

## *The First Three Years*

The standard interpretation of Sigmund Freud is that he was a thorough enemy of religion, in particular of Christianity, and there is much well-known evidence that shows Freud in this light. After all, Freud did write that religion is a universal obsessional neurosis.<sup>1</sup> He said, too, that religious doctrines, psychologically considered, are illusions — that is, projections of infantile needs that comfort people unable to face suffering, uncertainty, and death.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Freud often developed his critical interpretations in major works in which he presented new psychological theories with which he attempted to justify his conclusions about religion.

Certainly Freud publicly proclaimed his religious skepticism, and all his biographers agree that he was an atheist or agnostic. For example, Ernest Jones, in his three-volume biography, has written that Freud “went through life from beginning to end as a natural atheist.... One who saw no reason for believing in the existence of any supernatural Being and who felt no emotional need for such a belief.”<sup>3</sup> Freud’s daughter Anna declared only a few years ago that her father was a “lifelong agnostic.”<sup>4</sup>

The preceding picture is brought into further focus by the fact that Freud affirmed his ethnic and cultural Jewishness while living in an Austro-German culture during a time when anti-Semitism waxed and waned — but mostly waxed, and to the point of paroxysm. This anti-Semitism eventually forced Freud to leave Vienna toward the end of his life, after National Socialism (Nazism) rose to power. In short, Freud is commonly viewed as a secularized Jew who accepted his Jewish ethnic identity but rejected all things religious, including and especially Christianity; he is seen as a pessimistic free-thinker, an unrepentant atheist, a scientist-humanist, a skeptical realist.

### **The Thesis: Freud’s Pro-Christian (and Anti-Christian) Unconscious**

But in a state of curious coexistence with this standard image of Freud the atheist (and anti-Christian), there is another side of Freud. Many of his biographers, including Jones, have noted, at least in passing, a substantial number of pro-religious comments, concerns, and relationships scattered throughout Freud’s life. Freud was, after all (for many years — indeed, until his death), very preoccupied with religious issues, as his important writings on religious topics make clear. He persistently, and in many, ways obsessively, returned over and over to religion. For example, at the end of his *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), he came back to the same set of closely related issues he had treated much earlier in *Totem and Taboo* (1913).

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<sup>1</sup> S. Freud (1907, S.E., 9, p. 117).

<sup>2</sup> S. Freud (1927a, S.E., 21, pp. 16-24).

<sup>3</sup> Jones (1957, p. 351).

<sup>4</sup> A. Freud (1980).

Paul Roazen, biographer and Freud scholar, implies that Freud's feelings about religion were deeper and more ambivalent than he ever acknowledged. "Whenever Freud sounds intolerant, it is likely that something in him was threatened and he may have been more involved with the problem of religion than he cared to know."<sup>5</sup>

To the extent that Freud's involvement with religion was with Judaism, this issue has been extensively treated by several authors.<sup>6</sup> What primarily concerns us at present, however, is Freud's personal, often positive, relationship with Christianity. This topic has not been systematically addressed before.<sup>7</sup> The neglect is apparently due in part to an almost reflexive acceptance of the standard interpretation of Freud as anti-religious, and in part to the fact that many of Freud's letters and other biographical material have only recently become available. But it must be said that it is also due in part to the common lack of knowledge about and at times antipathy toward things Christian within contemporary psychological scholarship.

Despite this neglect, I think that even before beginning this discussion, the reader reasonably familiar with Freud's life and thought will grant upon reflection that Freud's relationship to religion — in particular Christianity — was not one of simple, uncomplicated rejection. He was a public atheist, but he was certainly not a simple, "natural atheist." In any case, it is the present thesis that Freud was deeply ambivalent about Christianity; such ambivalence requires at least two strong opposing psychological forces. Since much of the anti-religious character of Freud's life and thought is now well established and documented, the emphasis in this book is usually on the other side of the coin. Indeed, I develop the claim here that Freud had a strong, life-long, positive identification with and attraction to Christianity. I hasten to add, however, that an important secondary emphasis of this book is on Freud's little-known, unconscious hostility to Christianity, which is reflected in his curious preoccupation with the Devil, Hell, and related topics such as that of the Anti-Christ. All of this very substantial Christian (and anti-Christian) part of Freud should provide an understanding of his ambivalence about religion. It should also furnish a new framework for understanding major aspects of Freud's personality, and allow us (as already mentioned) to re-evaluate Freud's psychology of religion.

### **His Catholic Nanny: General Importance**

Young Sigmund had a Catholic nanny or nursemaid at least until he was two years and eight months old: "I even retain an obscure conscious memory of her."<sup>8</sup> We will return shortly to the central importance of this woman, but first we need some background information.

Freud was born on May 6, 1856, in the small town of Freiberg in Moravia — a town that is now part of Czechoslovakia and called by its Czech name, Příbor<sup>9</sup>. The town is 150 miles northwest

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<sup>5</sup> Roazen (1975, p. 251).

<sup>6</sup> See Rubenstein (1968), Cuddihy (1974), Robert (1976), Klein (1981), and Ostow (1982), among others.

<sup>7</sup> One exception to the neglect of Freud's involvement with Christianity is noted in the Acknowledgments: Gregory Zilboorg's *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1962). See also an earlier publication of mine (Vitz, 1983). Another relevant book, which I came across as this book was going to press, is J. R. Dempsey's *Freud, Psychoanalysis, Catholicism* (1956). Dempsey clearly anticipated aspects of my thesis about Freud's attraction to Catholicism, as represented especially by his desire to visit Rome.

<sup>8</sup> S. Freud (1900, S.E., 4, p. 247). The nanny's dismissal has been commonly connected with the period when Freud's mother was in bed at the time his younger sister Anna was born on December 31, 1858—Freud would have been two years and eight months old on January 6, 1859.

<sup>9</sup> Sajner (1968); Eissler (1978, p. 11).

of Vienna and about 12 miles from the border of present-day Poland.<sup>10</sup> At the time, Moravia was an especially devout Catholic region; devotion to the Virgin Mary was so pervasive that Moravia became known as a “Marian Garden.”<sup>11</sup> It was famous for its pilgrimages and shrine churches devoted to the Virgin (and, to a lesser degree, to St. Anne, mother of the Virgin). Nemeč reports that even today Moravia still has about 250 Marian churches, chapels, and outdoor shrines.<sup>12</sup> That is, Moravia is still Catholic in many respects, in spite of “fierce state repression”<sup>13</sup> by the Communist authorities.

Sigmund lived in this small Moravian town until he was three years old.<sup>14</sup> Sometime in 1859, probably in late spring or early summer, his family moved to Leipzig briefly, and then went on to Vienna in 1860, where Freud lived all but the last 15 months of his life. The town of Freiberg had a population of about 4500, over 90% of whom were Roman Catholic. About 3% of the Freibergians were Jewish, and a like number were Protestant.<sup>15</sup> The statistics for Vienna were similar, although there Catholics did not so fully outnumber other groups. As a result, Freud spent almost his entire life as a Jew in a society dominated by Roman Catholic culture. Any understanding of Freud and religion must always take into consideration this general situation.

During Sigmund’s years in Freiberg, the Freud family lived on the second floor of a two-story house that was owned by the Zajic family.<sup>16</sup> The living arrangements are in part observable in Figure 1-2, which shows the house in which Freud was born and lived during this period. The Zajics, who had lived in the town for generations, ran a locksmith business out of a workshop on the first floor; the upper floor, consisting of two large rooms (one on each side), was used for living quarters.

Jakob, Sigmund’s father, Amalia, his mother, and the children lived in one of the rooms, and the Zajics lived on the other side.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that the Freuds lived in one room obviously means that they were far from well-to-do. It does not, however, imply real poverty either; after all, they had a nanny, and (as we will see) Amalia was able to travel with the nanny to a spa. The most accurate words to characterize the family’s financial situation are “lower-middle-class” and “struggling.” As we will see, there is no doubt that for many years Sigmund was acutely aware of his relative poverty. His friends, colleagues, fellow students, and mentors were almost always much better off than he. The absence of money would be a constant frustration to his aspirations as a young man.<sup>18</sup>

The name of the nanny is of interest. There is documentary evidence that her name was Resi Wittek — namely, an old record of a registration at the spa town of Roznau.<sup>19</sup> The registration, in German, is dated June 5, 1857, and it reads in translation: “Amalia Freud, wool trader’s wife

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<sup>10</sup> Clark (1980, p. 5).

<sup>11</sup> For the extremely strong Marian character of Czech Catholicism and the rationale for the title of “Marian Garden” for Moravia, see Nemeč (1981).

<sup>12</sup> Nemeč (1981, p. 119). There must have been many more prior to the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia.

<sup>13</sup> Markham (1984, p. 1); see Nemeč (1981) for additional evidence.

<sup>14</sup> For example, see Jones (1953, Ch. 1) or Schur (1972, p. 22).

<sup>15</sup> Sajner (1968, pp. 167-180).

<sup>16</sup> Sajner (1968). For some time it was thought that the nanny was Monika Zajic, a member of the landlord’s family. Because of the Roznau spa registration, this is now known to be incorrect. (See note 19.)

<sup>17</sup> For the family living arrangements, see Sajner (1968), Schur (1972), and Eissler (1978).

<sup>18</sup> See Jones (1953, Ch. 5).

<sup>19</sup> Krüll, (1979, p. 305, note 20); also confirmed by Sajner to Swales (personal communication). Krüll gives her name as “Rosi”; this mistake has been acknowledged by Krüll (personal communication, 1983). The nanny’s name was Resi.

(spouse) with the child Sigmund and female servant Resi Wittek from Freiberg.”<sup>20</sup> “Resi” is a common Czech short form of “Theresa,” which was a reliably Catholic first name of the time and place.<sup>21</sup> Roznau, about 45 kilometers from Freiberg, was (and is) a place where people took “cure,” the “waters,” for various ailments. Jones notes that Amalia, because of a tubercular condition, occasionally visited Roznau.<sup>22</sup>

It is also significant that the Emanuel and Maria Freud family lived about three or four blocks away<sup>23</sup>; as we will see, Sigmund often played with Emanuel and Maria’s children, who were roughly his age. Emanuel Freud was Sigmund’s much older half-brother; he was in his mid-20s and was the eldest son of Freud’s father by an earlier marriage.<sup>24</sup> (Jakob Freud’s first wife had apparently died.<sup>25</sup>) Philipp, another half-brother who was a year or two younger than Emanuel and was unmarried, lived even closer, in a house right across the street.<sup>26</sup>

Exactly when the Czech woman, Resi, began to function as young Sigmund’s nanny is not certain, but her involvement clearly began quite early in his life. Freud wrote that he was in his nurse’s charge from some time “during my earliest infancy.”<sup>27</sup> Besides the presence of Resi in June 1857, when Sigmund was just over a year old, inferences based on other historical facts support Freud’s statement. In particular, Sigmund had a younger brother, Julius, who was born when Freud was about a year and five months old.<sup>28</sup> This child became sickly and died on April 15, 1858, when Freud was not quite two.<sup>29</sup> It is likely that Freud’s mother would, of necessity, have been preoccupied with this second child, and that the nanny would have assumed a major maternal role for Sigmund by this time — probably earlier.

Freud’s biographers agree that it is of significance that as an adult Freud recalled the psychological importance for him of the birth of this baby brother, Julius, and of his death<sup>30</sup>: “I welcomed my one-year younger brother (who died within a few months) with ill wishes and real infantile jealousy ... his death left the germ of guilt in me.”<sup>31</sup> Certainly this report suggests a situation in which Sigmund felt he was losing some of his mother’s and possibly even some of his nanny’s previously available attention. To make matters worse, the death of Julius was followed only seven and a half months later by the birth of a sister, Anna, on December 31, 1858.<sup>32</sup> And, of course, Amalia would have attended to the new child and nursed it, at least for some weeks afterwards. If we put all of this together, it becomes clear that Freud must have found his mother, Amalia, relatively unavailable to him from the time he was a little under a

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<sup>20</sup> Krüll (1979, p. 266); my translation.

<sup>21</sup> “Theresa” had strong Catholic connotations, primarily because of the Catholic Archduchess of Austria, Queen of Hungary and Bohemia from 1740 to 1780, whose name was Maria Theresa (1717-1780). There are also a number of prominent saints bearing the name Theresa.

<sup>22</sup> Jones (1953, p. 15).

<sup>23</sup> Jones (1953, p. 6); Krüll (1979, p. 130). Sajner (1968) notes that Monika Zajic was at least some of the time the nanny for John and Pauline Freud.

<sup>24</sup> Krüll (1979, pp. 149-161).

<sup>25</sup> There was also a second wife, named Rebekka, between the first wife and Freud’s mother, Amalia. There is almost no information about her. In spite of one attempt to give her great psychological importance, she does not appear to have been important in Freud’s life. See Swales (1983d) for the most extensive summary of the historical information on this topic.

<sup>26</sup> Krüll (1979, p. 130).

<sup>27</sup> S. Freud (1900, S.E., 4, p. 247).

<sup>28</sup> Julius seems to have been born in October 1857. See Swales (1983d, p. 12); Krüll (1979, p. 266).

<sup>29</sup> Krüll (1979, p. 266).

<sup>30</sup> For example, see Jones (1953, pp. 7-8).

<sup>31</sup> Origins (p. 219).

<sup>32</sup> Jones (1953, p. 3).

year old until he was close to three years old. After all, his mother was busy with two pregnancies and two births, and had a sick child who died during this time, while Sigmund was put in the charge of his nanny. There is no evidence that there was anyone else available to help the mother out. Freud's father, Jakob, worked elsewhere in the town and often traveled in the surrounding area buying wool.<sup>33</sup> There is, then, every reason to believe that the nanny filled the maternal vacuum during this important period, and that Freud experienced her as a second mother — or even (as we shall see) as his primary mother.

It is not clear where Julius was born, since there is no record of his birth in Freiberg. Since the births of the other Freud children were recorded in Freiberg, it is reasonable to assume that Julius was born elsewhere<sup>34</sup> — perhaps Roznau, or perhaps Vienna, the home of Amalia's family. It is relevant that Amalia had a brother named Julius, only a year or two younger than she, who lived in Vienna. However, he died of tuberculosis on March 15, 1858, one month before the baby Julius died.<sup>35</sup> Swales has suggested that, knowing her brother was ill, she went to visit him in Vienna while she was pregnant, and thus had baby Julius in Vienna. If so, she might easily have left young Sigmund with his nanny.<sup>36</sup> In any case, the death of her slightly younger brother and her baby, both named Julius, within a short time of each other must have been deeply disturbing for Amalia.

During the first 32 months of Sigmund's life (i.e., until Anna's birth), his mother was pregnant a total of 18 months. During pregnancy a mother's milk supply diminishes. Furthermore, the fact that his mother became pregnant so soon after Sigmund's birth (about five months afterward), and also soon after Julius's birth, strongly implies that she did not breast-feed or at least did not fully breast-feed very long after her children's births. It is rare for a woman to get pregnant while nursing her baby regularly during the first six months after giving birth.<sup>37</sup> In any case, it is unlikely that Sigmund was nursed by his mother for more than a brief period.

It is not entirely clear in the relevant texts whether the nanny was a wet nurse. She is sometimes described as "old," but she may have been only in her late 30s or early 40s (i.e., "old" relative to Freud's 21-year-old mother). There is no reference to any other wet nurse. Freud did describe her with the word "*Amme*," the German word for a nurse for very young children<sup>38</sup>; Mahony notes that *Amme* means "wet nurse,"<sup>39</sup> as does McGuire.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it is likely that Resi was Sigmund's wet nurse.

Schur, in his biography of Freud, using the information of Sajner, has written that the Freud women frequently worked together in some kind of "garment district" warehouse, while the children were cared for by a maid.<sup>41</sup> (The maid was presumably the Czech nanny.) This also suggests that Freud's mother was often out of the home when not directly pre-empted by her pregnancies, and again underlines the importance of the nanny as a mother-figure. If so, Sigmund would have been almost exclusively with the nanny for many weeks during his earliest

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<sup>33</sup> Krüll (1979, p. 134).

<sup>34</sup> Swales (1983d, p. 12).

<sup>35</sup> Swales (1983d, p. 12).

<sup>36</sup> This possibility was suggested to me by Swales as rather likely.

<sup>37</sup> Full breast feeding suppresses ovulation, thus acting as a natural mechanism for child spacing. Ratner (1983) writes, "The birth of children every 11 or 12 months or so is abnormal and, with rare exception, is only found in mothers who bottle feed or token breastfeed their infants [or use a wet nurse]" (p. 201).

<sup>38</sup> Grigg (1973).

<sup>39</sup> Mahony (1977).

<sup>40</sup> McGuire (Ed.), in S. Freud & Jung (1974, p. 59).

<sup>41</sup> Schur (1972, p. 21).

years.<sup>42</sup>

Freud himself directly acknowledged the foundational significance of the nanny for his character, in his letters to his friend Wilhelm Fliess — letters written when Freud was in his 40s, during his personal psycho-analysis. Insights from this self-analysis, which was the first psychoanalysis, formed the basis of Freud's great work *The Interpretation of Dreams*, published in 1900. About his nanny, Freud wrote in 1897 to Fliess:

My "primary originator" (of neurosis) was an ugly, elderly but clever woman who told me a great deal about God and hell, and gave me a high opinion of my own capacities.... If...I succeed in resolving my hysteria I shall have to thank the memory of the old woman who provided me at such an early age with the means of living and surviving. You see how the old liking breaks through again.<sup>43</sup>

Later, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he wrote (as noted earlier) that he even had a vague conscious memory of her. He added that "it is reasonable to suppose that the child [Freud] loved the old woman."<sup>44</sup> Additional evidence of the nanny's great importance is provided by another letter, in which Freud was commenting upon a recent dream: "The real meaning is that the old woman, the nanny, stood for me, and that the doctor's mother was my mother."<sup>45</sup>

These are most significant admissions, for if Freud's nanny did provide the basis of his early self-confidence and his first "means of living and surviving," she was his functional mother and therefore much more than just the origin of his neurosis (even though the "neurotic" properties of Freud's personality are extremely important for an understanding of him and of the origin and nature of psychoanalysis). His awareness of his love for her breaking through, and his comment that in the dream the nanny stood for himself, underscore the positive contribution of this old woman to Freud's personality with particular clarity: In a fundamental sense, she was a parent (an originator), a mother, to him. It is the basic positive significance of the nurse that other commentators have neglected. Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that Freud nowhere made such claims about the *early* importance of his own mother. Indeed, this lack of evidence further supports the present view that the nanny was the primary mother.

### **His Nanny: Importance for Religion**

What we must look at is whether this woman influenced Freud's understanding of religion, and, if so, how. Here again, the letters of Freud provide direct evidence. As quoted above, Freud noted that his nanny "told me a great deal about God and hell...." A short time later, in the next letter, Freud picked up the same theme again, and wrote as follows:

I asked my mother whether she remembered my nurse. "Of course," she said, "an elderly woman, very shrewd indeed. She was always taking you to church [*in alle Kirche* — in all the churches; Freiberg, though small, had at least three Catholic churches]. When you came home you used to preach, and tell us all about how God [*der liebe Gott* — the loving God] conducted His affairs." [German from the original letter.]<sup>46</sup>

That the two- or three-year old Freud was always being taken to church would have been

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<sup>42</sup> Swales (1983d, p. 12).

<sup>43</sup> Origins (pp. 219-220).

<sup>44</sup> S. Freud (1900, S.E., 4, p. 248).

<sup>45</sup> Origins (p. 222).

<sup>46</sup> Origins (pp. 221-222). A second church in Freiberg is St. Valentine's. It is baroque and has many statues. See Muk & Samánková et al. (1985, p. 443).

unusual even in most Christian homes at the time, although for a pious woman attendance at Mass several times a week would not have been unusual. For this to have occurred in a Jewish home, however liberal or secular, would have been quite striking. On such church visits, Freud almost certainly received an introduction to Christianity, a sort of elementary catechesis. How else to account for his ability to come home and preach sermons to his family?

Young Freud would have frequently experienced the special atmosphere of the Catholic Mass. He would have seen paintings and statues of the Madonna and of the Madonna and Child, images of saints, and the like. He would have heard Latin; he would have watched the distribution of Holy Communion. He would have been taken to Mass during the seasons of Advent and Lent, with their penitential overtones and distinctive violet (or purple) colors in the robes of the priests and in the shroud over the cross in Lent. He would have experienced the Christmas season, and most especially he would have been taken to church for the two major holidays, Easter and Pentecost. These were by far the two greatest feasts of the Christian year in 19th-century Europe. In a small, devout Catholic town, these two celebrations would have involved the entire community.<sup>47</sup>

It would have been in church that Freud would most probably first have heard music: bells, organ, and instrumental music, as well as choirs and chants. (This was of course long before radio or any other modern technology of sound.) Music would have been an important part of the service. Czechoslovakia was renowned in the 18th and 19th centuries as the most musical country in Europe, and the regions of Moravia and Bohemia were especially known for their folk and church music.<sup>48</sup> The main church at Freiberg was famous, in its region, for its chimes. (The church had been renovated just a few years earlier.)<sup>49</sup>

In church he would have been in a large, dimly lit, and arching space (any church would seem large to a young child). The church would have flickered with the lights of candles, which were (and still are) commonly lit for the souls of the dead, or as prayers. It is very possible that Sigmund or his nanny may have lit a candle for the soul of his recently dead baby brother. It is almost certain that Freud and his nanny would have talked about the religious meaning of death. Zilboorg concurs in this by saying that she “consoled him, that his little brother who died would live again.”<sup>50</sup> Certainly Heaven and Hell would have been natural topics. Ernest Jones apparently accepts this understanding of the situation, since he comments, “She [the nanny] implanted in him the ideas of Heaven and Hell and probably those of salvation and resurrection.”<sup>51</sup> Jones says very little about Freud and Heaven and Hell, and he never documents or pursues further Freud’s relation to salvation and resurrection. But, as is shown below, Freud indeed did have a lifelong involvement with all these very Christian ideas.

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<sup>47</sup> The importance of Pentecost for 19th-century Czech Catholic communities has been attested to me by Professors Rutar, Nemeč, and Zezula.

<sup>48</sup> The musicality of Czechoslovakia, especially in the 18th century, is noted by Burney (1773/1959, Vol. 1, pp. 33 ff.), and Czech musicality was widely recognized throughout the West in the 19th century as well. A common expression was that every Czech was born with a violin in his hands; the term “Bohemian” has its origin in the lifestyle of many Bohemian musicians who roamed about Europe looking for employment in orchestras or bands. Czech music consisted of two strands: one a strong and stable folk or popular music tradition; the other the Catholic Church’s long-term cultivation of high or classical music (e.g., in the monasteries, especially Benedictine, and in the courts). In Freud’s time, Czechoslovakia produced Smetana (b. 1824) and Dvorak (b. 1841) from Bohemia and Janáček (b. 1854) and Mahler (b. 1860) from Moravia. See also the “Mysticism, Music, and the Acropolis” section in Chapter Six.

<sup>49</sup> See Jones (1953, p. 12) for the fame of the Freiberg church chimes; see Rieger (1867, p. 936) for the major renovation in the 1850s of the main church that dated back to the 13th century.

<sup>50</sup> Zilboorg (1962, p. 137).

<sup>51</sup> Jones (1953, p. 6).

It should also be noted that there was no synagogue in Freiburg, and, hence Freud was not exposed in these early years to any equivalent, Jewish religious experience.<sup>52</sup> Nor is there any evidence that the Freuds celebrated the Jewish holidays, had regular Friday Sabbath meals, or kept the Jewish dietary laws in the Freiberg days. There is no reason to believe that Freud's mother gave him religious instruction; she is known to have been uninterested in religion. There is no certain support for it, but Jakob Freud probably said his prayers on Friday, thus providing some Jewish presence in the home.<sup>53</sup>

In any case, the nanny, this functional mother, this primitive Czech woman who was the "primary originator" of Freud, was his first instructor in religion. These first lessons were of a simple, no doubt often simple-minded, Catholic Christianity.<sup>54</sup>

What would the elements of this simple religious education have been?, The basic components can be gathered from Freud's own words, from Jones's comments, and (as I indicate throughout the rest of this work) by certain Christian themes and actions that occurred throughout Freud's life. The basic concepts in Freud's religious unconscious were the following: God, *der liebe Gott* (this, of course, is in common with Judaism); Heaven and Hell and the Devil (all related to the notion of judgment); and also salvation and resurrection. These last two themes, it will be shown, were associated by Freud with Easter, the celebration of the resurrection of Christ, and with Pentecost or Whitsun, the celebration of the receiving of the Holy Spirit. For Freud, as in standard Christian doctrine, salvation and Heaven would have meant being saved from damnation and from Hell.

In addition, this very basic Christianity would have had a heavily Catholic character. Freud's experience of Christianity was in the distinctive environment of 19th-century Catholic piety. This would also have meant a heavily feminine Christianity for Freud, the female aspect being represented in his life by his devout nanny and also by the Marian emphasis so common at the time. Freiberg's main church was named after Mary's birth.<sup>55</sup> In the center of the town square was a statue of Mary<sup>56</sup>; such statues are very common throughout Austria and much of Czechoslovakia.<sup>57</sup> The cult of St. Anne (or Anna), the mother of Mary, was also extremely popular in Moravia. Anna was a common name, and many churches throughout the region were named after St. Anne.<sup>58</sup> No doubt Freud saw priests and heard occasional references to the Pope, but the strong masculine characteristics of Catholic Christianity would not have been an important part of Freud's childhood experience. In short, Freud's early religious experience had a basic Christian core, situated within a Catholic and feminine context.

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<sup>52</sup> Swales (personal communication, 1982), however, notes that there was a small Jewish prayer room in Freiberg not far from the Freuds. (Original information as personal communication from Sajner to Swales.)

<sup>53</sup> Suggested to me by Dr. Henry Elkin (1980), and confirmed by others knowledgeable about Eastern European Jewry in the mid-19th century.

<sup>54</sup> Rainey (1975, p. 35) also makes this general point; Falk (1978, pp. 377-378, 385) has similarly noted some of the Christian significance of the nanny.

<sup>55</sup> The church was called *Mariae Geburt* ("The Nativity of Our Lady"). See E. Freud, Freud, & Grubrich-Simitis (1978, p. 49). It had a gothic Madonna. See Muk & Samánková et al. (1985, p. 443).

<sup>56</sup> Swales (personal communication, 1983) has visited Freiberg and has seen the statue; I have also seen his photo of it. There is also a photo of the statue in Sajner (1968, facing p. 168).

<sup>57</sup> Zezula (personal communication, 1981); also confirmed by Professors Nemeč and Rutar. See also Nemeč (1981, e.g., p. 127), for the old Marian column, Old Town Square, Prague.

<sup>58</sup> I was informed of the Czech popularity of St. Anne by Professor Zezula (personal communication, 1981); see also Nemeč (1981). For a brief history of the Catholic saints of Moravia see Rutar (1983). "Anna" and "Maria" then, even more than now, were notably Catholic names. (The fact that Emanuel Freud's wife was called Maria and her children were named John and Pauline, plus the fact that Sigmund's sister was named Anna, all suggest a strong assimilative current in the Jakob Freud family, at least in the 1850s.)



For some reason, Jones denies that Freud's experience with his nanny contributed to Freud's neurotic attitude toward religion:

Much has been made of this nannie [sic] by writers who are eager to discover a neurotic origin for Freud's negative attitude towards religion. It is of course easy to weave conjectures and speculations on a theme of this sort, but I am not aware of any evidence that might justify one in attributing any lasting influence to the nannie's theological beliefs, and in any event the contact ceased at the age of two and a half. [Actually, the contact lasted longer; see below.]<sup>59</sup>

This is a most curious statement, for what Jones is saying is that early childhood experience is insignificant in relation to adult behavior and personality.<sup>60</sup> Surely this is an amazing position for a psychoanalyst of the classical type to take. Jones's "unwillingness to weave conjectures" is all the stranger,<sup>61</sup> since Freud himself stated (as quoted earlier) that his nanny was essential to his neuroses. Indeed, even Jones declares in Volume I of his biography, "Freud has taught us that the essential foundations of character are laid down by the age of three and that later events can modify but not alter the traits then established."<sup>62</sup> One does not have to consider that this theory of character is universally true to accept that it was most certainly true for its originator.

One thing to keep in mind about Freud as a child is that he was attractive and precocious. Sajner reports that Johann Zajic, the landlord, years later recalled Sigmund in his Freiberg days "as a lively youngster who liked to play in the workshops and to make small toys out of metal scraps."<sup>63</sup> His genius for language has been remarked on by many (his German style is outstanding and is part of the power of his work), and apparently this gift was apparent from Freud's earliest childhood. Certainly a child who could give even some semblance of a sermon when aged only two and a half or so was already giving signs of very early conceptual ability and unusual verbal talent. As an adult, Freud was fluent in English and French. He was also moderately familiar with Spanish, Italian, Latin, and Greek.<sup>64</sup>

Freud also mentioned that he was able, during the period of his own psychoanalysis, to recover some of his memory for the Czech language, which he had not used since he left Freiberg roughly 40 years earlier.<sup>65</sup> (This would exclude a few short visits to Freiberg by Freud in his teens. At these times, he visited Jewish friends and spoke mostly German.<sup>66</sup>) For Sigmund, the world of the nanny would have been based on Czech (to some extent associated with Church Latin), while with his parents the language was German (and Yiddish). Language would have differentiated these two worlds rather sharply.

### **The Nanny: How Long Was She with Sigmund?**

The nanny disappeared suddenly from Freud's life. She was dismissed, sometime after December 31, 1858, but before the family left Freiberg. The first thing to establish, then, is

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<sup>59</sup> Jones (1957, pp. 349-350).

<sup>60</sup> This point is very clearly made by Drobin (1978, p. 48).

<sup>61</sup> Jones's denial of the nanny is so peculiar that it means he is distinctly threatened by the association of his master with a religiously oriented mother-figure. Other evidence for this is provided in later sections.

<sup>62</sup> Jones (1953, p. 13).

<sup>63</sup> Sajner (1968, p. 173); Schur (1972, p. 21).

<sup>64</sup> Freud's gift with language and his familiarity with different languages are attested to by all of his biographers.

<sup>65</sup> For Freud's memory of the Czech language, see Jones (1953, p. 7); S. Freud (1900, S.E., 4, p. 196).

<sup>66</sup> A visit by Freud to Freiberg in his teens is described in his Screen Memories (S. Freud, 1899a, S.E., 3, pp. 303-322). At that time he visited the Fluss family, who were German-speaking Jews.

when the family of Jakob Freud left Freiberg. According to a document describing him as a man of good standing, Jakob Freud was still in Freiberg on March 23, 1859.<sup>67</sup> Certainly for a family to migrate to a new city in winter or early spring just after the wife had had a new baby would seem most ill advised and unlikely.<sup>68</sup> It was a dismal time of year; the journey would have required a 12-mile trip by cart to the nearest train station, in Stauding (Studenka)<sup>69</sup>; and the family had had a baby die about a year earlier. It is therefore probable that they did not leave until somewhat later than March.

There is also a record of Amalia Freud already in Leipzig requesting a passport extension; this record is dated August 11, 1859.<sup>70</sup> Thus the Jakob Freuds clearly left Freiberg for Leipzig sometime between March 23 and August 11, and probably not until late spring or summer. Freud himself wrote in his curriculum vitae in 1885 that he was three years old when he left with his parents for Leipzig and then Vienna.<sup>71</sup> Also, he noted in 1899 in an autobiographical writing (*Screen Memories*) that he left his birthplace when he was a “full three years of age” [“von voll drei Jahren habe ich nämlich meinen kleinen Geburtsort verlassen”].<sup>72</sup> Both of these comments would mean that he left after May 6, his birthday. Krüll assumes that one of Freud’s famous memories took place in Freiberg in middle to late spring of 1859, and this would imply that they were still there in May or early June of 1859.<sup>73</sup> I take all this to mean that the Jakob Freuds were in Freiberg until sometime between late May and late July at the latest. Evidence is given below to suggest an early June departure from Freiberg.

The next question to ask is this: When was the nanny dismissed? The standard answer, first proposed by Jones and uncritically accepted since then, is some time shortly after December 31, 1858. At this time (i.e., by January 6), Sigmund was already two years and eight months old, not two and a half, as Jones claims.

But I now propose a different and later date for the nanny’s sudden removal from Freud’s life. There are grounds for a psychological interpretation, presented later, involving Freud’s emotional associations with Easter and especially Pentecost (Whitsun); these imply that the nanny vanished on or shortly after one of these important holidays, presumably in the spring of that year. In 1859, Easter was unusually late, occurring on April 24; Pentecost would have fallen seven weeks later, on June 12.<sup>74</sup> (Pentecost is 50 days after Easter, specifically seven Sundays after, and it usually falls in late May.) That Freud had his nanny until late May or early June, when he would have been just over three years old, is consistent with Freud’s own comments and with Krüll’s proposal that the family left Freiberg in the late spring or early summer of 1859.

The major piece of evidence used to date when the nanny was fired is the letter written by Freud to his colleague, Wilhelm Fliess, in October 1897 (part of which has been cited earlier):

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<sup>67</sup> Swales (1983d, p. 13). See also Sajner (1968); Gicklhorn (1969); Krüll (1979, pp. 167-176).

<sup>68</sup> Freud’s sister Anna wrote as an old woman that the family left Freiberg six weeks after her birth on December 31, 1858 (Bernays, ca. 1935). This is obviously incorrect, since documents attest to the Freuds’ being in Freiberg 12 weeks after her birth (i.e., March 23). It is likely that her memory was a corruption of “six months,” which would mean that they left at the end of May or early June 1859. Swales (1983d, p. 13) notes the discrepancy and thinks it is possible that “six weeks” is a corruption of “six months.” Jones (1953, p. 15, note b) also comments on the mistaken dates of Freud’s sister in her memoirs.

<sup>69</sup> Swales (1983d, p. 13).

<sup>70</sup> Krüll (1979, p. 266).

<sup>71</sup> E. Freud et al. (1978, pp. 107, 327).

<sup>72</sup> S. Freud (1899b, *Gesammelte Werke*, 1, p. 473).

<sup>73</sup> Krüll (1979, p. 261).

<sup>74</sup> See Harvey (1967, p. 951); all subsequent dates for Easter and Pentecost are from this calendar.

I asked my mother whether she remembered my nurse. “Of course,” she said, “an elderly woman, very shrewd indeed. She was always taking you to church. When you came home you used to preach, and tell us all about how God conducted His affairs. At the time I was in bed when Anna was being born” (Anna is two-and-a-half years younger) “she turned out to be a thief, and all the shiny Kreuzers and Zehners and toys that had been given you were found among her things. Your brother Philipp went himself to fetch the policeman, and she got ten months.”<sup>75</sup>

This passage tells us why the nanny was dismissed, but not exactly when it happened. Read carefully, it can mean that when Amalia was home in bed with the newborn Anna, Sigmund would come home and preach. This was Christmas time — December 25 through January 6 — and there would have been much in the church services to interest a child at this season. Then the letter says, “she turned out to be a thief.” The expression is ambiguous and implies that at some unspecified later date, she turned out or was discovered to be a thief. It certainly does *not* necessarily mean that she was so discovered on or about December 31.

Another thing to remark about this passage’s seeming to link December 31, 1858, with the nanny’s dismissal is that although Freud was putting it in quotes, he was of course recalling a conversation with his mother. Thus the whole passage was a reconstruction of the original conversation. This conversation could easily have covered two separate ideas, the first being young Sigmund’s coming home to preach to his mother (who was, for the time being, regularly at home in the week or two after Anna’s birth), the second being “she turned out to be a thief.” It would be natural in a reconstruction to have put these two ideas together, or even to have misunderstood that the mention of the discovery of the nanny’s stealing right after the mention of his coming home to preach implied that the two events occurred at the same time.

It is relevant to note in this case that Amalia Freud was in her early 60s and recalling things that had happened almost 40 years before.<sup>76</sup>

There is also some good psychological evidence, based on one of Freud’s memories, that places the nanny’s dismissal in the late spring or early summer of 1859. It is now well established that Siegfried Bernfeld has conclusively proved that Freud’s *Screen Memories* essay was an autobiographical report.<sup>77</sup> In this paper, Freud described the following scene:

I see a rectangular, rather steeply sloping piece of meadowland, green and thickly grown, in the green there are a great number of yellow flowers.... At the top end of the meadow there is a cottage and in front of the cottage door two women are standing ... a peasant-woman with a handkerchief on her head and a nursemaid. Three children are playing in the grass. One of them is myself (between the age of two and three); the two others are my boy cousin, who is somewhat older, and his sister, who is almost exactly the same age as I am. We are picking the yellow flowers.... The little girl has the best bunch; and, as though by mutual agreement, we — the two boys — fall on her and snatch away her flowers. She runs up the meadow in tears and as a consolation the peasant-woman gives her a piece of black bread.... (We) hurry to the cottage and ask to be given some bread too. And we are in fact given some; the peasant-woman cuts the loaf with a long knife.<sup>78</sup>

From this description, first, it is fairly certain that a nanny was present (a “peasant-woman” or nursemaid); second, given that we consider this to be the report of an authentic memory, it is clear that it occurred in the late spring or in the summer. It is understood that the two other children are Freud’s “cousins” (actually, his half-nephew and half-niece) John and Pauline. John

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<sup>75</sup> *Origins* (pp. 221-222).

<sup>76</sup> In 1897, Freud’s mother Amalia was 62 years old and Freud was 41. Amalia was born August 18, 1835 (Jones, 1953, p. 2). Freud’s father had died the preceding fall, so there was no chance to ask him about the nanny.

<sup>77</sup> S. Bernfeld (1946).

<sup>78</sup> S. Freud (1899a, S.E., 3, p. 311).

was about a year older than Sigmund, while Pauline was younger than Freud. Krüll places this very important memory in the spring of 1859, and hence Freud was somewhat older than he remembered, as were the other two children.<sup>79</sup>

Thus, if the discovery of the thieving took place in May 1859 or a little later, Freud would have had his nanny until the age of three or so, and Freud's claim of her great importance thus makes more sense. Furthermore, the evidence described throughout much of the rest of this study of the emotional significance for Freud of Easter and Pentecost is also much more understandable if these holidays were associated by him with the loss of the nanny. (For example, the *Screen Memories* paper was itself written the week before Pentecost.) In short, if the nanny was suddenly dismissed in late May (or early June), the event would have provided a basis in experience for what I call Freud's "Easter-Pentecost complex." (For much more on this, see Chapter Three.)

Finally, it is clear that Freud connected the loss of his nanny with train travel and his leaving Freiberg, and thus it is likely that she disappeared only shortly before the family left Freiberg.

There are still other reasons to think that the dismissal occurred later than Christmas of 1858-1859. One is that there is no mention of another nanny during 1859, who, under the circumstances of the new baby, would most definitely have been needed. Another point to keep in mind is that early memories are often inexact with respect to dates. The order of old events is usually recalled correctly, but the "blank" intervals of time between events are frequently dropped out, thus collapsing important occurrences into a shorter time period. Indeed, this kind of error occurred in the immediately preceding letter to Fliess, dated October 3, 1897 (just 12 days before the letter under discussion). There Freud wrote as follows: "...later (between the ages of two and two-and-a half) libido towards *matrem* was aroused; the occasion must have been the journey with her from Leipzig to Vienna, during which we spent a night together and I must have had the opportunity of seeing her *nudam*..."<sup>80</sup> This passage occurs right after the sentences quoted earlier about the nanny being his (Freud's) "primary originator," and it contains an error with respect to time. Specifically, the train journey from Leipzig to Vienna is known to have occurred when Freud was about three and a half, since the family moved to Vienna in late 1859 or 1860 after several months in Leipzig. At this time, Sigmund was three and a half or slightly older. This error, commonly noted by Freud's biographers,<sup>81</sup> is one of placing an event too early.

In summary, then, I believe there are excellent reasons to think that the nanny was dismissed some months after December 31, 1858, and that late May (or early June) is the most plausible time. (More evidence for the late May or early June time is given below in connection with Freud's associations to Pentecost.) And I also believe that the family left Freiberg shortly thereafter. Again, more evidence for this time of year is given in the later sections dealing with Easter and Pentecost.

### **Was His Nanny a Thief?**

In fact, the entire episode of the nanny's alleged theft is strange. First, why would a woman acknowledged as shrewd be so foolish as to leave stolen coins in a readily discovered place or among her possessions? Did she hide them in the Freuds' one room? On her person? Then how account for the toys? Why not spend the coins quickly or at least hide them in a safe place? Also unusual is that Freud's mother said the nurse stole the toys, since these were also found among

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<sup>79</sup> Krüll (1979, p. 266).

<sup>80</sup> Origins (p. 219).

<sup>81</sup> Jones (1953, p. 13).

the coins. She might steal toys for members of her family,<sup>82</sup> but why keep several of them together with stolen money? All this is most odd, especially given the extreme likelihood that Freud's mother must have looked on the nanny with increasing jealousy and dismay. Here was this peasant woman who was in many ways taking over the role of a mother in the life of her lively and attractive first-born son. Not only was the nanny coming to be extremely important to her son's affections, but she was also taking him to church and instructing him in Christianity. Amalia Freud was never very serious about her own Judaism; still, there is certainly no reason to think she was benevolently disposed toward Christianity. Possibly, her young son's early training in Christianity aroused real concern. If so, this was a reason why the Freuds, in particular Amalia, would have wished to get rid of the nanny.

In addition, the issue of proving theft involving a nanny and her charge would have been immediately understood as difficult. Two- and three-year-old children have no concept of money, and frequently give coins to those they like. During the writing of this book, I often noticed that my own three-year-old son would ask occasionally for coins, especially shiny ones, and that just as often he would give coins to me. He also did the same with some of his caretakers. Thus, should a nanny be found with a bunch of coins, one might suspect her of theft, but making a legal case against her would be most difficult. A strong suspicion of theft might lead to a dismissal, but not to a jail term.

There is still another problem with the story of the nanny's theft and jailing. The Freuds were part of a very small number of Jews in Freiberg, most of whom were relatively recent immigrants from further East. To have publicly brought charges of stealing money against a local woman would have risked alienating the local population and stirring anti-Semitism.<sup>83</sup> Unless there were other issues involved, why create all this trouble and risk?

What is one to make of all this? One plausible interpretation is that the situation was something as follows: Amalia or Philipp did find a cache or collection of coins and toys, which led to a suspicion of the nanny and to her abrupt dismissal. It is also possible that Philipp went to the police or other authorities and discussed the matter. It is even possible that a penalty of ten months in jail came up when they talked things over. However, under the circumstances, there are reasons (discussed below) to doubt that the nanny was actually jailed for such a term. (The Freuds would not have been in Freiberg to verify it, since, at the very earliest, the nanny would have completed her ten months in November of that year, after they had left.) I suspect that the expression "ten months" became in Amalia's mind or in family tradition a reality instead of a hypothetical or maximum penalty.

On the other hand, it has been suggested that the whole story is fabricated or that the real situation has been very seriously distorted. It is clear that Amalia's memory was emotionally charged, and the facts as reported seem quite odd. It is possible that Amalia's anxiety over the religious impact of the nanny might have been enough to make her want the nanny dismissed on whatever charge she could find. There is, however, yet another completely different explanation of the nanny's dismissal, which derives from a recent thesis of Krüll. This possibility is not directly germane to our present focus on the nanny's religious significance, and hence it is postponed to the next chapter.

### **Was Freud Secretly Baptized?**

Upon hearing about the clearly pious nature of the nanny, a number of people with whom I have

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<sup>82</sup> This possibility was suggested to me by Professor Rutar (1983), a native Czech, whose "Nana" did in fact take a prized toy of his when he was a child. Later, the toy was found being used by a child of the "Nana's" family.

<sup>83</sup> This possibility was brought to my attention by Professor Robert Holt.

spoken have raised an interesting question: Did the nanny secretly baptize Sigmund? (These have been people — Catholic priests, etc. — familiar with the mentality of devout Catholic women who care for children.) Many readers may not be aware that anyone who has reached the age of reason can baptize any unbaptized person, using any water that is at hand. This fact, however, was (and is) commonly known by devout Catholics.<sup>84</sup> The ritual need not be performed in church and can be done in five to ten seconds. Usually such informal or covert baptism is advised only in extreme circumstances, such as when death is imminent.

Several factors would have strongly predisposed Freud's nanny toward baptizing him. The death of Freud's younger brother Julius would have raised the issue in most concrete terms. For a devout Catholic woman of the time, the death of an unbaptized child who was close to her would have been a most disturbing tragedy. Czech culture has several familiar folk tales in which this occurs and the child's soul goes to Hell or leads an unpleasant life in a kind of limbo.<sup>85</sup> Either the nanny baptized the sickly and obviously dying Julius, thus establishing a precedent for her baptizing Sigmund, or she failed to baptize him, which would have aroused her fears. A Czech custom may have encouraged her as well. In Czech churches, it was traditional for baptismal water always to be present and visible in the baptismal bowl or font throughout the year. This water was commonly blessed on Holy Saturday (the Saturday before Easter).<sup>86</sup> In the dimly lit churches of the time, it would have the appearance of black or dark water. Such a possible covert baptism, in church or otherwise, may have had a lasting effect on Freud's memory; if the nanny had talked about the meaning of baptism, it would have left permanent traces. In any case, Freud in his attendance at services would most probably have witnessed and discussed the baptism of others.<sup>87</sup>

Whether Freud was covertly baptized must on the basis of present information remain unknown, but that this nanny was consciously trying to influence Sigmund with respect to becoming a Christian is virtually certain. Why else take the child so often to church? Why else instruct him so as to enable him to preach rudimentary sermons? The nanny could easily have felt that she had no greater gift to give her beloved charge than baptism.

To exemplify and underline something of the psychology of Freud's nanny, I relate a story told to me by a Roman Catholic priest of the New York diocese when I mentioned Freud's nanny to him. (This priest was one of the people who spontaneously raised the issue of a possible baptism.) The story is about the priest's own mother, who is still living but quite elderly. She arrived in New York City in the 1920s, a young girl fresh off the boat from Ireland. She was and still is a very devout Catholic. Her first job was as governess or nanny for a Jewish couple living in Greenwich Village. This couple had one child, a boy aged about three, when she started her job. Although her employers were of a Jewish background, they were then serious and active Communists, recently back from a trip to Russia. (The nanny recalls a visit to the home by Dorothy Day when she was still a Communist.) As such, the parents were strong atheists, and no religious instruction or environment was provided for the child. (The absence in Freiberg of any serious Judaism in Freud's home would have been a similar situation.) This young Irish nanny grew to love the boy very much, and because of this she could think of no better gift than to baptize him. She did this at home without the boy's being aware of it. The child, now grown up to be a prominent New York professional, presumably doesn't know to this day that he was baptized years ago. Just prior to the baptism, the family had had a dangerous automobile accident while traveling in New England with the nanny. No one had been injured, but the accident had raised the issue of the boy's possible death. This event, analogous to the

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<sup>84</sup> For example, see *Catechism of Christian Doctrine* (1885/1977, p. 4).

<sup>85</sup> Zezula (personal communication, 1983); also, children who died unbaptized went to limbo, according to Church teaching.

<sup>86</sup> Rutar (personal communication, 1983).

<sup>87</sup> Baptism was an especially common rite for adults on Holy Saturday, as it still is.

death of Julius Freud, precipitated the concern on the nanny's part and resulted in her baptizing the child.

There is some interesting and relevant material bearing on this issue. Martin Freud (Sigmund's oldest son), in his autobiography, *Glory Reflected* (1957), a book that gives much information about the Freud home, has mentioned that his younger sister Anna had a nanny. This was in Vienna just at the turn of the century. Martin Freud, writing 60 years later, recalled her very well; even though this was his sister's nanny, he wrote, "Still, that nanny, Josefina, had great influence over me."<sup>88</sup> He continued:

My father [Sigmund] described his own nurse as an old and ugly woman, a Catholic, who used to take him to her church services in Freiberg, possibly with the idea of laying the early foundations of a conversion. I do not think for one moment that Josefina had any thoughts of this kind, but one day when I was with her alone, the other children being left at home for some reason I have forgotten, she took me into the nearby Votivkirche to a service. The church was crowded; the ceremonial was magnificent and colourful, and I was greatly impressed by the preacher: but I suspect Josefina's object was merely to sit down, not to impress a little Jewish boy with the splendor and dignity of a Catholic service. Possibly she needed spiritual food, and as she could not, or dared not, dump me anywhere, she towed me in behind her.<sup>89</sup>

Several comments are salient here. The expression, "possibly with the idea of laying the early foundations of a conversion," sounds very much as if the family, at least in retrospect, was suspicious about this with respect to Freud's nanny. In addition, rather surprisingly, the Sigmund Freuds had a serious Catholic nanny for their children, just as Freud had had himself. (Josefina was probably at Mass because it was a holy day of obligation.) Also noteworthy is that after 60 years, even this one visit to a Catholic service was still memorable for Martin Freud.

Apparently it was rather common for a nanny to have lasting effects on the life of the child in her charge. Sencourt, a friend and biographer of T. S. Eliot, has made this point with regard to Eliot's Irish nanny, who "frequently talked to him about God."<sup>90</sup> Also, she often took the young future poet to Catholic services. This was in St. Louis, Missouri, where Eliot was born and grew up in an otherwise liberal environment of Unitarianism. Sencourt suggests that Eliot's later rejection of his family's religion and his conversion to the Church of England, with its then very strong Anglo-Catholic character, was in part determined by the effect of these early Catholic experiences on the impressionable young Eliot.<sup>91</sup>

### **Washed in the Blood of the Lamb**

Those stimulating letters from Freud to Fliess contain a number of extremely curious comments, but perhaps none so strange as those he made in a letter of October 3-4, 1897. Here Freud

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<sup>88</sup> M. Freud (1957, p. 35).

<sup>89</sup> M. Freud (1957, p. 36). Martin Freud (1957, p. 54) also mentioned that his sister Mathilde was allowed to go to church with a friend during summer vacation; Klein (1981, p. 60) writes that the Freud children apparently never attended synagogue. Thus, the Sigmund Freud family was without any significant Jewish *religious* atmosphere, and at least somewhat benevolently disposed toward the surrounding Catholic culture.

<sup>90</sup> Sencourt (1971, p. 17).

<sup>91</sup> Sencourt (1971, p. 20). Sencourt comments that Eliot's first 16 years, spent mostly in St. Louis, were the most important in his life for establishing the material (images, emotions, experiences) on which his poetry was based; he also notes an important youthful poem by Eliot, "A Fable for Feasters," set in a very Catholic setting of abbots, holy water, rites, and so on. The hypothesis of a connection between Eliot's Catholic nanny and his later religious conversion was brought to my attention by Professor James Hitchcock.

wrote:

Last night's dream produced the following under the most remarkable disguises: ... I saw the skull of a small animal which I thought of as a "pig" in the dream, though it was associated in the dream with your wish of two years ago that I might find a skull on the Lido to enlighten me, as Goethe once did. But I did not find it. Thus it was "a little Schafskopf." (literally a little "sheep's head;" figuratively, "blockhead") The whole dream was full of the most wounding references to my present uselessness as a therapist. Perhaps the origin of my tendency to believe in the incurability of hysteria should be sought here. Also *she* (the nanny) *washed me in reddish water in which she had previously washed herself* [emphasis added] (not very difficult to interpret; I find nothing of the kind in my chain of memories, and so I take it for a genuine rediscovery). A severe critic might say that all of this was phantasy projected into the past instead of being determined by the past. The *experimenta crucis* would decide the matter against him. The reddish water seems a point of this kind. Where do all patients derive the horrible perverse details which are often as alien to their experience as to their knowledge?<sup>92</sup>

What is one to make of these most unusual references? Apparently Freud's biographers have remained largely silent because of the obscurity of the passage, despite Freud's frustrating aside, "not very difficult to interpret." Confused silence was certainly my initial response. However, after reading a draft of the present text, a colleague and scholar of Freudian theory, Professor Robert R. Holt, has proposed a religious interpretation with which I agree.<sup>93</sup>

First, Holt makes the important observation that nowhere in the letter did Freud claim that he had recovered direct memories of actual early events. Instead, he was giving constructions or hypotheses, which, if true, would explain his dreams. But he was not giving the exact texts of the dreams themselves. Notice that he wrote, "Last night's dream produced the following under the most remarkable of disguises."

Holt focuses on the comment that the nanny washed young Sigmund in reddish water. Most people, when asked about this remark, interpret it to mean that Freud was somehow washed in water that had been colored by the nanny's menstrual blood; in other words, that this was literally water in which she had previously washed herself. Such an interpretation, however, opens up much more of a mystery than it solves. For, as Holt observes, why on earth would she have done such a thing? If one judges by contemporary attitudes of women somewhat comparable to this Moravian peasant, such an action seems extremely unlikely. It seems improbable that a pious Catholic woman, whose personal habits recommended her for a job of child care, would have allowed a little boy to get "contaminated" by her menstrual blood; menstrual blood is commonly considered unclean by simple people, and taboo for males.

Instead, Holt proposes that what Freud was reporting was a conflation of two sets of associations to blood: menstrual blood, and baptism as being "washed in the blood of the Lamb." Freud may indeed have had memories of seeing reddish water in which his nanny had washed herself. Remember that this was in the days before sanitary napkins, when the problem of menstruation for women was a far messier one than it is today: Rags were used, washed out, and reused. Generally they were left to soak in the bathroom in containers of cold water. All this may well have aroused intense curiosity in little Sigmund.

But Freud might also have another set of memories — of having been secretly baptized. And part of the explanation would have been that he was told that he had been "washed in the blood of the Lamb," as the nanny had been herself. They had been washed in the same water, which

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<sup>92</sup> Origins (pp. 220-221, emphasis added).

<sup>93</sup> Holt (personal communication, 1981).



was also the blood of the Lamb.<sup>94</sup>

Freud's associations in this letter add support to this view. Just prior to his remark about the reddish water, he referred to the skull of a "little sheep"; a little sheep, of course, is a lamb. A skull is also often associated with the crucifixion of Christ, since it took place on Golgotha, which means "the place of a skull."<sup>95</sup> Many paintings of the crucifixion represent this with a skull somewhere on the ground near the foot of the cross.

A few sentences later, Freud used the expression *experimenta crucis* — that is, "the test of the cross" — to suggest that the memory of the reddish water was not a fantasy, but, rather, derived from an actual early experience. All of this implies that when he wrote that his nanny washed him in "water in which she had previously washed herself," Freud was referring to his covert baptism.<sup>96</sup>

It is worth pointing out, with respect to this interpretation, two things: First, the idea that Christ is "the Lamb of God who washes away the sins of the world" is a basic concept in Christian thought, repeated daily in the liturgy of the Mass. Second, and more specifically, a great deal of popular piety in the 19th century was deeply preoccupied with blood.

Almost every village in a devout area such as Moravia would have had at least one large public crucifix, almost always with Jesus shown bleeding from his head, hands, feet, and side. Thus, the blood of Christ, and Christ as the Lamb of God, would have been familiar to Freud as a child.

### **Freud's Response to the Loss of His Nanny**

Whatever the reason, Freud's nanny was dismissed. She suddenly disappeared, and there is no question that Freud felt abandoned by his nanny. The threat of abandonment was the theme of his "casket" or "cupboard" memory, in discussing which he related the function of "screen memories." ("Screen memories" are consciously retrievable memories from childhood that rather frequently come to mind, and that cover, block, or screen a traumatic experience that occurred at the same time or slightly earlier.)

If the woman disappeared so suddenly ... some impression of the event must have been left inside me. Where is it now? Then a scene occurred to me which for the last twenty-nine years had been turning up from time to time in my conscious memory without my understanding it. I was crying my heart out, because my mother was nowhere to be found. My brother Philipp ... opened a cupboard for me, and when I found that my mother was not there either I cried still more, until she came through the door, looking slim and beautiful. What can that mean? Why should my brother open the cupboard for me when he knew that my mother was not inside it and that opening it therefore could not quiet me? Now I suddenly understand. I must have begged him to open the cupboard. When I could not find my mother, I feared she must have vanished, like my nurse not long before. I must have heard that the old woman had

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<sup>94</sup> Many Christians mean "Have you been baptized?" when they ask, "Have you been washed in the blood of the Lamb?"

<sup>95</sup> Matthew 27:33. In this and subsequent references to the Bible, the Revised Standard Version is used unless otherwise noted.

<sup>96</sup> It was after learning of Holt's proposal that I read Suzanne Cassirer Bernfeld's paper (S. C. Bernfeld, 1951), in which she connects this same memory to Freud being "preconsciously occupied with church matters" (p. 123). She writes that "[T]he priest at Easter Mass washes his hands in red wine diluted with water which stands for Christ's blood" (pp. 122-123); she also notes the Latin *experimenta crucis* and assumes that the nanny had major religious meaning for Freud centered around Easter and resurrection.

been locked, or rather “boxed” up.<sup>97</sup>

Obviously, he was anxious and fearful over his nanny’s disappearance, a disappearance that he did not understand (he was, after all, only three years old). Even if he had understood, it would have made little difference to his feeling of great loss.

Thus, the nanny, Freud’s functional mother during his crucial first three years — this woman who provided him with his “means of living and surviving” (or what Freud and many of his followers would call “ego-strength”); who gave him his first lessons in religion; whom he loved as only a young child can love; and to whom he may have given his money and toys — suddenly abandoned him at a most impressionable age. He heard that she had been locked up, but only much later did he understand that it was for stealing from him. In short, Freud’s earliest, most basic experience of religion was connected to his earliest emotional attachment: it was traumatic; it was Catholic; and, as we shall see, it was the source of great ambivalence.

### **Freud and Separation Anxiety**

The disappearance of the nanny would have precipitated a now widely acknowledged elementary and powerful anxiety known as “separation anxiety.” In my discussion of separation anxiety, I depend heavily on the work of John Bowlby and his conceptualization of the origin and consequences of this anxiety. I use Bowlby because his trilogy, *Attachment and Loss*, is already recognized as the classic statement on separation anxiety, and as a significant contribution to the psychology of childhood in general. It is equally helpful that Bowlby writes out of a psychoanalytic background, in which he ties his concept of separation anxiety into Freud’s theoretical writing on anxiety.<sup>98</sup>

Before proceeding, perhaps I should make it clear that I do not intend to argue that Freud suffered from anything like a debilitating case of separation anxiety. I do believe, however, that Freud had a moderate and significant degree of separation anxiety. But let us first take up Bowlby’s definition of this condition.

The prototypical separation anxiety is the intense anxiety generated in the child by separation from its mother or mother-figure. The loss may be temporary, as when the mother leaves for a few weeks, or permanent, as when brought on by her death. A crucial period during which such separation can have most profound and enduring effects is in early childhood — which for Bowlby, as for Freud, means the first four or five years.<sup>99</sup> Freud, of course, attached a similar importance to this period; in particular, Freud wrote that “the periods between the ages of two and four seem to be the most important.”<sup>100</sup>

When a child is separated from its mother, the anxiety response goes through three stages, only the first of which is properly called separation anxiety, although all three reactions are closely related to each other. The first phase, “protest,” is found to raise the problem of anxiety; the next, “despair,” raises the issues of grief and mourning; and the last, “detachment, raises the issue of defense.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Origins (pp. 222-223).

<sup>98</sup> Bowlby also thoroughly connects his concept of separation anxiety to the research and theory on animal instinct as understood by the ethologists. Bowlby thus sees his work as a partial answer to Freud’s explicit request for a theory of the instincts. In particular, he notes (1969, pp. 185-198) that separation anxiety is a common powerful motivation in the life of many young animals, especially young primates.

<sup>99</sup> Bowlby (1969, p. 10).

<sup>100</sup> S. Freud (1939, S.E., 23, p. 74).

<sup>101</sup> Bowlby (1969, p. 28; 1973, p. 27).

The first phase of protest is probably familiar to anyone who has observed and reflected upon the vigorous way in which children so often protest when their mothers leave them, or when they are left in a new place (such as a hospital or even a nursery school). Bowlby's research and writings powerfully document the frequently long-term effects of such separations when they are permanent or repeated throughout childhood. One case cited by Bowlby is especially relevant: a 1919 report by Helene Deutsch on a little boy who was brought up by nannies because his mother was working.

When he was just two years old his first nurse left and was replaced by a second. Despite the fact that he remained at home and that his mother was there every evening, the behavior he showed after his familiar nurse's departure conforms to pattern. On the night of her going he cried a great deal, was sleepless, and insisted on his mother remaining with him. Next day he refused to let the new nurse feed him, and he reverted to being wet and dirty. During each of the subsequent four nights his mother had to stay with him and to assure him of her love, and his daytime behavior continued disturbed. Not until the sixth day did much of his behavior return to normal and not until the ninth day did he appear to be himself again. Although there was clear evidence that he was missing his familiar nurse, he never once again mentioned her by name and seemed reluctant in any way to refer to her absence.<sup>102</sup>

Bowlby very effectively establishes the importance of separation anxiety as a major factor in childhood and adult pathology, and he also shows that Freud himself eventually came to a very similar interpretation of the origin of our most basic anxiety. Bowlby summarizes his case<sup>103</sup> by noting that Freud first linked separation and anxiety in a very brief discussion in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). Here Freud gave the topic only one paragraph, and he wrote: "Anxiety in children is originally nothing other than an expression of the fact that they are feeling the loss of the person they love."<sup>104</sup> In 1917, in his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, he again linked anxiety (in this case, infantile anxiety) with separation, in a three-page development. As Bowlby summarizes it, "a child missing 'The sight of a familiar and beloved figure — ultimately his mother' [is] the 'situation which is the prototype of the anxiety of children."<sup>105</sup>

But it was not until his major late work *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926) that Freud accorded separation the central place in what was to be his final theory of anxiety. Freud concluded then: "Missing someone who is loved and longed for ... [is] the key to an understanding of anxiety."<sup>106</sup> Although earlier he had often postulated links between sexuality and anxiety, Freud ended up focusing on separation as the prototypical anxiety experience. (It is interesting to note, in this connection, that in his discussions of separation Freud tended to hedge the use of the actual word "mother," using vaguer terms — e.g., "beloved figure," "the person they love.")

Let us take it as established that separation anxiety is extremely important to the understanding of personality and that it is caused by separation, primarily in childhood, from the mother or mother-figure. What concrete evidence is there that Freud suffered from any degree of anxiety of this sort? Let us go back over some things we have looked at earlier: First, Freud described his nanny as the originator of his neuroses; second, his nanny, his "loved one," disappeared suddenly; third, he uncovered this in his own psychoanalysis — in particular, he

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<sup>102</sup> Deutsch, cited by Bowlby (1969, p. 30). The boy is now known to have been Helene Deutsch's son, Martin (Roazen, personal communication, 1985; see Roazen, 1985).

<sup>103</sup> Bowlby (1973, p. 375-383).

<sup>104</sup> S. Freud (1905, S.E., 7, p. 224).

<sup>105</sup> Bowlby (1973, p. 378, note 2), quoting S. Freud (1917b, S.E., 16, p. 407).

<sup>106</sup> S. Freud (1926, S.E., 20, pp. 136-137).

remembered a scene (the “casket scene”) in which he was “crying my heart out.”<sup>107</sup> There is already, then, substantial evidence for the nanny’s being linked to the emergence of a separation anxiety in Freud. There are other examples as well.

### **Freud’s Travel “Phobia” and Separation Anxiety**

Biographers have commonly referred to Freud’s so-called travel phobia. At the time, travel was generally by train, and thus Freud’s fear was centered on an irrational avoidance of train travel. This fear (*Reisefieber*) was especially active, according to Jones, in the years 1887-1899, a period that included Freud’s own difficult self-analysis.<sup>108</sup> Freud directly connected his travel fear with his suddenly leaving Freiberg, traveling by train to Leipzig, and then shortly afterward moving to Vienna.<sup>109</sup>

Jones, paraphrasing Freud, writes: “On the trip from Freiberg the train passed through Breslau, where Freud saw gas jets for the first time; they made him think of souls burning in hell!”<sup>110</sup> The visual appearance of such gas lights in the city or in a dimly lit train station would have been very similar to the experience in a church of candles lit for the souls of the dead. The religious comment and imagistic associations for Hell (and, implicitly, of death and judgment) are obviously Christian, and are hard to account for on any other basis but the nanny. (This is also the conclusion of Suzanne Bernfeld and of Grigg.<sup>111</sup>)

Now Freud’s fear of train travel was not a true phobia, as evidenced by the fact that once Freud actually got on a train and began to travel, the fear became markedly less or disappeared entirely. In fact, Freud liked to travel and spent much time doing it and enjoying it. (A true phobia becomes more intense as a person comes closer to the feared object or situation.) Instead, Freud’s anxiety was much like the standard separation anxiety shown by many children in their fear of going to school.

Bowlby and others have made it clear that such fears are frequently an expression of the child’s fear of separation from the mother or mother-figure.<sup>112</sup> It is not school or the like that is feared, but separation. In this case, obviously, what Freud feared was separation from the nanny who had suddenly disappeared. Little Sigmund may well have expected to see her again; even if she was indeed locked up, she would eventually be let out. But the Freud family left Freiberg shortly afterward, and this would have killed Freud’s hopes of being reunited with his nanny. And indeed he never did see her again.

The actual reasons for the departure of the Freud family from Freiberg are not known. It has been suggested that because of investment losses in South Africa, prospects did not look good in this small town.<sup>113</sup> This is possible, but even if so it does not explain why the Freuds left

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<sup>107</sup> It is most significant that Freud said that the “crying my heart out” scene had occurred to him from time to time over the previous 29 years without his having any understanding of it (*Origins*, p. 222). This memory is obviously very important in conceptualizing Freud’s psychology.

<sup>108</sup> Jones (1953, p. 13).

<sup>109</sup> *Origins* (p. 237).

<sup>110</sup> Jones (1953, p. 13).

<sup>111</sup> S. C. Bernfeld (1951); Grigg (1973).

<sup>112</sup> Bowlby (1973, Ch. 18).

<sup>113</sup> Roazen (1975, pp. 27, 553) reports an interview with Edward Bernays in which financial losses by Emanuel and Philipp in South African ostrich feather farms are suggested as the explanation of why the Freud family left Freiberg. This claim is presumably based on the recollection of Edward’s mother, Anna (Freud’s sister); see also Bernays (ca. 1935, p. 90). However, Swales (personal communication, 1985) has informed me that the situation may have been quite different. Oliver Freud throws doubt on Edward

Freiberg or why the family split up. In general it was, in fact, a good time for business, and the Jewish friends of the Freuds, all of whom stayed, did quite well.<sup>114</sup> Jones has implied that anti-Semitism was a factor, but this suggestion has been butted thoroughly by several authors.<sup>115</sup> An explanation for the departure is presented in the next chapter.

It should always be kept in mind that, in addition to sorrow and mourning, part of the psychological response to separation is great anger at the mother-figure for leaving. Thus anger and mourning, along with his attachment and love, would have become part of Freud's association to the nanny and all she stood for. Bowlby gives many examples of the anger set up by separation experiences and the subsequent anxiety.<sup>116</sup> Perhaps the most dramatic and poignant are cases such as that of an adolescent boy who murdered his mother and afterward exclaimed, "I decided she would never leave me again."<sup>117</sup>

The importance of this separation experience for Freud is summarized by Suzanne Bernfeld in her essay on Freud's early life, when she writes about the move from Freiberg that "this simple geographic change was a catastrophe for Freud and he spent the next forty years of his life trying to undo it."<sup>118</sup> The material presented below shows that Freud never did undo it, and that his nanny and his early Freiberg days would haunt him not just for the next 40 years, but for the rest of his life.<sup>119</sup>

### **The Theme of the Two Mothers**

Freud's biographers have noticed many things about him, but with rare exceptions they have overlooked Freud's lifelong preoccupation with great figures who had two mothers. (An exception is Gedo, who in one article does draw attention to the "two mothers" theme in Freud's life<sup>120</sup>; another who notes this is Spector, who brings up the issue of two mothers with specific reference to Freud's interpretation of Leonardo da Vinci.<sup>121</sup>)

Certainly, one famous figure with two mothers is Oedipus, whose story served as the basis for Freud's most distinctive and best-known contribution to personality theory, the Oedipus complex. The interesting point, for us, is that Oedipus has two mothers: his biological mother, Jocasta, and his functional mother, Merope. Jocasta, informed of the prediction that her newborn son would one day kill his father, has the baby Oedipus taken by a servant to be exposed in the nearby mountains. Instead of leaving the baby to die of exposure, the servant takes pity on him and gives him to a peasant, who in turn, takes the child to his master, Polybos, the King of Corinth. He is brought up in Corinth at the court by the King and the Queen, Merope. The tragedy *Oedipus Rex* itself focuses emphatically on the ambiguous parentage of Oedipus. Indeed, the powerful lines of the seer, addressed to Oedipus in Scene One, haunt the entire play: "Who are your mother and father?: Can you tell me?" And these questions are

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Bernays's claim in a letter to Siegfried Bernfeld (letter in the Bernfeld Collection, Library of Congress, with two sections dated April 13 and June 25, 1944). Oliver Freud wrote that the ostrich feather farms, destroyed by a bird disease and bringing financial ruin, were in England. Thus, this disaster came *after* departure from Freiberg.

<sup>114</sup> See Krüll (1978). For example, the Fluss family stayed in Freiberg and prospered.

<sup>115</sup> See S. Bernfeld & S. C. Bernfeld (1944); Sajner (1968); Krüll (1979).

<sup>116</sup> Bowlby (1969, Ch. 2; 1973, p. 253; 1980, pp. 28-29).

<sup>117</sup> Burnham, cited by Bowlby (1973, p. 251).

<sup>118</sup> S. C. Bernfeld (1951, p. 113).

<sup>119</sup> This conclusion that Freud would spend a lifetime trying to undo his childhood loss was proposed by Zilboorg (1962, p. 138).

<sup>120</sup> Gedo (1968/1976).

<sup>121</sup> Spector (1972, p. 61); see also Swan (1974).

posed by Oedipus himself a few lines later: “My parents again! Wait: who are my parents?”<sup>122</sup>

Another great personality who never ceased to attract and intrigue Freud was Moses. It is agreed by Freud’s biographers that in many respects Freud identified with this great Old Testament figure.<sup>123</sup> Freud was particularly fascinated by Michelangelo’s statue of Moses, which Freud acknowledged as the work of art that most powerfully affected him; he studied it extensively, and finally discussed it in his now famous essay, *The Moses of Michelangelo* (1914a). Freud had a life-long interest in Moses, and, of course, his last great work, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), was a book-length treatment of this great figure.

According to the Old Testament account, young Moses was the son of a Hebrew couple who was taken care of by his natural mother for three months until it was no longer safe to do so: The Pharaoh had decreed that all male Hebrew babies were to be killed. The baby was then put in a basket and set in the river where it was found, at its edge, by the Pharaoh’s daughter, who kept and raised him. Through a ruse, Moses’s natural mother nursed him for some time afterwards. But the eventual outcome was that his natural mother “brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son; and she named him Moses.”<sup>124</sup> In short, Moses had two mothers: a biological mother, who was a Hebrew, and a functional mother, who was Egyptian.

Thus, the two most Important “theoretical” characters for Freud, throughout his life, were both deeply involved in situations of ambiguous parentage. Both had two mothers, one primarily biological and one functional, just as he had.

The “two mothers” theme becomes all the more interesting when we consider Freud’s treatment of still another great historical character in his essay *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* (1910a). In this work, Freud presented the world’s first psychoanalytic interpretation of a painting. The painting in question is Leonardo’s *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne*. As its title indicates, this well-known work contains the three figures St. Anne (Anna), the Virgin Mary (Maria), and the baby Jesus, who is holding a lamb. The problem that this painting raised for Freud is that the two women are both painted as young. Why should St. Anne be represented as young when, as Jesus’s grandmother, she clearly had to be older than her daughter, Mary? (Also, Christian tradition holds that Anne was quite old when she conceived Mary.) Freud answered this question as follows:

The picture contains the synthesis of the history of his childhood. The details of which are explainable by the most intimate impressions in Leonardo’s life.... Leonardo’s childhood was precisely as remarkable as this picture. He has had two mothers, first, his true mother, Caterina, from whom he was torn away when he was between three and five, and then a young and tender stepmother, Donna Albiera, his father’s wife.<sup>125</sup>

Clearly, Freud’s interpretation of Leonardo fits perfectly with his own childhood. Caterina, a peasant woman, was the older and “his true mother,” from whom he was “torn” shortly after he was three years old in order to be placed with the young and more aristocratic stepmother, Donna Albiera, the wife of the much older Piero da Vinci (who represents Jakob, in Freud’s projected interpretation).

In support of this understanding, Spector identifies the very subjective, personal involvement of Freud in his Leonardo Interpretation.<sup>126</sup> Working from Jones<sup>127</sup> (who also notices that Freud

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<sup>122</sup> Sophocles (1939, pp. 21, 22).

<sup>123</sup> For example, see Jones (1955, p. 363-367).

<sup>124</sup> Exodus 2:10.

<sup>125</sup> S. Freud (1910a, S. E., 11, pp. 112 -113).

<sup>126</sup> Spector (1972, p. 54).

had a clear autobiographical involvement with this painting), and from the art historian Schapiro,<sup>128</sup> Spector notes that Freud minimized the importance of Leonardo's father and made the abandoned older mother the decisive influence.<sup>129</sup> Spector shows that Freud did this in spite of good evidence, *of which Freud was aware*, that Leonardo's father was, in fact, probably a very early and important presence in the artist's life.<sup>130</sup> Spector links Freud's nanny to the theme of the two mothers and suggests that the St. Anne figure is a symbol for the nanny. Spector's analysis also implies that for Freud, his own father was somehow not that important in the Freiberg years, being instead rather distant or "out of the picture," as Freud supposed Leonardo's father had been.<sup>131</sup> One remaining point: Freud's autobiographical identification with this painting also very definitely means that in some sense he viewed himself as the baby Jesus. After all, from Freud's viewpoint, Jesus also had an ambiguous paternity and (in the painting) two mothers.

Reviewing these three examples of "two mothers," we see that in the story of Oedipus, the biological mother is the one who is enmeshed in her son's painful fate; that is, the biological mother is the "problem" mother. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud's central thesis was that Moses was an Egyptian and not a Jew. Since Freud on occasion spoke of himself as Moses, and all agree he often identified with Moses, a most straightforward interpretation of this identification is that in it Freud was denying his own Jewishness (at least his religious Jewishness) and identifying with Egypt. In any case, Freud was again viewing the biological mother as the problem; he also implicitly was endorsing the functional (non-Jewish) mother as the true mother. Finally, in Leonardo's case, there was a direct preference for the older peasant mother, Caterina, over the "young tender stepmother, Donna Albiera," a representation of Amalia. In short, "see how the old liking breaks through."<sup>132</sup>

### Freud's First "Anna," or What Was the Nanny Called?

The name of the nanny, as already mentioned, was Resi (Theresa) Wittek. This name is *not* how she would have been referred to by young Freud or by members of his family, however. It is safe to assume that she was called "*Amme*" by the members of Sigmund's family, since this is the common German name for a such a woman in the home, and since this was the name Freud himself once gave her.<sup>133</sup> In this connection, it is important to note that Freud's mother's name, Amalia, is phonetically very similar to "*Amme*"; certainly she must have been called "mama" often, and "*Amme* and "mama" are quite close.

But this peasant woman would have spoken Czech exclusively, and this would have been the language used with the children. The customary Czech name for such a woman is "Nana," which is one of the most frequent variants of the name "Anna."<sup>134</sup> That is, "Nana" is both the

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<sup>127</sup> Jones (1955, p. 346); Lichtenberg (1978) further enriches our understanding of the projective, autobiographical character of Freud's *Leonardo* essay.

<sup>128</sup> Schapiro (1956).

<sup>129</sup> Spector (1972, p. 58).

<sup>130</sup> Spector (1972, p. 58).

<sup>131</sup> Spector (1972, p. 57).

<sup>132</sup> It should also be noted that Freud's future relationship with his wife and her sister Minna (who lived in the Freud house beginning in 1896) represented a re-creation of the "two mothers" situation, a situation powerfully explicated by Swales (1982a). Roazen (personal communication, 1985) also sees Martha and Minna as an example of two mothers.

<sup>133</sup> For example, see *Origins* (p. 245). In this letter Freud used "*Amme*" for his nurse; at other times he used "*Kinderfrau*." See Grigg (1973, p. 112).

<sup>134</sup> Machek (1971, p. 389). It was Professor Zezula (personal communication, 1981) who first informed me of this common Czech expression for a nanny.

popular Czech equivalent for “Nanny,” and also one of the popular nicknames for Anna. Therefore, “Anna” and “Nana” are in the case of a nanny inextricably connected. This use of “Nana” is documented as especially typical of Moravia.<sup>135</sup> “Nana” is obviously an analogue to the English “Nanny,” which is itself a variant of the name “Anne.” Apparently Anne or Anna, the grandmother of Jesus, became a widely used word for a mother substitute. If the actual grandmother had been the nanny, she would probably have been called “Nana”; otherwise she may have been called “Anna.”<sup>136</sup> Both words are very close in sound, and even if “Anna” was not used, “Nana” is quite similar.

No wonder Freud was drawn to Leonardo’s painting of Anne (Anna), Mary (Maria), and Jesus! Even the name of the older, preferred second mother in the painting was the same as that of his own older second mother. To make the analysis of Leonardo’s painting even more over determined, “Maria” has sound similarity to “Amalia.” (And it should be recalled that Maria Freud, the young wife of Emanuel, was also part of Freud’s Freiberg years.<sup>137</sup>

One might also wonder whether Freud knew in an earlier version of the painting, Leonardo also included young John the Baptist, thus bringing Freud’s half-nephew (“cousin”) John into the “associative picture.”<sup>138</sup> Freud’s biographers have often noted the life-long influence of John on Freud’s life. In the final version, as shown in Figure 1-4, a lamb was substituted for John. Some of the possible associations to “lamb” have already been noted.

One concluding remark about the name “Anna” is in order. It should be noted that Freud declared that the names of his own six children were “chosen, not according to the fashion of the moment, but in memory of people I have been fond of. Their names made the children into revenants.”<sup>139</sup> With the word “revenant,” Freud was referring to his belief that a name results in the recreation (almost the reincarnation) of the previous person with the name. The only child of Sigmund Freud who received a decidedly Christian name was his daughter Anna, who was also Freud’s favorite child. By one of those ironies of life, it was his daughter Anna who was to become Freud’s nurse — his “Nana-Anna” — in the long illness of his later years.

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<sup>135</sup> Machek (1971, p. 389) notes that the term “Nana” is used mainly by children and that it is most prevalent in Moravian dialects.

<sup>136</sup> Zezula (personal communication, 1981).

<sup>137</sup> Freud’s proposal of a psychoanalytic aesthetic—that is, a psychological interpretation of the artist—was so contaminated by his own psychology that, in spite of his claim of analyzing the artist, much of what he discussed is now understood as a projection of his own psychology. That is, what he gave us was a psychoanalytic interpretation of the critic. This “aesthetic of the critic” is interesting, of course, but it tells us little or nothing about Leonardo or his work. The richness of the autobiographical element in Freud’s writing is constantly stressed throughout this book. The pervasive tendency of Freud to project his own psychology has led Swales to comment that “taken as a whole, Freud’s work represents the longest and strangest autobiography in Western literature” (personal communication, 1982). This overstates the case, but the remark nevertheless contains much truth.

<sup>138</sup> This well-known earlier version, the Burlington House Cartoon, is in the National Gallery, London. Freud did refer to this version in a 1923 footnote to his Leonardo essay. See S. Freud (1910a, S.E., 11, p. 114).

<sup>139</sup> S. Freud (1900, S.E., 5, p. 487); see also E. Freud et al. (1978, p. 167).