

# PINK FREUD

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**I**t may be putting too fine a point on the matter to observe that, in what presently goes under the name “queer theory,” there is little or no consensus on the subject of psychoanalysis. Theorists of sexuality remain largely divided over the issue of the instrumental importance of psychoanalytic frames of thinking for an antihomophobic cultural politics. For some, psychoanalysis represents simply the continuation of “the whole, astonishing and metamorphic Western romance tradition” that threatens to become “a narrowly and severely normative, difference-eradicating ethical program” (Sedgwick 26). For others, “Freud’s work is, in its implications if not always its application, the most radical theoretical challenge this century to the fixity of gender and sexual identities” (Weeks 206). On one side, then, psychoanalysis appears as simply the latest chapter in the history of a powerful cultural system of sexual classification, while on the other it emerges as one of the most important conceptual challenges to that system. Rather than cancel each other out, these two positions together register the internal contradictions that propel psychoanalysis, highlighting both this theory’s enormous disruptive potential and its complicity with the very symbolizations of power it seeks to subvert. Indeed, if there is any single point of agreement among the six contributions to this special issue on Freud, it may well be a shared emphasis upon the complications, vexations, and surprises that psychoanalytic questions continue to bring to discussions of sexuality and difference. Like the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari before them, these new essays refuse to play “take it or leave it” with psychoanalysis, “as if every great doctrine were not a *combined formation*, constructed from bits and pieces, various intermingled codes and flux, partial elements and derivatives, that constitute its very life or its becoming” (117).

Perhaps the division in queer theory over the subject of psychoanalysis can be attributed directly to the ambivalence in psychoanalysis over the subject of homosexuality. Certainly it is Freud who gives us our most familiar and denigrating sexual typologies, most memorable among them “the

male homosexual” (fixated on the phallic mother, denying sexual difference, narcissistically rediscovering himself in his love-objects) and “the female homosexual” (disappointed in the father’s love, identifying with the phallus, regressively pursuing a preoedipal fantasy of imaginary maternal plenitude). At the same time, while Freud may have strongly objected to Karl Heinrich Ulrichs’s theory of a “third sex,” he did so on the grounds that positing a third or intermediate sex overlooks the significant role same-sex desire plays in every sexual identity formation, including (and most threateningly) heterosexuality. Emphasizing throughout his career “how inappropriate it is to use the word perversion as a term of reproach” (7: 160), Freud’s attempts to strip this cultural category of any moralistic connotations immediately placed him, along with such figures as Magnus Hirschfeld, at the vanguard of German Jewish sexual reformers.

Freud’s famous 1935 letter to an American woman, reassuring the anxious mother that her son’s homosexuality betrays neither immorality nor insanity, deserves to be quoted once more, if only for its insight into the motivations for Freud’s political efforts to remove homosexuality from the legal system that criminalized it. Freud writes:

Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness.... Many highly respectable individuals of ancient and modern times have been homosexuals, several of the greatest among them (Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, etc.). It is a great injustice to persecute homosexuality as a crime and cruelty too. If you do not believe me, read the books of Havelock Ellis.<sup>1</sup>

Several years earlier Freud used these same arguments in a letter to the government law commission that was considering whether to remove homosexuality from the German penal code; there he framed the legal prosecution of sexual relations between consenting adults as an “extreme violation of human rights.” In fact, as early as 1903 Freud can be seen deploying psychoanalysis for political purposes, coming to the defense of a Viennese professional on trial for sodomitic acts. In a public interview granted to a local newspaper, Freud passionately reiterated his position that “homosexual persons are not sick” and “the homosexual does not belong before the tribunal of a court of law” (qtd. Abelove 382).

Freud’s efforts to remove homosexuality from the overtly disciplinary space of the court tribunal cannot ultimately exempt psychoanalysis from the charge that it colludes on a much deeper level with juridical power. This is the import of Michel Foucault’s argument that psychoanalysis, by sub-

scribing to a binary system of licit and illicit sexual behavior, represents simply another discourse based on the juridical practice of prohibition and punishment, the newest member in “the great family of technologies of sex” (119). In *The History of Sexuality* (1976) Foucault takes psychoanalysis to task for its inability to think desire outside the law, but as Leo Bersani notes in the first essay of this volume, Freud had already begun the project of proposing a new economy of corporeal pleasure some seventy years earlier in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). Reintroducing Freud’s interest in problems of identificatory fantasy into Foucault’s reading of discursive networks of power, Bersani, in an analysis of gay sadomasochistic sex, poses the more difficult question of what role conventional power structures play in any subject’s experience of bodily pleasure. Arguing that sadomasochism inevitably reproduces the power hierarchies behind the master/slave dynamic that it claims to parody, Bersani asks whether S/M could survive a critical reexamination of the politics of authority and oppression that locates pleasure at the site of unequal power relations.

Interestingly, it is in a critique of political totalitarianism that we find one of Foucault’s published defenses of Freud, whom he commends for his “theoretical and practical opposition to fascism” (150).<sup>2</sup> What Foucault at first dismisses as psychoanalysis’s uncritical adherence to established networks of power he later credits for its uncompromising opposition to the brutal and genocidal form that social and sexual regulation assumed under Nazism. Freud’s allegiance to the old order of juridical power Foucault comes to understand as a more complex form of political resistance to the rise of fascism in Europe. But if it is true that psychoanalysis could not live with fascism, fascism apparently had little trouble accommodating psychoanalysis. In “Heil Homosexuality,” Laurence A. Rickels maps the introjection of Freudian libido theory by the Nazi military establishment. The first to develop the concept of psychological warfare, the Germans pushed back the frontier of “greater psychoanalysis” from the frontline treatment of the war neuroses to the civilian war waged on homosexuality at the home (or “homo”) front. Emerging from behind the lines of the collapsing war defenses, the figure of the sexual offender, Rickels proposes, may be the true veteran of Nazi psychotherapy’s preemptive psychological strikes against a massive outbreak of the sexual perversions.

Between the wars Freud increasingly turned his attention to the question of female sexuality. The last of Freud’s case histories, “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman” (1920), was written in a spurt of creative activity as Freud rallied from the trauma of World War I. Judging from this particular paper, while the German military complex was busy plundering psychoanalysis for strategies of national defense, Freud was looking to the rhetoric of modern warfare to help him theorize some of the fundamental

concepts of psychoanalysis, including (and most prominently) the defensive mechanism of unconscious resistance. Freud's reference in "A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman" to "Russian tactics"—Russia's military strategy of resistance through retreat to a defensible boundary line—becomes Mary Jacobus's point of entry into the complicated subject of Freud's own unconscious resistances and the transgressive desires they seek to fend off. For Jacobus, Freud's case history of a spurned female homosexual, disappointed in her father's love and yet indifferent to Freud as a possible paternal substitute, reads very much like a displaced narrative of Freud's unconscious identifications and professional insecurities. If this eighteen-year-old girl could so readily get under Freud's skin, discomfiting him to the point where he is driven to terminate the analysis prematurely, then it may well be because his young patient's homosexuality incriminates Freud in a play of feminine identifications, exposing in the process the repressions shoring up the defenses at psychoanalysis's own contested frontiers.

Freud's next extended foray into the field of sexual differences can be found in "Female Sexuality" (1931) and "Femininity" (1933), where he ventures a more systematic account of women's psychosexual development. Here, too, the vocabulary of erotogenic zones, psychological retreats, sexual rivals, and deposed antagonists points to a military tropology—a metaphoric of tactical warfare and liberatory struggle—governing Freud's theoretical model of sexual identity formations. According to Freud, in the internal combat waged within the little girl between an impulse to defend the attachment to her original love object (the phallic mother) and a desire to conquer a new one (the oedipal father), the vagina must gain the upper hand, vanquishing the rival clitoris and assuming its place as the girl's one and only sovereign pleasure: "with the change to femininity the clitoris should wholly or in part hand over its sensitivity, and at the same time its importance, to the vagina" (22: 118). Only by shifting her allegiance from clitoris to vagina, and her object choice from mother to father, can a homosexual deviation be cut off at the pass and a normative heterosexual outcome assured. Freud never tired of putting the clitoris, that "atrophied penis" (22: 114), firmly in its place. A final journal notation recorded shortly before his death in 1939 singles out the clitoris, "neatest expression of inferiority," as the anatomical origin of the entire family of sexual neuroses, the very "source of all inhibitions" (22: 299).

In her contribution to this volume, Valerie Traub reminds us that the association of clitoral activity with lesbian perversity is hardly original to Freud; in fact, in his remarks on the zoning of women's sexual pleasure, Freud implicitly draws on a wealth of early material that linked the tribade to "the seat of woman's delight." Traub examines in detail sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anatomies, travel narratives, midwiferies, and marital

advice books to show how cultural fantasies of the enlarged clitoris (the “woman’s yarde”) became historically grafted onto the tribadic body. Before the emergence of sexology, psychoanalysis, and other related nineteenth-century technologies of sex, a whole lexicon of terms was available to the pre-moderns to signify erotic desire between women. In her discussion of the witches of Fez and the bathers of Turkey, Traub identifies the many historical precedents and diverse cultural discourses out of which the Freudian model of the clitoral lesbian was eventually fashioned.

Psychoanalysis’s clinical devaluation of “passive” femininity and the corresponding overestimation of “active” masculinity play a critical role in Freud’s own attempts to redirect what he called his “piece of homosexual investment” (Freud and Ferenczi 221) into the more “productive” channels of scientific research. Freud’s strong personal attachments to several of his male colleagues, powerful emotional connections that Freud worried placed him in a dangerous position of feminine dependency, constitute an important recurrent theme in his periodic attempts at self-analysis. The apparent strength of these ties has led more than one commentator to speculate that Freud’s identification with those “highly respectable” homosexuals of history—Plato, Michelangelo, and Leonardo—is based on the sublimation of his own (homo)sexual passions into the monumental intellectual work of constructing a new science of sexuality. I think it would be going too far to say that Freud’s entire theory of sexuality—or the institution of psychoanalysis itself—operates as an elaborate defense against Freud’s repressed homosexuality (as Luce Irigaray comes very close to suggesting in “The Poverty of Psychoanalysis” [100]); yet at the same time some of Freud’s most original and contested theories emerge directly from the autoanalysis of his homosexual desires—desires that cannot, for that reason, be easily ignored.

For example, Freud felt he owed his reading of paranoia as an effect of sublimated homosexuality to his tumultuous relationship with Wilhelm Fliess, the Berlin ear, nose, and throat doctor with whom Freud carried on a seventeen-year correspondence.<sup>3</sup> In 1908, years after the breakup of what Ernest Jones was later to describe as Freud’s “passionate relationship of dependence” on Fliess (1: 287), Freud explains to Jung: “my one-time friend Fliess developed a dreadful case of paranoia after throwing off his affection for me, which was undoubtedly considerable” (Freud and Jung 121). One of Freud’s biographers interprets this remark as more revealing of Freud’s homosexual attraction to Fliess: “whatever he might tell Jung, he was laboring to analyze his sentiments to Fliess rather than Fliess’s sentiments for him—to analyze and thus, if possible, to purge them” (Gay 275), a conclusion borne out by Freud’s later comment to Sándor Ferenczi, “I have now overcome Fliess, which you were so curious about” (Freud and Ferenczi 243). When Ferenczi himself threatened to become another Fliess,

Freud warned his impertinent young companion, “this need has been extinguished in me since Fliess’s case, with the overcoming of which you just saw me occupied. A piece of homosexual investment has been withdrawn and utilized for the enlargement of my own ego”—adding, with a slight note of elation, “I have succeeded where the paranoiac fails” (221).

Ferenczi’s presumptions of intimacy produced no small amount of discomfort for Freud, whose feelings of tender regard for his friend the nose doctor—his “only other,” he once admitted to Fliess (*Complete Letters* 73)—were never fully or finally resolved, despite and indeed because of his repeated disclaimers to the contrary. (Years later, Anna Freud commented that if her father at the end of his life rarely spoke of Fliess, it was because the termination of their friendship was still too present and too painful.)<sup>4</sup> Freud’s dismissal of Ferenczi’s affection for him is striking for the harshness and defensiveness of its tone. To Jung again Freud writes: “[Ferenczi] never stops admiring me, which I don’t like, and is probably sharply critical of me in his unconscious when I am taking it easy. He has been too passive and receptive, letting everything be done for him like a woman, and I really haven’t got enough homosexuality in me to accept him as one” (Freud and Jung 353). And what of Freud’s relationship to Jung, his confidant in matters both professional and personal? Freud’s disparaging comments to Jung about Ferenczi’s emotional dependency find their complete obverse in his later complaints to Ferenczi about Jung’s fear of male intimacy. In a letter to Ferenczi recounting the dissolution of this seven-year friendship, Freud notes of Jung (with as much regret as frustration) that “things were not at all in order in his relations with men” (Freud and Ferenczi 434).<sup>5</sup>

Thus Jung, too, was destined to become a “Fliess redivivus” (Freud and Ferenczi 243). Freud’s famous fainting spells, two of which took place in Jung’s presence, and one in Munich, where in 1894 Freud and Fliess held one of their private “congresses,” bring Freud to the disquieting conclusion that at the root of these attacks is the reawakening of the “homosexual investment” he thought he had already withdrawn. Far from “succeeding” where the paranoiac “fails,” Freud’s habit of blaming any intellectual challenges by his closest confederates (not only Fliess but Ferenczi, Jung, and Adler too)<sup>6</sup> on each man’s latent homosexual feelings for him could only have led to the more unsettling suspicion that this acute sensitivity to professional persecution must also manifest, by the logic of his own spurious definition of paranoia, the strength of *his* unconscious attraction to *them*. As late as 1923, Hans Pichler, the oral surgeon and friend who treated Freud’s cancer, induced in his then sixty-seven-year-old patient sensations of helplessness and dependency, provoking Freud once again to strive for a “loosening of the homosexual bond” (qtd. Gay 426). Reading through Freud’s voluminous correspondences

to friends, family, students, and colleagues, one receives the distinct impression that Freud's circle of disciples was held together by nothing so solid and yet so tenuous as respect, ambition, rivalry, envy, and (in Freud's words) "strong homosexual current" (*Complete Letters* 464).

Daniel Boyarin places Freud's depreciation of femininity in the historical context of fin-de-siècle Europe where male feminization, and the homosexual-ity it was believed to induce, was widely considered to be a Jewish problem. At first intent on analyzing his "feminine side" (*Complete Letters* 412) and on diagnosing his own male hysteria, Freud, increasingly the acculturated Western Jew, later abandoned his interest in these subjects in favor of the more normative theory of the Oedipus complex. Boyarin reads Freud's dramatic turn toward the positive Oedipus—the complex that defines masculinity as active, phallic, and heterosexual—as a complicated response to cultural representations of the Eastern European Jewish male as passive, feminine, and homosexual. If Freud was ultimately not able to overcome his "inverted" desire for Fliess, Boyarin suggests, he could at least erase from his theoretical corpus any symptomatic signs of male hystericization and homosexualization. The Oedipus complex is Freud's definitive answer to that most enduring of anti-Semitic caricatures: the queer Jew.

Part of what Freud was repressing in his embrace of Oedipus were the fantasies that structured his sentiments for Fliess—fantasies of male menstruation, anal penetration, and homosexual impregnation. Freud, it seems, took a backseat in nearly all his early professional relationships—most particularly in his intellectual apprenticeships to such powerful mentors as Ernst Brück, Jean Martin Charcot, and Josef Breuer. Eager to be inseminated by the "seed" of male knowledge, Freud invariably found himself "on the receiving end" of these erotically charged male collaborations (Koestenbaum 21).<sup>7</sup> Bringing up the rear of this volume, Lee Edelman's essay explores the significance of Freud's efforts to put anal eroticism finally behind him by erecting in its place a theory of genital sexuality. Closely reading, among other scenes, Freud's "Open-Air Closet," "Close the Eye(s)," and "Count Thun" dreams, Edelman argues that Freud's specific choice of the micturating penis as the emblem of heterosexual masculinity can never ultimately escape the lingering smell of the most culturally abjected of erotogenic sites, the anal orifice. While Freud's theory of a developmental progression from an "anal stage" to a "phallic stage" may attempt to oppose the fecal to the urinary—"anal inferiority" to "urethral greatness"—the one inevitably soils the other, leaving an indelible mark.

It seems fitting that this special issue on Freud should appear on the eve of the centennial anniversary of *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), the Freud/Breuer coupling that first gave us the theory of psychoanalysis. A century later, we are still attending to some of the same questions that Freud's work insistently

poses—questions of fantasy, history, desire, identification, power, and resistance. Moreover, Freud’s cast of queer characters continues to fascinate: Dora, the hysterical girl who learns about the mysteries of oral sex from late-night sex talk with her father’s mistress; little Hans, the “young libertine” who acts out his homosexual desires at the precocious age of five; the Rat Man, the obsessional neurotic whose phobic terror of rodents divulges a secret fantasy of anal intercourse; Leonardo, the artistic genius whose childhood bird fantasies leave him with a lasting taste of fellatio in his mouth; Schreber, the Saxon Supreme Court justice whose transvestic desire to become a woman and to be penetrated by the rays of God make him the most famous paranoiac in the annals of psychoanalysis; the Wolf Man, the wealthy young Russian whose own anal eroticism is secured through an identification with the mother at the primal scene of *coitus a tergo*; and the unnamed adolescent of “A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,” the “beautiful and clever” middle-class girl whose unsuccessful courtship of a “fallen woman” ends in an injurious fall from a railway cutting. Dora, little Hans, the Rat Man, Leonardo, Schreber, the Wolf Man, and the anonymous homosexual woman all make cameo appearances in the pages that follow. But the real star is Freud himself, who seizes center stage, making his queer debut in a camp production called “Pink Freud.”

## NOTES

1. A much fuller redaction of this letter, along with a discussion of Freud’s public statements on homosexuality and his opposition to clause 175 of the German legal code, can be found in Abelow.
2. See also Foucault’s considerably more qualified praise of Freud, at the end of *Madness and Civilization*, as the first to “liberate” madness from the prison of the asylum even while relocating it within the institutional confines of the new science of psychoanalysis (276–78).
3. Freud later writes of the keen embarrassment he would feel if his letters to Fliess were ever to enter the public domain. “Our correspondence,” he confides to Marie Bonaparte (who, by 1937, had acquired ownership of these valuable documents), “was the most intimate you can imagine” (*Complete Letters* 7). For more on the remarkable odyssey of Freud’s letters to Fliess, letters that Freud actively sought to have destroyed, see Jeffrey Masson’s informative introduction to this correspondence (*Complete Letters* 4–11) and Ernest Jones’s more succinct account (1: 287–88).
4. Masson cites this anecdote in his introduction (Freud, *Complete Letters* 4).
5. It appears that Jung largely assented to Freud’s view of the matter, attributing his own latent homosexual feelings for Freud—and the “repulsion” they inspired in him—to an early trauma: “as a boy, I succumbed to a homosexual attack by a man I had formerly revered” (qtd. Gay 204).
6. Freud tells Jung that Alfred Adler’s paranoid attacks awaken in him the memory of Fliess, “but an octave lower” (Freud and Jung 376). His falling out with Adler upset him so much, he confesses, because it “opened up the wounds of the Fliess affair” (382). For a more detailed account of Freud’s various homoerotic entanglements than I have space to



chronicle here, see Ernest Jones's classic three-volume work and Peter Gay's more updated biography, both of which I cite in this introduction to supplement the published correspondences.

7. Of Charcot's intellectual influence, Freud writes to his fiancée, Martha Bernays, "whether the seed will ever bring forth fruit I do not know; but what I certainly know is that no other human being has ever affected me in such a way" (Jones 1: 185). Koestenbaum hypothesizes that by self-consciously assuming the feminine role in these intellectual fertilizations, "Freud made himself passive so that he might gain mastery" (21).

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