

Freud: Haunted by Childhood Rivals

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In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud interprets his own dreams to demonstrate the process of dreamwork and how to discover the wishes that inspired them. However, while giving his readers a look into his mind, Freud recounts key events from his childhood that reveal a distinctive psychological pattern. Freud's early-childhood rivalry with his nephew and difficult relationship with his father developed the habit to perceive his peers and superiors as rivals that he must overpower.

Freud's first rivalry goes back to his relationship with his nephew, or cousin, John. John was the son of Freud's half-brother, but being just a year older than Freud, he was thought of as his cousins. As babies, they were playmates, and Freud describes how they "loved each other" (313) despite fighting consistently. Their relationship demonstrates the rivalry Freud describes between siblings, as the dominance of the older sibling creates a vengeful response in the younger. Speaking in general terms, Freud describes how a younger sibling "in helpless rage at the older, admires him, envies him, and fears him, or turns his first conscious stirrings for freedom and justice against the oppressor" (193). Being the younger of the two, Freud's desire to overpower a superior rival began with this relationship and followed him through the rest of his life. Freud writes that "all of his friends are in some sense reincarnations of this first figure" (313). His "childhood ideal went so far that friend and foe coincided in the same person" (314), demonstrating an imagined competition Freud would internally impose onto his friends.

Freud's second crucial rivalry was with his father, who impressed upon Freud that he was meant to overpower and supplant him. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud recalls a story his father had told him as a child. His father remembered being having his hat thrown to the ground by a Christian and his only response was to silently pick it up. Freud describes his reaction to the story, "That did not seem very heroic of the big, strong man who was leading me by the hand"

(151). Freud compares his father to the father of Hannibal, a character he had resonated with because of the bullying he faced at school. Hannibal's father "makes his son swear before the domestic altar to take revenge on the Romans" (151), modeling strength that Freud's father wasn't imbuing in him. However, although his father presented weakness to those who were cruel to him, he was tough on young Freud. As an example of this, Freud recalls an instance when he had relieved himself in his parents' bedroom. His father criticized him for his accident, proclaiming, "Nothing will come of the boy" (166). Freud has a retaliatory dream regarding this memory, where his father is blind and urinates into a bottle that Freud holds for him. This dream reverses their roles with the intention of making fun of his father's incapability. Freud believes that the dream means to say, "You see, something did come of me" (167), inverting their power dynamic and overpowering his father.

Freud's major dreams in *The Interpretation of Dreams* can be traced back to a need to dominant his rivals, which he projects onto his peers. For example, in the yellow beard dream Freud criticizes the characters of his two colleagues. By blending these men with his uncle, "it makes a numbskull of one, R., and a criminal of the other, N." (110). At the time, Freud was being considered for a promotion that his two colleagues had not received. His dream seeks to degrade his colleagues in order to prove that Freud is better than his peers and will receive the job, ultimately stepping into a superior position and overpowering them. Similarly, Freud degrades the standing of his colleague Otto in the Irma dream in order to prove his superiority and correctness. The inspiration for the dream was a patient that Freud had been treating, Irma, who "lost her hysterical anxiety but not all of her somatic symptoms." (84). His dream seeks to absolve Freud of any blame or guilt, referencing Irma's rejection of his proposed treatment and implying that her somatic symptoms may be a result of a physical ailment. Freud's dream even

implicates his colleague, Otto, as the cause of her symptoms, as he had recently given someone an injection in real life and was giving Irma one in Freud's dream. Freud explains that his dream "takes revenge on Otto" (95) for opposing Freud's treatment plan. In direct opposition to his own competence, Freud depicts Otto as guilty and negligent, vindicating himself and coming out victorious over his rival. Both the Irma and the yellow beard dreams demonstrate Freud's desire to defeat his friends and colleagues, despite not actually being in direct competition with them.

Freud also presents his unwavering belief in his correctness in both dreams. In the yellow beard dream, Freud reveals that he is afraid of not getting the promotion because he is Jewish. Both of his colleagues who got passed over for the title are Jewish as well and therefore his criticism of them intends to vindicate him. Freud needs to believe that his colleague didn't get rejected on the basis of being Jewish so that he may receive the profession, believing that only discrimination would disqualify him for the position. Freud strongly believes in his right to succeed and in the Irma dream he demonstrates this again through his adamant insistence on being innocent. By determining a number of causes for Irma's symptoms, all of which absolve Freud of any responsibility, his dream reveals his unshakable belief in his correctness. Two memories he reveals from his childhood convey a learned confidence in himself, as they both set up Freud to desire greatness. His mother recounts to him the tale of his birth, where an old woman delivered the prophecy that "she had given the world a great man." (147). The second instance was later in Freud's childhood, when a poet approached Freud's family to "devote a few rhymes to me and declared in his inspiration that one day I would probably become a 'minister'" (148). Freud postulates that these events are the inception of his desire for greatness, which suggests that his belief in his right to greatness has a similar origin.

Freud's belief that he must overpower and defeat his rivals is introduced again in the non vixit dream. In the dream, Freud is having lunch with two friends and dissolves his friend Josef with his penetrating gaze. Freud traces this blue-eyed gaze back to a memory, where Brucke, a demonstrator of his, caught Freud arriving late and gave him a glance that dissolved Freud away. In his dreams, the roles have been reversed, as Freud is now in the superior position to his friend Josef and refers to him as non vixit, expressing a conflicting pairing of feelings for him. Freud first relates non vixit to a monument of Emperor Joseph II, which was engraved with "vixit non diu" (269). He explains that this refers to Freud's regret that Josef "had been robbed by his all too early death of his well-founded claim to a memorial" (270). However, Freud annihilates his friend for "being guilty of a malevolent wish" (270), which reminds him of the conflicting sentiments found in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Freud quotes Brutus' speech, "'As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him'" (270). This demonstrates Freud's ambition, as he annihilates Josef despite caring for him. He takes on the role of Brucke in order to present his superiority over Josef and punish him for his own ambition. Freud is demonstrating his belief that he must overpower his superiors, as he perceives rivalry in the ambition of his peers and therefore must defeat them. He recalls his cousin John again, as they once performed a scene between Brutus and Caesar. Playing the role of Caesar, John was the overly ambitious superior that Freud is fated to overpower, and therefore so are all of his future rivals.

This mentality can explain how Freud perceives the world and develops his theories. For example, the destiny of the son to supplant his father, which Freud coined the Oedipus complex in 1910, is based on his own relationship with his father. On *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus is fated to kill his father and take his place. Even though Oedipus and his biological parents defy this

prophecy, doing all that they can to prevent it, it happens anyway. Freud uses this tale to support his theory, claiming that all boys dream of replacing their fathers and being in a relationship with their mothers. Freud quotes the oracle's speech to Oedipus, as she tells him that "Nor need this mother-marrying frighten you; / Many a man has dreamt as much" (203). Freud uses the oracle to represent the subconscious thoughts of Oedipus, and therefore relates them to the unconscious drives of all men. Due to his early onset rivalry with John, Freud perceives his father as a rival and developed this perception of father-son relationships. The creation of the Oedipus complex theory is based on his childhood experiences, which caused his determination to perceive male superiors as rivals that he must defeat. He projects this point of view onto all men, operating under the assumption that they all regard their peers as he does.

Freud's childhood rivalries with his cousin and father manifested in his future relationships, as Freud perceives his peers as competitors he must defeat. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud's dreams relay this lifelong desire to overpower his peers and superiors, which he believes he is destined to do. His theories of psychology all possess remnants of this mentality, as he attributes his psychology to a facet of the male mentality.