

**A TALE OF TWO ICONS: 'THE JEWS ALL OVER THE WORLD
BOAST OF MY NAME, PAIRING ME WITH EINSTEIN'
(FREUD, 1926)**

John Forrester

Towards the end of her life, Marilyn Monroe told an interviewer: 'You're always running into people's unconscious.'¹ As an experienced psychoanalytic case, Marilyn was being knowing and innocent, both at once, which was her style. That other great icon of the twentieth century, Albert Einstein, was adept at adopting the same stance in what I think we are safe in regarding as a rhetorical question: 'Why is it that nobody understands me and everybody likes me?' he asked a *New York Times* reporter in 1944 – a witticism that Abraham Pais uses as an epigraph for his last book on Einstein, *Einstein Lived Here* (Pais 1994, p. vi). (The book's title is itself a joke in this style, since the phrase comes from a cartoon from the *Washington Post* a few days after Einstein's death, depicting a planet seen from space with a label bearing the phrase pinned to it.) These sayings are emblematic of the ways in which Marilyn and Albert contributed much to the development of their individual mythical and iconic statuses, in ways that are both indubitable and very hard to pin down: they were, one might say, 'unwittingly complicit' with the great waves of public adoration and interest in them. As Erik Erikson remarked of Einstein: 'This man learned to look into cameras as if he were meeting the eyes of the future beholders of his image' (Erikson 1982, p. 157).

Everyone is at all times always running into all other people's unconscious. Marilyn did not mean that she was special in this regard; what she perhaps meant was that other people were constantly *showing* her their unconscious because of who they thought she was. This is what it means to be an icon. Or perhaps she felt she had a *gift* for blundering in on them, and that this might be the explanation for how she acquired her iconic status. That other icon, Albert Einstein, was repeatedly surprised by this constant trait of his everyday life. For Sigmund Freud, it was his bread and butter; in

1. 'Interview with Richard Meryman', *Life*, 3 August 1962. See also Sarah Churchwell, *The Many Lives of Marilyn Monroe*, London: Granta, 2004.

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that characteristic gesture of his, one of his ways of securing the objectivity of his science, what I've called the postman's gesture, the gesture of transference-interpretation, he declared it was – *nothing to do with him* (Forrester 1990, pp. 235–6).

In this paper I will examine the interrelation of the public framing of Freud and Einstein and the personal relationship they put together within that public frame. What brought them together was the fact that they were world-famous Jewish scientists. At times, this seemed to have 'nothing to do with them'. But the plain fact, whether they liked it or not, was that they were cast as the great Jews of their era. Flung together in the spotlight of the burgeoning media, they negotiated the 'Jewish question' in their own ways. Each of them, fundamentally rationalistic, even radically sceptical of the claims of religion – in rather different ways, true – could not but acknowledge this essential element in their personal being and this essential element in their historical destiny. Tied together as iconic incarnations of the Jewish sage, the great physicist and the great soul-doctor, they attempted to negotiate, make the most of and subvert these mythical burdens; yet, with little personally in common, they failed to go much beyond their public vocations. Their attempts to wriggle inside their public personae certainly have a poignancy, in large part due to the fact that the *persona* – the internationalist, pacifist Jewish thinker who has cast off the shackles of the conventional – is now consigned to oblivion, forgotten and tortured into silence on the rack of history.

Freud and Einstein found themselves roped together, like mountaineers climbing the Mountain of Truth, by accident and circumstance. Crucial to this linkage was the seismic shift in cultural topography consequent on the First World War. Strangely enough, although the two men belonged to different generations – Freud born in 1856, Einstein in 1879 – the respective trajectories of the development of their scientific work were chronologically very much in parallel. Freud's *magnum opus*, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, was published in 1900; but he too, like Einstein, had an *annus mirabilis* in 1905, with the publication of three major works revealing, like Einstein's great papers of that same year, for the first time, the extraordinary range and potential power of his theories: the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* and the foundational and controversial case-history of 'Dora'. Just as Einstein's professional reputation began to grow in the years between 1905–10, so did Freud's, particularly with the strong connection to the most respected psychiatric institution in Europe, the Burghölzli Hospital in Zurich. By 1911 (a reasonable but not definitive date to select), when Sommerfeld declined to give a paper on relativity theory because it was already 'a certain possession of the physicist' and was no longer at the forefront of physics, Einstein was accepted as a major theorist with substantial achievements (Staley 1998, p. 290). By 1910, after Freud's triumphant visit to Clark University, Massachusetts, the previous

summer and with the establishment that year of the International Psychoanalytic Association devoted, as its Statutes declared, to 'the cultivation and promotion of the psychoanalytic science as inaugurated by Freud' (McGuire 1974, Appendix 3, 'Statutes of the International Psychoanalytic Association', p. 568), psychoanalysis was established as an important international scientific movement.

Both Einstein and Freud engineered major new theoretical developments in their scientific work during the First World War – general relativity for the one, the metapsychological papers for the other. Freud's second great spurt of theorizing had a longer breath than Einstein's, culminating with the major revisions of his theory of instincts in 1920 and the introduction of the concepts of ego, id and super-ego in 1923. Curiously enough, if we accept Abraham Pais's judgement that Einstein's significant contributions to physics were complete by 1925 (Pais 1982, p. 320), and a somewhat old-fashioned but still usable conviction that Freud's last major theoretical innovation was the theory of anxiety expounded in *Hemmung, Symptom und Angst* (1926),² their creative theoretical careers came to an end at about the same time. By the mid-1920s, both had become worldwide cultural figures whose fame was only faintly related to any further developments in their respective fields of which they were the instigators. They had become what they would remain to their deaths – world-famous Jewish scientists.

These parallel trajectories matter for their relationship only because of the near-simultaneity of their sudden fame.³ The beginning of the Einstein craze can be dated pretty accurately to November 1919 and the reports in *The London Times* of Eddington's expedition (Earman & Glymour 1980; Holton 1988; Pais 1982). The Freud craze had a longer curve, starting earlier with a less steep rise, and was not as much of a worldwide psychic epidemic as the Einstein craze; Freud's first inkling that he might become famous came, he reported, when, on board ship for New York in 1909, he discovered his cabin-steward reading *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (Jones 1955, p. 62). So by 6 July 1921, relativity could be listed in *The Nation* alongside other modern marvels: 'annual sea serpent, the seven-year mutation of our bodies, the jargon of Freud, the messages from Mars' (Friedman & Donley 1985, p. 13). Psychoanalysis and relativity, Freud and Einstein, would

2. Most modern commentators on Freud would regard this as a cock-eyed view, since his major writings on religion and civilization, not to mention his important general expositions of psychoanalysis and re-evaluations of psychoanalytic technique, were, in 1926, still to come. However, it was a common view amongst neo-positivist systematizers of psychoanalytic theory in the 1950s.

3. Before the First World War, Einstein had become a publicly acknowledged figure in the German-speaking lands (Pais 1982, p. 308) and Freud's fame – and notoriety – was steadily increasing in this period. The rage for Freudian ideas began to become a flood in certain circles in New York in 1914 and 1915 (Hale 1971).

incessantly be twinned as the new wave, the post-war scientific novelties of the age.

Twinned as the shock of the new, these were certainly not the only things the two men had in common. In the small-scale world of turn of the century Jewish intellectual groupings, perhaps it is not surprising their paths almost crossed several times, with amusing proximities, or ran in parallel in a variety of ways. Take Einstein's close friend Friedrich Adler, revolutionary physicist and assassin in 1916 of the Austrian Prime Minister. If, in the late 1890s, when they were closest, Adler had talked about his early life in Vienna, he could have told Einstein that the home in which he had grown up and in which his father Victor, before going on to become the leading Socialist politician in Austro-Hungary, had established an unsuccessful medical practice at Berggasse 19, was now occupied by the family and consulting room of a Sigmund Freud (Feuer 1974, pp. 14–26; Loewenberg 1983). We have little evidence of Einstein's acquaintance with Freud's ideas, but we can offer plausible guesses. It is more than likely that when Einstein was living in Prague in 1911 he took part in discussions of Freud's ideas at a meeting of the Kant-Abend Circle in the pharmacy in Old Town Square. The core members were Bergman, Brod, Weltsch and Ehrenfeld; both Einstein and Franz Kafka attended occasionally (Illy 1979).⁴ Einstein's acquaintance in the pre-war period with psychoanalysis can be taken for granted; but there is no sign of him having expressed great interest. He was, after all, famously focused on the pressing problems of theoretical physics.

Both Freud and Einstein were amongst the members of the Society of Positive Philosophy founded by Joseph Petzoldt as far back as 1912; its members included Mach, Josef Popper, August Forel, David Hilbert and Felix Klein (Ellenberger 1970, p. 809).⁵ In the era of the intelligentsia which dawned with the First World War – or in September 1910, as Virginia Woolf dated it – and bloomed in the inter-war period, Einstein was omnipresent as a signatory of manifestos and political petitions. The first such declaration Einstein helped instigate was also signed by Freud: a call for 'No death sentences for political crimes' in December 1920 during the vicious reaction to the short-lived Hungarian Bolshevik Republic (Pais 1994, p. 152).

In early 1921, Einstein visited Vienna and lectured to thousands in a concert hall; he took the opportunity to call on two of Ernst Mach's eminent

4. Another link between Kafka and Einstein was the Hungarian Robert Klopstock (1897–1972), Kafka's 'last friend' and doctor at his deathbed. Klopstock became friendly with Einstein in the late 1930s and was mentioned by Einstein in his last letter to Freud – 'I had already read your two essays in *Imago*, which Dr Klopstock, a physician friend, had brought me' (4 May 1939) – as if Freud might know him (Jones 1957, p. 259).

5. The organizer of the *Gesellschaft für positivistische Philosophie*, seen as a Berlin forerunner of the more stable and famous *Wienerkreis* of the post-war period, was the philosopher Joseph Petzoldt (1862–1929), friend of Mach and Avenarius.

scientific co-workers – Josef Popper-Lynkeus (of whom more anon) and Josef Breuer, the ‘inventor’ of the cathartic cure and Freud’s former close collaborator in the 1880s, who had collaborated with Mach in the 1870s on the function of the vestibular apparatus and the perception of motion and orientation (Feuer 1974, pp. 57–8; Frank 1948, p. 176; Hirschmüller 1989). By 1921, Einstein no doubt knew a great deal about Freud’s work; the sudden fame of the physicist in that year is what probably prompted Freud to his only mention in his writings of relativity theory. Writing in the summer of 1921 and reflecting on the great surge of interest in the occult, Freud pointed to ‘the loss of value by which everything has been affected since the world catastrophe of the Great War’ but also to the effect of the transformations in the exact sciences:

The discovery of radium has confused no less than it has advanced the possibilities of explaining the physical world; and the knowledge that has been so very recently acquired of what is called the theory of relativity has had the effect upon many of those who admire without comprehending it of diminishing their belief in the objective trustworthiness of science. You will remember that not long ago Einstein himself took occasion to protest against such misunderstanding. (Freud 1921, pp. 177–8)

‘Einstein himself’ – this phrase is sufficient indication that Freud too was caught up in the movement by which the revolution in modern physics became identified with the icon of Einstein. Just as, we should add, despite his every deliberate and conscious effort, ‘Freud himself’ had come to represent all of psychoanalysis. It had already happened, years before: when he visited the Academy in Budapest in September 1918, a student magazine ran a story entitled ‘Freud’s cigar’ (Falzeder & Brabant 1996, p. 297; 4 October 1918). The era of the iconic intellectual had arrived. By 1921, Valéry Larbaud could comment that Joyce’s notoriety had made him as familiar to the literary world as Freud and Einstein were to the scientific world (Ellmann 1959, p. 537; Friedman & Donley 1985, p. 103). Freud was the first scientist to appear on the cover of *Time Magazine*, founded in 1923; he appeared on 27 October 1924. Einstein’s first appearance would be on 18 February 1929.

By the 1920s, the linking of their names was no longer confined to their common public personae. Correspondents would draw Freud’s attention to his position alongside Einstein as a great scientist; when in 1923 René Laforgue, one of the early French psychoanalysts, tried to entice Freud to come to Paris, he used Einstein’s name as part of the bait, thus hoping to evoke the enormous success – and relative safety given the continuing French hostility to all things ‘German’ – of the *Boche* scientist’s visit in March 1922:

We are in contact with Professor Langevin, Einstein’s friend and Director of the Collège de France, where lectures could also be organized for the evening. (Laforgue to Freud, 25 October 1923, in Bourguignon 1977)

In his response, Freud played the same game of implicit comparison with Einstein – ‘of course, my lectures will not have the same weight as Einstein’s’ – so that Laforgue could not but respond in kind: ‘I’m convinced that you will be shown as great attention as Einstein’ (Laforgue to Freud, 8 November 1923, in Bourguignon 1977). Laforgue did not know it, but his invitation had arrived just when Freud was undergoing his first operation for cancer, which permanently put paid to such public speaking engagements.

If the Freud–Einstein connection was a frequent one at the time, its most characteristic form was of the ‘great Jewish thinkers’. Typical was the lecture series organized jointly in early 1922 by the University of London and the Jewish Historical Society on five Jewish thinkers: Philo, Maimonides, Spinoza, Freud and Einstein (Jones 1957, p. 88). In 1924, the young philosopher Frank Ramsey, in Vienna to have analysis and converse with Wittgenstein, wrote to his mother: ‘We really live in a great time for thinking, with Einstein, Freud and Wittgenstein all alive (and all in Germany or Austria, those foes of civilization!)’ (Ramsey 1924; Forrester 2004). In 1925, Ernest Jones attended an Anglo-Austrian Society dinner at which Lord Haldane reflected on ‘the contributions made to culture throughout the ages by Vienna. The four names he singled out to illustrate this were Mozart, Beethoven, Mach and Freud’. Jones also reported that the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Balfour, speaking at the inauguration of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem where Einstein was also present, praised ‘the three men he considered have most influenced modern thought, all Jews – Bergson, Einstein and Freud’ (Jones 1957, p. 116).

Einstein’s famously ecstatic reception in the US may even have been in large part due to the strange compromise mounted by the American press, Yiddish and English, on the arrival in New York in April 1921 of the Zionist deputation consisting of Chaim Weizmann, Einstein and Menachem Ussishkin. Who were the crowds, overwhelmingly Jewish, cheering for? New York City Hall gave both Weizmann and Einstein the Freedom of the City. Where the English-language press celebrated the arrival of the greatest scientist of the age, the Yiddish papers celebrated the arrival of the notable Zionist leader, Dr Weizmann. The Zionist press noted this favourable English-language press for Einstein and began to increase their coverage of him, focusing on the purported failed anti-Semitic campaign in Europe against him. The compromise emerged cleanly and logically: the welcome was for the great but embattled Jewish scientist, in the US to help raise money for the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. On his departure, the *Yiddishes Tageblatt* hailed him as ‘the first Jewish celebrity, who is known to the outside world, who came here on a special Jewish mission’ (Missner 1985, p. 287). William Carlos Williams’s experimental poem commemorated the event:

April Einstein has come
 to liberate us
 here among
 the Venusremembering daffodils
 Yiddishe springtime of the mind
 and a great pool of rainwater
 under
 the blossomy peachtrees.
 (Williams 1951, pp. 379–80)

This is the point where Freud's and Einstein's interests did converge in a more than ephemeral way. Freud, too, was a long-term supporter of the Hebrew University and even hinted, in his message of support to the University on the occasion of its formal opening in 1925, that he would have liked to have joined Einstein in Jerusalem: 'I find it painful that my ill-health prevents me from being present at the opening festivities of the Jewish University in Jerusalem' (Freud 1925, p. 292). The previous year, the bait of Einstein's name was again too enticing for Freud, when Albert Cohen⁶ of Geneva founded the short-lived *Revue Juive*:

Today I was met by an urgent request from Albert Cohen in Geneva, who wants to publish a *Revue Juive*, also to give him a contribution. I had already submitted my name for the editorial committee, and now he very skillfully bribed me with the statement that Einstein and I are the two most outstanding living Jews. What was left for me but to admit to him that I am very flattered and to grant him something harmless? (Falzeder & Brabant 2000, Freud to Ferenczi, 6 August 1924, p. 161)

Einstein contributed to the first number; Freud to a later number that year.

The aim of the *Revue Juive* caught very well the ambiguities of Jewish intellectuals, as they were increasingly known, like Freud and Einstein, by nature cosmopolitan and internationalist, wary of all nationalisms, yet increasingly drawn into support, sometimes whole-hearted, for Zionism – but even then a 'cultural' rather than 'political' Zionism: 'Founded by men who are conscious of belonging to a living race whose spiritual work is not yet brought to fruition . . . [in order to] remind all men of their identical predicament' (Cohen 1925). Cohen's neat Editorial sleight of hand made the promotion of cultural Zionism a work on behalf of all mankind, combining the Jewish allegiances of the cosmopolites with their ideals of internationalism and the progress of all.

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What sort of Jews were Einstein and Freud? Raised in a non-religious household, Einstein had a brief enthusiasm for Jewish rituals and rites in his early adolescence, after which his self-awareness of Jewishness becomes

6. Albert Cohen (1895–1981), author of *Belle de Seigneur* (1968).

submerged in his early adulthood. Moving in circles in which Zionism was becoming more and more an urgent political focus, he had little patience and less interest in such matters until his move to Berlin in 1914 forcibly made him aware of anti-Semitism and of the perilous blindness of the assimilationist ethos of so many educated professional German Jews. Einstein was almost certainly aware of the manoeuvrings around his Jewishness that went on when he was proposed for academic appointments in Zurich, in Prague and in Berlin. He would not have been surprised to read Sommerfeld's characterization of him (in a letter to Lorentz dated 26 December 1907) as possessing the 'abstract-conceptual manner of the Semite' (Staley 1998, p. 292).

In early 1919, on the eve of his 40th birthday, he was successfully targeted for conversion to the Zionist cause by Kurt Blumenfeld (Clark 1973, pp. 356–81). From then to the end of his life, he was a stalwart and vocal proponent of the Zionist cause, in much the same way as he was a vociferous supporter of internationalism and pacifism from the beginning of the First World War onwards. His close association with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and his travels to raise money for the cause with Weizmann were emblematic of his unyielding commitment. Yet he was never religious in a conventional sense; his God was akin to Spinoza's – not a recognizably Jewish God.

Freud appears to have been acutely aware of anti-Semitism from early on, but this was not an 'organized' theme in his life or thought until he too turned 40, in 1896. He never belonged to a Zionist organization (neither did Einstein) and his own son – needlessly, as it turned out – feared paternal admonition in the early 1900s when he joined such an organization. While the developing field of theoretical physics attracted a disproportionate number of Jews, Einstein's milieu was never as overwhelmingly Jewish as was Freud's Viennese medical and then psychoanalytic milieu. Einstein may have started his physicist's career as an amateur, working in the Swiss Patent Office, but he never felt so isolated from, so 'despised and universally shunned' by his scientific peers to join, as Freud did, the B'nai B'rith in order to find 'a circle of picked men of high character who would receive me in a friendly spirit in spite of my temerity'. The congenial company of the Olympia Academy in Berne, a group of young rootless ex-students finding their way, most but not all of them Jewish, none of them conventionally so, was quite sufficient for Einstein. Freud, on the other hand, had to wrestle with inner principle and instinct regarding the communities he felt able to join:

Whenever I felt an inclination to national enthusiasm I strove to suppress it as being harmful and wrong, alarmed by the warning examples of the peoples among whom we Jews live. But plenty of other things remained over to make the attraction of Jewry and Jews irresistible – many obscure emotional forces, which were the more powerful the less they could be expressed in words, as well as a clear

consciousness of inner identity, the safe privacy of a common mental construction. And beyond this there was a perception that it was to my Jewish nature alone that I owed two characteristics that had become indispensable to me in the difficult course of my life. Because I was a Jew I found myself free from many prejudices which restricted others in the use of their intellect; and as a Jew I was prepared to join the Opposition and to do without agreement with the 'compact majority'. (Freud 1926a, pp. 273–4)

Having found a congenial and supportive society amongst the Jews, Freud was later to worry that it was essential to the survival and growth of psychoanalysis that it avoid becoming a 'Jewish national affair' [*eine jüdische nationale Angelegenheit*] (Falzeder & Brabant 2000, 3 May 1908, p. 38; see Yerushalmi 1991, p. 42). Despite the disproportionate number of Jews in all of the sciences – a fact which remained true throughout the rest of the twentieth century – Einstein never appears to have wondered if his version of physics might become a Jewish national affair. Perhaps the recent successful institutional retrenchment of sciences like physics made such a fear less plausible. This did not stop Einstein's works being burnt alongside Freud's in Berlin on 10 May 1933. By then, both Einstein and Freud had become accustomed to asserting their Jewishness as they sensed the rise of anti-Semitism. Einstein made a much-quoted acerbic comment in his article in *The Times* in November 1919:

By an application of the theory of relativity to the tastes of readers, today in Germany I am called a German man of science and in England I am represented as a Swiss Jew. If I come to be regarded as a *bête noire*, the descriptions will be reversed and I shall become a Swiss Jew for the Germans and a German man of science for the English! (Einstein 1919)

A similar play with the pigeon-holing of prejudice is to be found in Freud's comment to a journalist in 1926:

My language is German. My culture, my attainments, are German. I considered myself German intellectually, until I noticed the growth of anti-Semitic prejudice in Germany and German Austria. Since that time, I prefer to call myself a Jew. (Gay 1988, p. 448)

As conflict grew in Palestine, the support of both Einstein and Freud was sought by Zionists for firm stands against the policy of the British and the protests of the Arab inhabitants. Both at times made quite clear that they viewed the prospect of the establishment of a Jewish political state in defiance of the 'local population' with dismay. But, as we shall see, there was no escaping their Jewish destiny for either of them.

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Whatever the affinities in the public eye, there was no real necessity in Freud and Einstein eventually entering into direct contact. What prompted it? The first direct contact was Einstein sending Freud birthday wishes on Freud's

70th birthday in May 1926 (Jones 1957, p. 130). Freud was extremely pleased and wrote to Princess Marie Bonaparte on 10 May 1926:

Amongst the written congratulations those from Einstein, Brandes, Romain Rolland and Yvette Guilbert gave me particular pleasure; the best newspaper articles were by Bleuler (Zürich) and by Stefan Zweig in the Viennese *Neuen Freien Presse*. (Freud 1926b)

Despite the fact that Einstein was Number One in this list of gratifying well-wishers, Freud did not respond to him directly. Instead, he commissioned a go-between, Dr David Eder, the Anglo-Jewish (as they used to say) psychoanalyst and Zionist, to convey his thanks:

make it easier for me by conveying my deep and sincere thanks to the distinguished members of the Curatorium of the Hebrew University, and the executive of the Zionist Organization. I have especially in mind Dr Weizmann and Professor Einstein, who have shown me so much sympathy, to whom I am bound by so many common interests, neither of whom, to my regret, I know personally. (Freud 1926c)⁷

This, the first indirect communication from Freud to Einstein, is typically Freud: not wanting to push himself forward, taking what one might even call an 'analytic' position. He is also quite clear what binds Einstein to him: their common interest in the fate of the Hebrew University, and then their common fate as Jews; beyond that, they were also the scientific revolutionaries of their era. Basking again in the pleasure Einstein's birthday wishes had brought him, Freud wrote in May 1926 to his English nephew in Manchester:

I am considered a celebrity; writers and philosophers who pass through Vienna call on me to have a talk, the Jews all over the world boast of my name, pairing me with Einstein. After all, I have no reason to complain and to look with fright at the near end of my life. (Freud to Samuel Freud, probably May 1926, in Clark 1980, p. 480)

At Christmas 1926, when Freud was staying in Berlin with his son Ernst and their family (including the 4-year-old Lucian, future painter, and the 2-year-old Clement, future politician, cook and humorist), Einstein and his wife Elsa paid a visit. We know nothing of Einstein's reactions; Freud's are recorded in two letters. To Ferenczi, Freud wrote:

Yes, I also chatted away two hours with Einstein; he came to Ernst's with his wife in order to see me. He is cheerful, confident, and kind, understands as much about psychology as I do about physics, and so we had a very good conversation. (Freud to Ferenczi, 2 January 1927, in Falzeder & Brabant 2000, p. 292)

7. When Eder died in 1936, it was proposed to found a Psychological Library at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem as a memorial to him; Freud, Einstein, Weizmann and Jones were appointed to the overseeing Committee (*Bulletin of the International Psychoanalytic Association* 18 (1937): 111–12).

To Marie Bonaparte a few days later he had something a little more abrasive to say:

The lucky fellow has had a much easier time than I have. He has had the support of a long series of predecessors from Newton onward, while I have had to hack every step of my way through a tangled jungle alone. No wonder that my path is not a very broad one, and that I have not got far on it. (Freud to Marie Bonaparte, 11 January 1927, in Jones 1957, p. 139)

This reaction of resentment at Einstein's easy achievements and comparative luck would persist: it would form the basis for a rather surprising letter which Freud wrote to Einstein in 1929. Before then, his meeting with Einstein, together with their constant coupling as 'great Jews', seems to have provoked Freud's imagination. In 1925 he had visited the Danish writer Georg Brandes, whom he had admired for many years (Jones 1957, p. 120). Two years later, writing about Brandes' recent death to his niece Margit Freud in Berlin, he confessed:

I am fond of looking for resemblances. At that time [in 1925] I was struck by his likeness to Wallenstein, which however didn't signify anything in particular. After I had talked to Einstein in Berlin and seen the bust of Popper-Lynkeus in our Rathauspark, I discovered a more significant resemblance between these three great Jewish personalities. (Freud to Margit Freud, 4 March 1927, in Freud, E. 1961, p. 377)

In 1929, Freud wrote Einstein a letter of congratulations on his 50th birthday:

To wish you good fortune would be superfluous. I would rather rejoice with countless many others at the fact that you have had, and are still having, so much good fortune.⁸

Einstein responded:

Why the emphasis on my good fortune? Although you, you who have slipped into the skins of so many people, and even of mankind *itself*, you have had no opportunity of slipping into mine!

Warum betonen Sie bei mir das Glück? Sie, der Sie in die Haut so vieler Menschen, ja der *Menschheit* geschlüpft sind, hatten doch keine Gelegenheit, in die meine zu schlüpfen!

In response to Einstein's decision to break the cycle of polite compliments and best wishes by reminding Freud – teasing, playfully rhythmical, almost flirtatious, alertly challenging, but is it also regretful? – that Freud had not analysed *him* and had no right to presume on his good fortune, he received a confession:

8. For the sequence of letters in 1929, see Grubrich-Simitis 1995.

. . . what I wrote to you made sense for me. It was the expression of my envy, which I am not afraid to own. Envy need not be something ugly. Envy can include admiration and is reconcilable with the friendliest feelings for the person envied.

However, in deciding what I should envy you for, I was not troubled by my ignorance.

The main consideration was how much more fortunate one is to be a completer than a pioneer. It seems to me that no special intellectual endowment is called for to open up a new field of science or technology, but rather certain traits of character, the boldness of an adventurer, an ability to set much store by one's own beliefs, and a kind of scorn for consensus with other people. It is easy to become famous – or rather notorious – for so doing, yet, if one has retained any critical faculty, one cannot fail to see how crude, imperfect and in fact fragmentary such an initial achievement in virgin territory is, and how liable it is to imbue one with the sense of the feebleness of a lone intellect compared with the magnitude of the task.

If the virgin territory is psychological, another factor also comes into play. All our attention is directed to the outside, whence dangers threaten and satisfactions beckon. From the inside, we want only to be left in peace. So if someone tries to turn our awareness inward, in effect twisting its neck round, then our whole organization resists – just as, for example, the oesophagus and the urethra resist any attempt to reverse their normal direction of passage. The world is then united in contradiction, and this contradiction from countless people, decade after decade, while not changing one's mind, does make one tired. And everyone finds contradiction so easy precisely in the field of psychology. Without specialized preparation, no one can permit himself a judgement in astronomy, physics or chemistry. Unless one is simply crazy, like Strindberg, one will beware of contradicting science if one has not fulfilled this condition. This does not hold for psychology. Every man is a connoisseur of the mind, every man knows just as well, or better, without having gone to any trouble. And since they have arrived at their opinions so cheaply, they cannot believe that someone else has gone to greater expense on the matter.

This rather astonishing confession – which Freud subsequently regretted and wished might be destroyed (Jones 1957, p. 164) – indicates at least something: if Freud had not altogether got under Einstein's skin, Einstein had certainly got under Freud's!⁹

Freud explicitly asked Einstein not to reply to this letter. So there was silence between them for some time. Then, in February 1930, Einstein asked Freud for a supportive public statement about Zionism. Freud declined. This did not stop Einstein from sending Freud friendly greetings on his 75th birthday, in May 1931. As Gay writes:

9. The letter's themes – envy and its vicissitudes (these were the years of the development of Freud's theories of penis envy), the difference between the pioneer on the one hand and the last and greatest in a long line (such seems to have been Freud's view of Einstein) and the special character of psychological theory, in which everyone is an expert and reacts with extreme resentment if another person presumes to have such knowledge – all featured in Freud's writings of this period.

Every Tuesday he was reading Freud with a woman friend [probably his step-daughter], and could not admire enough ‘the beauty and clarity’ of his writings. ‘Apart from Schopenhauer,’ he graciously added, ‘there is no one for me who can, or could, write like that.’ Yet the victory of Freud’s ideas over Einstein’s scepticism was incomplete; being ‘thick-skinned’, Einstein noted, he vacillated between ‘belief and unbelief’. (Gay 1988, pp. 574–5, citing Einstein to Freud, 29 April 1931)

‘Thick-skinned’ is an odd word to use, unless Einstein was deliberately reminding Freud that he had never ‘slid under his skin’.

The only public display of the relationship between Einstein and Freud was the publication, under the auspices of the League of Nations, of their dialogue *Why War?* Initiated at Einstein’s behest after discussions with Leon Steinig, a League official, it was in part the result of a conversation with Dr Ernst Jackh, who at a dinner in Geneva, asked Einstein:

Would you agree that it is no mere chance that your theory of relativity, and Professor Freud’s psychoanalyses, the League of Nations and its World Court, and other phenomena of our time, have developed together: that they are all an expression of the same revolutionary phase through which the contemporary world is passing? (Clark 1973, p. 347)

After long reflection, Einstein’s response – ‘You are quite right: I endorse your Holism’ – may have planted the seed that then developed in conversations with Steinig. As he put it to Steinig via one of his characteristic rhymes in February 1932:

Wenn Sie Freud zu ~~machen~~ bringen glauben
 Will auch ich es gern erlauben.
 Etwas blöd! Doch meinerwegen
Ich fürwahr hab nichts dagegen¹⁰

If you hope to ~~make~~ bring Freud on board
 For me that’s nothing untoward
 A bit dumb, i’nt it,
 But I, marry, have nothing agin it!

After discussions in late July 1932, Einstein wrote a letter to Freud, which would become the opening piece in the published volume. That public part of the correspondence was accompanied by the following private letter:

I should like to use this opportunity to send you warm personal regards and to thank you for many a pleasant hour which I had in reading your works. It is always so amusing for me to observe that even people who regard themselves as ‘unbelievers’ in relation to your teachings can put up so little resistance to your

10. Einstein Archive, Call Number 31-435.00. © Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Courtesy of the Einstein Archives Online. I confess to translating this myself.

ideas that they commonly think and speak in terms of your concepts if they – let themselves go [*sich gehen lassen*]. (Grubrich-Simitis 1995, p. 121)¹¹

Einstein's open confession the previous year of his ambivalence concerning Freud's theories, together with this 'observation' about other people becoming Freudians without knowing it – was he aware that this might be the case for him as well as for others? – might have prepared Freud for the surprising package Einstein had in store for him. In the public letter with which he opened the dialogue, Einstein set out the problem: 'Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war?' He offered a simple solution: the unconditional surrender of sovereignty by nation-states to a higher authority. Yet the failure of this rational solution was the result of the craving for power of small groups of interested élites, amongst whom he singled out those who benefited from the arms trade. However, most importantly the majority were 'under the thumb' of the ruling class and the Church, who 'organize and sway the emotions of the masses, and make its tool of them'. What allows this swaying of their emotions?

Man has within him a lust for hatred and destruction. In normal times this passion exists in a latent state, it emerges only in unusual circumstances; but it is a comparatively easy task to call it into play and raise it to the power of a collective psychosis. (Einstein & Freud 1933, p. 201)

Einstein's fluent deployment of Freud's own vocabulary prompted the psychoanalyst to observe how the physicist had posed as both statesman and psychologist in framing the question:

You yourself have said almost all there is to say on the subject. But though you have taken the wind out of my sails [*gleichsam den Wind aus den Segeln*] I shall be glad to follow in your wake [*ich fahre gern in Ihrem Kielwasser*] and content myself with confirming all you have said by amplifying it to the best of my knowledge – or conjecture. (Einstein & Freud 1933, p. 203)

Freud's account of how original Might – violence – had been countered and turned into Right depended on the union of the weaker against the strong individual: 'Right is the might of a community'. However, the crucial element that comes to hold the community together in Freud's eyes is not only their common interests, but the emotional ties that inevitably develop and hold them together.

Here, I believe, we already have all the essentials: violence overcome by the transference of power to a larger unity, which is held together by emotional ties between its members. What remains to be said is no more than an expansion and a repetition of this. (Einstein & Freud 1933, p. 205)

11. See also Nathan & Norden 1963, pp. 187–8 and Erikson 1982, p. 167, who records a slip of the pen in the manuscript: Einstein wrote 'Sie' ('you') for 'sie' (they, 'the unbelievers'), thus implying that it is Freud rather than the unbelievers who 'let themselves/yourself go'.

He develops this thesis and expounds, for Einstein's benefit, on the psychoanalytic theory of the instincts with a view to shedding light on the tendency towards hatred and destruction which Einstein had discerned, culminating with an undoubtedly rhetorical question for Einstein about the 'mythological' status of this theory being comparable to that of the concepts of physics. One senses that there is a personal tone entering into Freud's argument. And, in the final paragraphs, it does become personal, in an indirect sense, in which Freud turns to a new question:

Why do you and I and so many other people rebel so violently against war? Why do we not accept it as another of the many painful calamities of life? (Einstein & Freud 1933, p. 213)

His answer: 'We cannot help doing so. We are pacifists because we are obliged to be for organic reasons. And we then find no difficulty in producing arguments to justify our attitude' (Einstein & Freud 1933, p. 214).

Here we finally find Freud trying to 'get under the skin' of Einstein, the well-known pacifist. Reasons are cheap and superfluous, he argues; Einstein and others like him – Freud includes himself for the purposes of the argument – are constitutional pacifists, incapable of tolerating the repudiation of the internalized civilization which war requires. Whether or not such constitutional pacifists can survive, whether or not the rest of mankind will join them, is by no means certain. This is finally Freud's message: the inculcation of a successful aversion to war can be neither based on mere intellectual nor on emotional repudiation, but must be a permanent internal transformation of the instinctual economy.

And this is a message principally for Einstein. Freud very rarely uses the word 'pacifist'.¹² True, he had broached similar themes during the First World War; while Einstein was courageously standing out against the bellicosity of the German Professoriate, Freud's initial enthusiasm for the War cooled quickly and seeded a reflection on the profound disillusionment the War created in so many. But this thesis of the constitutional foundation of pacifism is something like a covert message, an interpretation, for Einstein, clothed in a public address to the League of Nations.

We can now see more clearly the dance that took place between them. It was started by Freud when he called Einstein 'lucky'; it was given substance when Einstein abandoned conventional courtesies and asked how Freud could know, since he had not slid under his skin; it was then made explicit in Freud's long explanation of his envy and the special tribulations of the pioneer in psychology. The public debate on war resulted from Einstein taking seriously an intuition that the science of Freud, the science of Einstein and the ideals of internationalism to which the two great Jewish scientific

12. There is one other usage; Freud uses the term 'pacifist' in *Moses and Monotheism* to contrast the civilized posture of Akhenaten's god Aten to that of the belligerent Yahweh.

icons were so deeply committed were linked by more than contingency. Then, his reading and re-reading of Freud allowed him to do exactly what he found so amusing in so many others: he 'let himself go' and began, most obviously in the opening letter on war, 'to think and speak in Freud's concepts', thus taking the wind out of Freud's sails. Freud responded with an account of pacifism tailor-made for Einstein. After all, Freud was obviously much more of a belligerent than Einstein; his struggle for scientific survival, the incessant battles with apostates, the very envy he had revealed to Einstein indicated how he saw Einstein as genuinely a man of peace in a way he himself could never quite be.

The conclusion of the *Why War?* episode demonstrates just that. On completing his part of *Why War?* in September 1932, Freud did not have a high opinion of the 'tedious and sterile so-called discussion with Einstein' (Jones 1957, p. 187). (It should be said that he often expressed such deprecatory thoughts on finishing a piece of work.) His most interesting reflection on its production was in a letter in February 1933 to Jeanne Lampl-de Groot:

My discussion with Einstein has been all corrected and can already be published in February. It won't save humanity either. Yes, why does Einstein commit such stupidities like his confession of faith and other unnecessary things? Perhaps because he is so good-natured and otherworldly. (Molnar 1992, Freud to Jeanne Lampl-de Groot, p. 144)¹³

This is entirely characteristic of the dynamic that had developed between Freud and Einstein: a flash of aggression from Freud followed by reflection on how Einstein, the man who understands nothing of psychology, is good 'by nature', organically perhaps – and thus to be admired, even envied, as a refined late-flowering product of civilization.

* * *

If we can characterize Freud's relationship to Einstein as under the sway of envy, Einstein's relationship to Freud was thoroughly imbued with ambivalence. The heart of it he stated clearly enough on a number of occasions: he found Freud's writing magnificent and persuasive – but he was never able to convert his admiration into a conviction of the correctness of Freud's ideas. In 1928, he was asked to lend his support for the nomination of Freud for the Nobel Prize in Medicine; he replied:

With all [my] admiration for the genius of Freud's achievement, I cannot decide to intervene in the present case. About the truth-content [Wahrheitsgehalt] of Freud's teachings, I cannot come to a conviction for myself, much less [can I] make a judgement that would also be authoritative to others. (Pais 1982, p. 514)

13. Freud and Lampl-de Groot were probably referring to Einstein's *Mein Weltbild* (translated as *The World As I See It*), published in 1931.

Each time Einstein failed to come to a conviction concerning Freud's teachings he would follow the same path. Some external occasion would cause him to become absorbed in Freud's ideas and he would turn to reading him; his admiration for the style and the boldness would know no bounds. But he would always find a rising tide of scepticism and disbelief mounting in him.

On the one occasion that he voiced to Freud something more than admiring scepticism, Freud's response was decidedly arch. This exchange took place on the occasion of Freud's 80th birthday celebrations in 1936, when Einstein wrote to him for the first time from Princeton:

Until recently I could only apprehend the speculative power of your train of thought, together with its enormous influence on the *Weltanschauung* of the present era, without being in a position to form a definite opinion about the amount of truth it contains. Not long ago, however, I had the opportunity of hearing about a few instances, not very important in themselves, which in my judgement exclude any other interpretation than that provided by the theory of repression. I was delighted to come across them; since it is always delightful when a great and beautiful conception proves to be consonant with reality. (Jones 1957, p. 217)

Freud responded:

I really must tell you how glad I was to hear of the change in your judgement – or at least the beginning of one. Of course I always knew that you 'admired' me only out of politeness and believed very little of any of my doctrines, although I have often asked myself what indeed there is to be admired in them if they are not true, i.e. if they do not contain a large measure of truth. By the way, don't you think that I should have been better treated if my doctrines had contained a greater percentage of error and craziness? (Jones 1957, p. 217)

We do not know what the 'few instances' attributable by Einstein to the indubitable workings of repression were; nor did he respond to Freud's challenge concerning the resistances to psychoanalysis. They did, however, exchange letters once more in 1939, when Einstein thanked Freud for sending him *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion*: 'Your idea that Moses was a distinguished Egyptian and a member of the priestly caste has much to be said for it, also what you say about the ritual of circumcision' (Jones 1957, p. 259). But Einstein's mixed admiration and misgivings again found perfect expression in the concluding paragraph:

I quite specially admire your achievement, as I do with all your writings, from a literary point of view. I do not know any contemporary who has presented his subject in the German language in such a masterly fashion. I have always regretted that for a non-expert, who has no experience with patients, it is hardly possible to form a judgement about the finality of the conclusions in your writings. But after all this is so with all scientific achievements. One must be glad when one is able to grasp the structure of the thoughts expressed. (Jones 1957, p. 259)

In 1949, when a young woman friend Anna Bacharach asked Einstein's opinion of Freud, the basic formula was repeated:

The old one had . . . a sharp vision; no illusion lulled him to sleep except on account of an often exaggerated faith in his own ideas.¹⁴

Whatever his personal misgivings, Einstein the public man was always willing to help those who asked him: in 1952 he became an Honorary Member of the newly founded Sigmund Freud Archives, alongside Anna Freud, Ludwig Jekels and Thomas Mann (*Bulletin of the International Psychoanalytical Association* 33 (1952): 261). But an even more exaggerated playing out of the scene of ambivalence occurred not long before Einstein died. He had befriended Johanna Fantova, a young woman who worked at Princeton's University Library. She recorded conversations with Einstein in a diary, which has recently been discovered. In November 1953 – two years after his beloved sister Maya's death – he told Fantova of a dream: his sister's dress was draped over a chair; he tried to fold it but was unsuccessful, whereupon the dress suddenly disappeared. In place of the dress, which he could no longer find, a friend appeared sitting in the chair.

His dream led him to read books about dreams, which eventually led him to reading Freud's *Totem and Taboo* and to his familiar response to Freud, the mixture of belief and unbelief: the Oedipus complex is a remarkable concept, hair-raising – for him idiotic – and he did not recall ever having dreamed of the castration complex. But the notion that repressed conflicts are expressed in dreams he found not so absurd, though it was doubtful that our actions can be traced back to origins of which we are not aware. Einstein did not think it impossible that dreams are repressed wishes, but he was not convinced. Freud, he concluded, again, was very intelligent but much of his theory was nonsense. He counselled Fantova against analysis (Calaprice 2004).

Einstein's and Freud's last collective act before Freud died was, appropriately enough, to contribute two 'Introductions', separately composed and signed, to a book in Hebrew by Y'israel Doryon devoted to the internationalist ideas of the Viennese Jewish engineer, positivist philosopher and philanthropist they both admired, Josef Popper-Lynkeus. Whereas Einstein's concentrated on the importance for his own thinking of Popper-Lynkeus's economic ideas, Freud's brief 'Introduction' reflected the historical moment:

The Jew, Joseph Popper-Lynkeus, scientist, thinker and humanist, will surely be recognized and honoured by future generations as one of the greatest personalities of his time. In the short period of socialist rule in Vienna, the municipality dedicated a statue in the town gardens to him. During the German invasion of

14. Pais 1982, p. 515. Pais misspells her name as 'Bachrach'. The fact that Einstein referred to Freud as 'Der Alte' gives a hint of the respect and affection with which he regarded him; he often referred to God by the same name.

Vienna, this monument was removed and probably destroyed. Mr Doryon's book is the first attempt to re-establish it. (Doryon 1939–40, pp. 7, 9; see also Klingsberg 1973, pp. xiv–xv)

After Freud's death in September 1939, Einstein maintained his support for Doryon's attempts to keep Popper-Lynkeus's ideas in circulation, contributing further Prefaces to editions prepared in 1944 and 1954. The fact of the long-standing support by both Einstein and Freud for this forgotten Viennese figure from the beginnings of the century indicated their joint commitment to the ideal he represented: the Jewish scientific and philanthropic adventure led by 'a prophetic and saintly person, and at the same time a thoroughly modern man' (Einstein 1955, p. vii).

One of the ironies of Freud and Einstein's collective destiny was that both these non-religious Jews, averse to the ideal of a nation-state, both critical of the aim of a State intended solely for the Chosen People, ended their lives struggling with the figure of Moses. Freud's last work, *Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion*, addressed the problem of the inner nature of Judaism by positing an Egyptian Moses as founder of the religion of the children of Israel in a historical grafting of the high imperial pacifist religion of Akhenaten on to the local worship of a volcano-god called Yahweh, 'an uncanny, bloodthirsty demon who went about by night and shunned the light of day' (Freud 1939, p. 34). In this way, Freud resolved – or found a final version of – his own identification with the angry prophet, disappointed by his followers and in restless struggle even with his own god; Freud had of course long been fascinated by the figure of Moses, most obviously in his pseudonymous 1914 essay, 'Der Moses des Michelangelo'.

Einstein's relationship to Moses was less visible and certainly less self-conscious. However, he had, as the great Jewish scientist, played Joshua to Chaim Weizmann's Moses in the project of founding the new Zion, the stated aim of their famous visit to America in 1921. And so, by that strange twist of fate, when Weizmann, the first President of the State of Israel, died on 9 November 1952, David Ben-Gurion, Israel's Prime Minister, was convinced that 'There is only one man whom we should ask to become the President of the State of Israel. He is the greatest Jew on earth. Maybe the greatest human being on earth. Einstein' (Navon 1982, p. 294). Now was the moment for Einstein's complicated relationship to Weizmann – he had confessed to Abraham Pais that 'my relations with Weizmann were, as Freud says, ambivalent' (Pais 1982, p. 315) – to Zionism, to Israel and to Judaism to be played out.

Einstein heard of the offer in the *New York Times*; in consternation, he immediately attempted to turn it down without hurting anyone's feelings. The most telling of the many reasons Einstein gave for declining the Presidency was that 'he had no talent at all for human relations'. But one can readily understand his consternation; as he had reflected, 'to punish me for my contempt of authority [Fate] made me an authority myself' (Hoffman

& Dukas 1972, p. 24). To punish him for being a cosmopolitan intellectual, one famous for his childlike other-worldly mien and his pacifism, Fate chose him to be the Leader of a Warrior Nation, to accompany Weizmann once again into the new Zion. But Einstein had never joined that club – he had never become a member of a Zionist organization. If Freud's Moses was an Egyptian, not a Jew, Ben-Gurion's proposed Israeli President was not a Zionist. There was one condition placed on Einstein's taking up the post: he should reside in Israel. Einstein refused.

Neither Freud nor Einstein was at ease with the figure of Moses; yet they both ended their lives confronted with the enigma he, the great iconoclast, represented. As befits their characters and their sciences, Freud sought out Moses to confront him, while Einstein inadvertently found himself playing out a world-historical role in the shadow of Moses. The ultimate irony, of course, is that they were each as ambivalent about their iconicity as they were about their relationship to the promised land Moses was never allowed to enter. The iconology of the twentieth century had no patience with irony: the two iconoclastic Jews, Einstein and Freud, were alone, bound together, incarnating the image of the Revolutionary Scientist.¹⁵

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15. 'If Einstein is number one, then who is number two? Some might nominate Sigmund Freud, although others would hotly contest his status as a scientist. Even if we leave Freud in contention, who are number three and four? We do not lack for eminent names – Bohr, Crick, Hawking, Marie Curie, Florey, Rutherford – but there is no general recognition at all. Why is this so?' (*New Scientist* 134, Issue 1822, 23 May 1992, p. 1).

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the relationship between Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein, including the parallels in the trajectories of their scientific careers, starting with the *annus mirabilis* of 1905. Noting how they shared much in common, the paper underlines that it was as 'great Jewish thinkers' that they were most often twinned, and proceeds to compare and contrast the development of their self-consciousness of being Jewish. It then traces their relationship in one meeting and in correspondence, both private and public, from 1926 to their deaths, emphasizing Freud's envy of Einstein and Einstein's ambivalent admiration of Freud. The paper ends with a consideration of the significance of the figure of Moses in both of their final years.