

ANALYZING A FREUDIAN ANALYSIS

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ONE of the most dramatic and artistic analyses of a lapse of memory, one frequently referred to by psycho-analysts as a convincing demonstration of the truth of the psycho-analytic theories, is Professor Freud's analysis of the forgetting of the insignificant word "aliquis" in a line from Virgil's *Æneid*. That the reader may be able to follow our argument, we reproduce Professor Freud's analysis (*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, pp. 17-22) *in extenso*:

Last summer, while journeying on my vacation, I renewed the acquaintance of a young man of academic education, who, as I soon noticed, *was acquainted with some of my psychological writings*. In our conversation we drifted — *I no longer remember how* — to the subject of the social position of the race to which we both belong. He, *being ambitious*, bemoaned the fact that his generation, as he expressed it, was destined to grow to waste, that it was prevented from developing its talents and gratifying its desires. He concluded his passionate speech with the familiar verse from Virgil: "Exoriar . . ." in which the unhappy Dido leaves her vengeance upon *Æneas to posterity*. Instead of "concluded," I should have said, "wished to conclude," for he could not finish the quotation, and *attempted to conceal the obvious gap* in his memory by *transposing the words*:

"Exoriar(e) ex nostris ossibus ultor!"

Finally, somewhat resentfully, he said: "Please don't make such a *mocking face*, as if you were gloating over my embarrassment, but help me rather. There is something missing in this verse. How does the complete line really go?"

"With pleasure," I answered, and cited it correctly, thus:

"Exoriar(e) aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor!"

"How stupid to forget such a word!" he said. "By the way, I understand you claim that *forgetting is not without its reasons*: [*Italics ours throughout*.] I should be very curious to find out how I came to forget this indefinite pronoun 'aliquis.'"

I gladly accepted the challenge, as *I hoped to get an addition to my collection*, and said, "We can easily do this, but I must ask you to tell me frankly and without any criticism everything that occurs to your mind after you focus your attention, *without any definite purpose*, on the forgotten word."

"Very well; the ridiculous thought comes to me to divide the word in the following way: 'a' and 'aliquis.'"

What does that mean?

"I don't know."

What else does that recall to you?

"My mind goes on to 'reliques' — 'liquidation' — 'fluidity' — 'fluid.' — Does that tell you anything?"

No, not by far! But continue!

"I now think," he said, laughing sarcastically, "of Simon of Trent, whose relics I saw two years ago in a church in Trent. I am thinking of the old accusation of blood-guilt which is now again being brought against *the Jews*, and of the writings of Kleinpaul, who sees in these alleged sacrifices reincarnations or revivals, so to speak, of *the Savior*."

This stream of thoughts is not unrelated to the theme which we were discussing before the Latin word escaped you.

"Right. I now think of an article in an Italian journal which I read recently. I believe it was entitled: 'What St. Augustine says about Women.' What do you make of this?"

I say nothing.

"Now I think of something which surely has no connection with our theme."

Please refrain from all criticism, and —

"Oh, I know! I recall a handsome old gentleman whom I met on my journey last week. He was a genuine '*original*.' He looks like a big bird of prey. His name, if you care to know, is Benedict."

Well, at least you give a grouping of saints and Church fathers: 'St. Simon,' 'St. Augustine,' and 'St. Benedict.' I believe that there was a Church father named 'Origines.' Three of these, moreover, are Christian names, like 'Paul' in the name 'Kleinpaul.'

"Now I think of 'St. Januarius' and his blood miracle — I find that these thoughts go on mechanically."

Just stop a moment; both 'St. Januarius' and 'St. Augustine' have something to do with the calendar. Will you recall to me the blood miracle?

"Surely you know all about it! The blood of St. Januarius is preserved in a phial in a church in Naples, and on a certain holiday it liquefies by virtue of a miracle. The people make much of this miracle, and become greatly stirred up if it is retarded, as happened once during the French occupation. Thereupon the General in command — or am I mistaken, was it Garibaldi? — took the priest aside, and, pointing significantly to the soldiers arrayed without, expressed the hope that the miracle would very soon transpire. And it actually took place . . ."

Well, and what else? Why do you hesitate?

"Something has just occurred to me . . . but it is too intimate a matter to impart . . . besides, I see no connection and no necessity for telling it."

I will take care of the connection. Of course I cannot compel you to

reveal what is disagreeable to you, but then you should not have asked me to tell you how you forgot the word 'aliquis.'

"Really? Do you think so? Well, I suddenly thought of a lady from whom *I could easily get a message that would be very unpleasant to us both.*"

That she missed her period?

"How can you guess that?"

That is no longer difficult. You prepared me for it sufficiently. Just think of the saints of the calendar, the liquefaction of the blood on a certain day, of the commotion if the event does not take place, and the distinct threat that the miracle must take place. . . . Indeed, you have elaborated the miracle of St. Januarius into a clever allusion to the woman's courses.

"It was surely without my knowledge. And do you really believe that my inability to reproduce the little word 'aliquis' was due to this anxious expectation?"

That seems to me beyond doubt. Don't you recall dividing it into 'a-lquis' and the associations: 'reliques,' 'liquidation,' 'fluid'? Shall I also add to this connection the fact that St. Simon, to whom you got by way of the reliques, *was sacrificed as a child?*

"Please stop. I hope you do not take these thoughts — *if I really entertained them* — seriously. I will, however, confess to you that the lady is Italian, and that I visited Naples in her company. But may not all this be coincidence?"

I must leave to your own judgment whether you can explain all these connections through the assumption of coincidence. But I assure you that *every similar case that you will analyse will lead you to just such remarkable 'coincidences'!*

The way the forgetting occurred must be construed thus: The speaker had deplored the fact that the present generation of his race is being deprived of its rights, and, like Dido, he had predicted that a new generation would take upon itself vengeance against the oppressors. So, then, *he has expressed a wish for posterity.* At that moment a *contradictory thought intruded itself; 'Do you really earnestly wish for posterity? That is not true. In what a predicament you would be if you were now to receive information that you may expect posterity from a certain quarter which you have in mind! No, no posterity, — no matter how much it may be needed for vengeance.'* This contradiction asserts itself . . . by establishing an extrinsic association between one of the elements of his idea and one of the elements of the objectionable wish, [which is] brought about in an extremely strained manner by an apparently artificial detour of associations. . . . We have [here] a second mechanism of forgetting, viz.: the disturbance of thought through an inner contradiction emanating from the repression.

Professor Freud undoubtedly intended the above analysis as a scientific demonstration of the principle enunciated by him in the

concluding sentence. We are therefore warranted in submitting it to a criticism in the manner characteristic of exact science.

1. In the first place, then, it must be pointed out that Professor Freud's account of the analysis is inadequate from a scientific point of view because the experiment, if we regard it as such, was not taken down immediately and verbatim by an impartial and unprejudiced stenographer. We are therefore in no position to judge how much Professor Freud suggested to the subject and what fine nuances in the subject's words he overlooked or ignored. In a psychological experiment of this nature the slightest gesture, a peculiar intonation of the voice, a wrinkling of the forehead, a look, etc., may be of significance. Errors of commission and omission are altogether too frequent in such experiments. As Professor Freud's report stands now it has no more value than hearsay or anecdotal evidence and that is little enough in science.

2. The subject, a young man with academic education, was acquainted with Freud's theories as to forgetting and was therefore not a fit subject for an impartial, unprejudiced investigation, no matter how honest he may have intended to be. Professor Freud encouraged the young man to associate under the impression that if he continued long enough they would discover *the* cause for — i. e. the meaning of — the forgetting. This is out and out suggestion. Professor Freud should have reminded the gentleman that there are, as he himself says elsewhere, other causes for forgetting besides repression. His failure to do this is a serious defect in his experiment.

3. We are told absolutely nothing about what the young man's thoughts had been prior to the discussion in which the forgetting occurred. Had he thought of the young Italian woman that morning? When had he last heard from her? Was there more reason for worrying about her menses now than previous months? Had he ever given her menses any thought? Many questions along this line occur to us, but the reader will supply these for himself. Their significance is obvious. If the woman's menses had not engaged his (conscious) attention whatsoever we cannot accept the theory that the forgetting of the word "aliquis" was "determined" by that, unless we are given more logical proof than that offered us by Professor Freud.

4. Nothing is told us about how much English the young academician knew, or whether he was in the habit of seeing English words in foreign words, whether he thought in English, and whether he usually thought of blood as a liquid (instead of a fluid).

5. It would have been of the utmost importance for us to know whether the young man knew the exact meaning of the verse in question or whether he knew it only vaguely. It so happens that this verse ("Exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor," — *Æneid*, Book IV, 625) is capable of two interpretations, one being a prayer for the coming of an unknown avenger ("May an avenger issue from our ashes!") and the other an address to an avenger ("Arise from our ashes, thou avenger!"). In the former the word "aliquis" is practically equivalent to "ignotus" *i. e.*, unknown, whereas in the latter it has the force of "some one" who is fully known. If the young man's ideas about the exact meaning of the sentence were vague we would have a sufficient explanation for his inability to recall the adjective or pronoun that should modify the substantive "ultor." That this was really the case seems to be proved by the fact that he forgot this adjective rather than some other part of the verse.

6. The experiment might have been of real value to psychology if Professor Freud had not committed the fatal blunder of supplying the missing word. Had he not done so it would have been interesting to see whether the young man's associations would have brought him to the forgotten word and what his associations would have been. As it was, Professor Freud is open to the charge of having directed the young man's attention in the direction of something which may already have been consciously occupying his mind.

7. It was an error on Professor Freud's part to ask, "What else does it recall to you?" when the young man had as yet recalled nothing. And it is a serious error on Professor Freud's part to assume that the transposition of the words represents an "attempt to conceal the obvious gap" in the gentleman's memory.

8. An even more serious error — and one fatal to the scientific character of the experiment — is Professor Freud's telling the young man that he had brought together a group of saints and church fathers, especially as he had mentioned only two. There is no reason for connecting the word "original" with Origines, and there is nothing to show that the young man knew of the existence of Origines or that Origines was a church father. Furthermore, the young man did not mention "St. Benedict"; he had spoken only of a man named "Benedict." Had Professor Freud asked him to associate to "Benedict" or to the "original," the subsequent associations would in all likelihood have been very different from what they were. So, too, Professor Freud might have asked the young gentleman to associate to

"St. Simon," to "Kleinpaul," to "Benedict," to "bird of prey," or to the false charges against the Jews, or to the article about women, and in each case the subsequent associations might — nay, would — have been very different. His not doing so proves the thoroughly arbitrary and accidental character of the whole procedure. It was only after Professor Freud's lead that the young man said, "Now I think of St. Januarius and his blood miracle." In a properly conducted scientific experiment the investigator should have asked nothing, made no comments, but should have allowed the subject to continue to associate without guidance or interruption. It must be noted that up to the point where Professor Freud speaks of the grouping of saints the young man had said nothing that might be construed as an allusion to what follows.

9. That Professor Freud actually directed the young man's mind to the subject of sex and the sexual function is proved by the fact that it was he, and not the young man, who first spoke of the calendar and connected these with the "blood miracle," thus suggesting "monthlies, menses." No sooner had the young man mentioned "St. Januarius" and the "blood miracle" than Professor Freud hastened to refer back to "St. Augustine" and to suggest that these had "something to do with the calendar." And he followed this suggestion up with a question concerning the blood miracle, thus getting the young man to concentrate on blood. Professor Freud no doubt knows — and took advantage of his knowledge — that there are many young men, journeying on their vacations, who "could" get news from somewhere that a certain person is worried about her menses. It may be of significance in this connection that when Professor Freud supplied the missing word he "made a mocking face." (Think of a scientist beginning an experiment with "a mocking face"!)

10. In his discussion of the forgetting of the word "aliquis," Professor Freud tells us that "the usual way of bringing to consciousness hidden ideas" is for the subject 'to tell frankly and without any criticism everything that occurs to his mind after he has focused his attention, *without any definite purpose*, on the forgotten word.' One has only to read the reported analysis to see that the actual procedure does not in the least correspond to this description. The young man began his free associations with a very definite purpose: to discover the cause of the lapse in something of a repressed and tabooed nature. Professor Freud did everything in his power, by direct and indirect suggestions, to lead the young man to tabooed and sexual

matters. And, furthermore, the young man was not permitted to associate freely; his mind was constantly being directed by Professor Freud's questions and suggestions.

11. In a properly conducted scientific experiment, undertaken with the object of determining why a scholar forgot a particular word in a given verse in a foreign tongue, it would be of the utmost importance to determine what percentage of students (of a certain age and in a given state of health, etc.), who had learned that particular verse a certain number of years ago can recall that verse correctly. It would also be important to estimate how many forget the significant words, how many the insignificant words, how many the verbs, etc. Then it would have to be determined whether psycho-physiological causes alone would or would not account for the forgetting in all as well as in particular instances. Only after all this was done and the forgetting could not be explained on known and proved psychological principles, would we be justified in resorting to an unproved and hypothetical assumption. Professor Freud has made no such study and therefore his "analysis" of the forgetting of the word "aliquis" in one particular instance has absolutely no scientific value. In this connection I may mention that not a single scholar to whom I spoke of the "familiar verse" under consideration was able to recall it correctly. And surely no one, except perhaps Professor Freud, expects to be able to recall all the Latin verses, even such "familiar" ones as "Exoriare," etc., that he had learned in his student days. And it would require a great deal more evidence than has yet been offered us to make us believe that all these instances of the forgetting of the verses are "complex"-determined.

12. Another matter that should have been determined by Professor Freud before he drew his conclusion about "a second mechanism of forgetting" is the question whether he would not have elicited the same facts if the young man had happened to forget some other word, *e. g.*, "exoriare," in the sentence, instead of the word "aliquis," or had forgotten to tie his cravat or lace his shoes. Had the young man that morning really been worried about his friend's menses we would have no hesitation in saying that sooner or later he would have spoken of that subject in associating to any word in the given sentence, or in any other sentence, or to his untied cravat. This would completely disprove the supposition that the forgetting of the word "aliquis" was "complex"-determined.

13. The fact that after several minutes' talk, consisting of free

associations and answers to suggestive questioning, the young man spoke of a subject of a private and personal nature, *i. e.*, a woman's menses, does not prove that there was a causal relationship between the forgetting of the word which was the starting point for the colloquy and the presence in the young man's mind of a latent worry about that woman's menstrual period. We must remember in this connection that the gentleman had *not* worried about the matter, and that he said only that he *could* get a message that would be unpleasant. But even if he had been anxious about the matter, that would not prove that there was a causal relationship between that worry ("anxious expectation") and the forgetting of the word "aliquis."

14. In his commentary on the analysis, Professor Freud says that the young man had "expressed a wish for posterity." But he had really not done so; he had only implied a wish that in the future some one might arise who would avenge the wrongs of the Jews. This has nothing to do with his own posterity. And incidentally, but by no means irrelevantly, it may be pointed out that in such a situation as that we are now dealing with the young man would be sure to say "progeny" not "posterity," if he were thinking of his own offspring. It remains yet to be shown that the wordless Unconscious identifies "posterity" with "progeny."

15. Continuing his commentary, Professor Freud says that "at that moment a contradictory thought introduced itself" into the young man's mind. As we have heard nothing of this "contradictory thought" from the young man himself, we must infer that Professor Freud assumes that the "thought" of which he speaks ("Do you really earnestly wish for posterity? That is not true. In what a predicament you would be if you were now to receive information that you may expect posterity from a certain quarter which you have in mind! No, no posterity!") and which inhibited the recollection of the word "aliquis" was unconscious. But we have been taught that the Freudian Unconscious consists of repressed, forbidden desires, of conative trends, of speechless urges, yearnings, cravings. Surely, the unconscious thought which Professor Freud attributes to the traveling academician cannot be described as an urge, a longing, and much less as a repressed desire. Thoughts and impulses (cravings, yearnings) are not identical phenomena, and one cannot be substituted for the other. If the subject had those thoughts (not "that thought") he was conscious of them as such, and if he was not conscious of them they were not the unconscious determinants of the forgetting. Uncon-

scious thinking is an oxymoron which is made impossible by Professor Freud's own definition of the wish-character of his "Unconscious."

16. Why, it may be asked, did Professor Freud stop his investigation when they came to the matter of the possible gestation? What reason had he for concluding that the search was finished? Why didn't he ask the gentleman to continue his "free associations"? Surely the possibly suppressed menses were not the only unpleasant subject that might have occurred to the young man's mind if the investigator had continued to quiz him long enough. In fact, it is more than likely that very unpleasant thoughts which had actually occurred (not that "could" have occurred) to him might have been elicited without any very great difficulty. Professor Freud's procedure leaves no room for doubt that he stopped his "investigation" when he found something that seemed to coincide with what was in him a foregone conclusion, namely, that something of a sexual and painful nature lies behind every forgetting. That this is so is corroborated by his statement that "every similar case that you will analyse will lead you to just such remarkable 'coincidences.'" Needless to say, it explains the unscientific technique pursued by Professor Freud throughout his "investigation"; his bias and his "hope to get an addition to his collection" ruined what in the hands of a more careful scientist might have been an important experiment.

17. Owing to the extrinsic associations between the word "aliquis" and one of the elements of the (conjectured) objectionable wish, this insignificant word was repressed so intensely that it could not be recalled. That is what Professor Freud would have us believe. The forgetting saved the young man from the pain which he might have felt as a result of the unconscious associations emanating from the presence in consciousness of the in itself harmless word "aliquis." To us this theory seems to be sufficiently disproved by the fact that the intrapsychic censor, so solicitous about the young man's feelings, did not interfere with his recollection — under Professor Freud's guidance — of the much more direct and significant allusions to blood, the months of the year, St. Simon, etc. If these things so readily recurred to the gentleman's mind, surely the word "aliquis" should have been passed by the censor.

18. One of the most serious errors committed by Professor Freud in the above analysis was his omission to get his companion's free associations to the English word "liquidation." Needless to say, the young man may have known, and probably did know, that "liquida-

tion" and "liquefaction" are not synonymous terms. And we, therefore, have here a word — the third in his associations — which has no reference to the assumed "complex," switches away from what we are asked to regard as a "complex-indicator," viz., the word "reliques," and leads back again to another "indicator" ("fluidity"). Why this happens is nowhere explained, nor is the fact itself pointed out or commented on.

Had the gentleman been invited to associate to "liquidation" we might have obtained some very interesting, and perhaps painful, data about his financial affairs, about difficulties in meeting his bills, about the importance of money to the Jews (and this would connect up with the conversation which led up to the lapse), etc. In this way, no doubt, important matters might have been elicited, perhaps not of a sexual nature, which had actually engaged the young man's conscious attention that morning. And in that case it would be left to us to decide whether these ideas or the possible worry about a woman determined or influenced his forgetting the word "aliquis."

It is not impossible either that had he been encouraged to continue his free associations to "liquidation," "fluid" and "fluidity" we might have elicited the recollection of enuresis nocturna, and then we should have been in no doubt as to the reason for his forgetting the innocent "aliquis." This would be strictly in accordance with Professor Freud's theory that behind ambition (Note the opening conversation!) we often, if not always, find unconscious memories of enuresis in childhood. Note, in this connection, these associations: a liquid, a relic of childhood, Simon (infants all wet their beds), Kleinpaul (the little Paul, *i. e.*, membrum virile), stream (!) of thoughts, women (girls probably suffer from enuresis more than boys), etc.

One would have thought, too, that before Professor Freud had reached the conclusion that the possibility of hearing of the non-occurrence of a certain woman's menses could cause a young Jew who had once studied Latin and some English to forget the commonplace word "aliquis" in a verse in Virgil's *Æneid*, that he would at least have inquired whether the gentleman in question had been able to recall that verse correctly a month or more prior to the reported conversation. But that seems not to have occurred to Professor Freud. And yet we all know that we sometimes forget words, names, quotations, etc., which at other times we can recall with ease. In the present instance this fact would, obviously have been of the utmost importance; if the young Jew could not have recalled the verse cor-

rectly prior to his liaison there would be nothing surprising in his present lapse of memory and we would not be expected to believe that this lapse was due to a possible concern about possible progeny. In the absence of any information along this line, the analysis of the forgetting of "aliquis" loses any possible value as a scientific experiment that it might possibly otherwise have had.

Inasmuch as Professor Bleuler, notwithstanding his repudiation of the bulk of Freud's teachings, defends the analysis of the forgotten "aliquis," we shall briefly examine some of his statements and arguments ("Jahrbuch f. psychoanalytische u. psychopathologische Forschungen," 1910, vol. 2, pp. 648-654).

He says that according to Freud the word "aliquis" "reminded" the gentleman's Unconscious of the absence of an anxiously anticipated menstruation. This statement is erroneous in the following respects: The Unconscious does not remember or reason or know or think, — it only wishes and wishes in symbolic or pictorial form; hence the word could not have "reminded" the Unconscious of anything. Then, too, the gentleman did not know that the menses had not appeared, and we have no evidence anywhere that the man was worried about the matter; he said only that he "could" get news that would be unpleasant.

Professor Bleuler thinks that the forgetting of "such an ordinary word as 'aliquis' is extraordinary and needs special explanation." This is not true; besides, he begs the question. If anything, an ordinary word in a foreign tongue ought, according to all known and accepted psychological principles, to be more readily forgotten than an uncommon word. The law of associations applies. Besides, if the young man did not know the exact meaning of the verse in question and the force of the bivalent word "aliquis," we would have a sufficient explanation for his inability to recall it.

Very few Latinists, says Bleuler, would have divided the word "aliquis" into "a" and "liquis," inasmuch as this word has nothing to do with the root of the word "liquidus." But there is absolutely nothing in Professor Freud's narrative to warrant the assumption that the young man was a Latinist. The ability dimly to recall a Latin verse from one's student days does not make one a Latinist. And it remains to be shown that the gentleman in question knew enough Latin to know the etymology of the word "aliquis." We have known fairly good Latin students who didn't know that. It does not, then, follow that there was a complex-determined preparedness in the

gentleman's mind for the incorrect division of the word "aliquis." And, furthermore, we have no means of knowing whether he even knew the correct scansion of the verse he intended to quote (He misplaced some of the words!) or on what syllable to put the main stress in the forgotten word. If he read the word "aliquis" in this verse with the stress on the first *i* (a-li-quis) we would think it quite natural for him to begin by dividing it into "a" and "liquis."

Bleuler asserts that it was extremely unlikely for the subject accidentally to divide the word "aliquis" as he did inasmuch as he showed no special tendency to "sound associations." But in this Professor Freud's champion is in error, for, as a matter of fact, the young man went on to associate "reliques" and "liquidation" to *liquis*.

The other points raised by Professor Bleuler do not call for special attention as they have practically all been dealt with in our comments on Professor Freud's analysis. But before we dismiss the subject we venture to raise a theoretical question: if a possible concern about the possible non-occurrence of a woman's menses could cause the forgetting of a word so remotely and indirectly related to this phenomenon as the word "aliquis" is, why did it not rather cause the forgetting of the word "exoriare" (exorcism, expulsion, abortion) which can be so much more directly linked up with the presumedly apprehended gestation?

Summing it all up, we may say that Professor Freud has not proved or even shown it to be probable that the forgetting of the word "aliquis" was complex-determined, that the Unconscious had anything to do with it, or that there was any relationship between the forgetting and the matters he elicited by his questions and suggestions.