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FRESH FREUD
No Longer Lost in Translation

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The new translations of Freud into English highlight the question as to the nature of Freud's quest and achievement. They show a livelier Freud than the Strachey translations (Freud, 1953–1974), who used everyday language in his work instead of trying to establish a new technical vocabulary for an esoteric new discipline. However, with the new Penguin editions thus far, fresh Freud is no longer lost in translation. The *Standard Edition* was created importantly to create an authoritative international trademark and was made more natural "scientific" in appearance. The fresh translations show a Freud in tune with Karl Popper's (1976) approach in his later work that viewed science as essentially problem solving. The example of "Mourning and Melancholia" (Freud, 1917/1964, 1917/1981, 1917/2005) is discussed as an exercise in exploration, conjectures, criticism, construct formation, and problem solving. Translation issues are discussed. Instead of being a particular trade mark, the very fact of there being new and different translations opens Freud's works to further questioning about their meanings and intents in the marketplace of ideas and practices.

Keywords: James Strachey, *Standard Edition*, Sigmund Freud, Adam Phillips, translation

Any Freud paper we read today through the prism and context of prior learning and reading. Therefore, any reading of Freud's papers is not really fresh because it is already filtered. The *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Revised Standard Edition* (24 volumes), under the general editorship of Mark Solms, is due for release in 2009. This involves a major new set of translations though it seems that most of the Strachey's (Freud, 1953–1974) terms will be retained, such has been their pervasive impact. The advent of the new translations of Freud into English highlights the question as to the nature of Freud's quest and achievement. They show a livelier Freud who used everyday language in all his work instead of trying to establish a new technical vocabulary in an esoteric new discipline. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* translated by James and Alix Strachey, received much criticism for its

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often staid and jargonized approach. However, with the new Penguin editions thus far, fresh Freud is no longer lost in translation. In time the new Penguin translations or, more likely, the new Solms translations will replace the Strachey translations. They will help promote a reassessment of Freud from different vantage points.

Those of us schooled in *The Standard Edition* need to ask: Are we reading Freud? Or are we reading Strachey and what lay behind him? The Strachey translations have been the default option not only for readers in English speaking countries but also for many others who read English but not German. The first volume of Freud's *Complete Psychoanalytic Works* in French (Laplanche, Bourguignon, & Cotet, 1988) was published as late as 1988. However, because the *Standard Edition* was the work of Anna Freud, Freud's most loyal follower and long-time International Psychoanalytical Assocation President Ernest Jones, and others of the inner circle located in London together with the Stracheys and the Hogarth Press, the English translations presented the authoritative stamp of legitimacy as what Ricardo Steiner (1987) called "A World Wide International Trade Mark of Genuineness." Because the *Standard Edition* remains such a massive achievement and is of such importance in transmitting Freud, issues concerning the accuracy and bias of the translations are of great significance.

Bruno Bettleheim's (1983) well-known critique of the translations took Freud to the opposite of scientific, spiritual, with his focus on "die Seele" (soul) as central to his outlook. Even assuming a "soul," the question is what sort of soul? Although the spiritual meaning of "soul" did not change in English from the spiritual, by Freud's time the meaning of "die Seele" changed in German to assume a scientific meaning more akin to "psychology" (Ornston 1992, p. 65). Although Bettleheim went too far, his general critique of the Strachey translations as overly scientistic has a point. As Steiner (1987) asserted,

> There is no doubt that the particular reading we make of Freud's text is also responsible for the particular model of therapeutic practice we derive from it. Thus the problems of translating Freud definitively have had and continue to have momentous repercussions in the field of therapeutic practice itself. (p. 36)

Because he read Freud in the original German and later again in English while training at Anna Freud's Centre, Alex Holder (1992) could report, "I found Strachey very clear, his language elegant, his commentaries illuminating, and his cross-references most helpful" (p. 85). He seldom went back to the original German since Anna Freud endorsed Strachey.

> I think that one of the apparent merits of Strachey's translation is its presentation of a streamlined Freud—Freud shorn of the polyphony of his style, of the ambiguities, uncertainties, and imaginative ponderings that are so characteristic of the original. This may make for more coherence and ease of understanding, but it presses Freud into a peculiar scientific framework. (p. 85)

Just after both Freud's death and the beginning of World War II, Jones wrote to Strachey on September 28, 1939, inviting him to undertake the enormous task of translating the *Gesammelte Schriften* into English. This was at the suggestion of Marie Bonaparte to Ernest Jones. As Steiner (1987) put it, this was

> notwithstanding enormous financial problems and the threat of impending war. Jones makes it quite clear that the reasons for doing this are twofold: both to stand as the only "worthy

> memorial" to Freud, and to: "secure a definitive edition for generations to come: if it is done after our time, it can never be done so well." (p. 42)

Many beside Jones and the actual translators (James & Alix Strachey; Robert Tyson) were involved: the Hogarth Press, the British Institute including its Publications Committee, the leaders of psychoanalysis who were Freud's inner circle. "Behind the single name of Strachey," Steiner argued, lay "a diversity of individuals, languages, and interests, all seeking an outlet and a compromise in the work he signed" (p. 42). Jones was convinced he and his group were what Steiner termed "a sort of metahistorical exemplification of how to interpret Freud's message," (p. 43) which was to be embodied in the Strachey translations. With Freud's death, the approach about the translations represented an authoritative way of codifying and transmitting his message univocally, representing the path from the ego ideal to the ideal ego, representing identification with the superego rather than the ego (p. 44). That what we know as the "Standard Edition" was originally called the "Memorial Edition of Freud" bears this out (pp. 46–47). Whether Freud's original conception of psychoanalysis was scientific, hermeneutic, philosophical, or clinical, we know that Jones had an agenda for translating Freud that, Patrick Mahony (1992) asserted, "greatly influenced Strachey's translation. Ideology underlay Jones's advocacy of a 'true uniform and definitive' psychoanalytic terminology: thus, univocal reduction of Freud's texts that, in Jones's mind, would serve as a most efficient tool for the institutionalization of psychoanalysis" (p. 29).

The translations reflect the translators' views on the nature of Freud's enterprise. In his general introduction to the *Standard Edition*, Strachey was explicit in his approach to translating Freud: the 'imaginary model' he always kept before him was "the writings of some English man of science of wide education born in the middle of the nineteenth century. And I should like, in an explanatory and no patriotic spirit, to emphasize the word 'English'" (Strachey, 1966, p. xix). Clearly, Freud himself developed his ideas over many decades during which meanings evolved and changed. Freud used ordinary German words in general use to communicate a picture of his ideas, which often contained ambiguity and were not reducible to single terms (Ornston, 1992, pp. 6). Technical terms can become codified and assume the status of what Alfred North Whitehead (1997, p. 58) termed "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness" in which abstract entities come to assume their own existence. As Freud told Breuer, "It is much too easy to slip into habits of thought which suppose that behind every substantive there must be some actual substance" (as cited in Ornston, 1992, p. 9). For example, Strachey's term *structure*, which has become such a psychoanalytic shibboleth, combines a dozen nonsynonymous German terms and conveys a false uniformity (Junker, 1992, pp. 48–49). Strachey standardized terms Freud used quite differently over decades, simplifying their ambiguity (Ornston, 1992, p. 7). Freud wrote with humor and style in an allusive and metaphorical way. Examples were often analogies. The extent of Freud's play with concepts was massaged out of Strachey's translations. Strachey's adoption of standardized terms when a variety of words fitted into different contexts and times made Freud's writing appear more certain and concrete as well as less literary and nuanced. Strachey chose the same term from different alternatives each time, suggesting a more rigorous development in a particular direction than was warranted (Ornston, 1992, pp. 9–16). Moreover, as Mahony (1984) suggested, Freud

> fashioned a written expression that discloses his own conscious as well as unconscious processes generally. And whereas the preponderant number of psychoanalytic authors merely describe the unconscious, Freud also aimed to let it emerge in his writing so that his texts combine both exposition and enactment. (pp. 852–853)

This was part of Freud's intent and method of exploration (see Ornston, 1992, pp. 4–5). As Mahony (1992) put it, "By and large he composed in an exploratory manner, registering what had already been said, and was trying to be said and to sum producing an investigative discourse attuned to the dynamic nature of psychic activity" (p. 26).

No doubt most readers in English will have read the translations in the *Standard Edition* as though they were reading Freud "in the original." On the one hand, it is an advantage that the translations in the new Solms edition will be standardized in their use of Freud's language in translation so as to contrast and compare statements of Freud in varying works and times and to find terms as they are used throughout. As with Strachey, sometimes different terms may be translated into the same English words, giving a false impression of uniformity. However, a full glossary and exploration of the terms will be incorporated into the Solms edition and will make such ambiguities of translation more transparent. On the other hand, it is also useful to see terms translated in nonstandard ways in different works for the simple reason that it reminds us that they are not original but are in translation. More to the point, it avoids a false uniformity. There are costs and benefits of standardization of translations, but standardization makes sense if it is not just declared but considered and argued for and is accompanied by an extensive set of notes.

Throughout his work, Freud used the term *wissenschaft,* which means theoretical "knowledge" or "science." For example, the term *wissenschaftlich* is translated in both the Strachey (Freud, 1917/1964, p. 246) and Philips translations of "Mourning and Melancholia" quite properly as "scientific" (Freud, 1917/1981, p. 432; Freud, 1917/2005, p. 206). However, we need to recognize that the import of this term within the German language tradition of that period had a far broader sweep than the concept of "natural science," which has for some decades been seen as the model for any science worth its salt. The German term referred to a broad system of knowledge or skills, which had come to the fore during the Enlightenment. The term gradually acquired the sense of a specialized, certain, and authoritative approach distinguished from ordinary knowledge. Although it was a term that involved working with evidence and the notion of verifiable results, it was a far cry from a catch-all concept of natural science. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, includes defining *science* as "knowledge or cognizance of something specified or implied" or "knowledge acquired by study," "a particular branch of study" as well as the modern use as referring to the natural and physical sciences (Onions, 1973, pp. 1903–1904). This last meaning of natural science or even on social science as derivative in method from the natural sciences was a still later accretion. The Strachey edition in general slants the direction toward a technical quasi-natural scientific perspective that reads as though Freud himself adopted it. It is not the detail of translation of the word as "science" rather than "knowledge" but to do with its meaning and the general context of what surrounds the way these terms are used in the texts, which can imply narrower or wider definitions.

Strachey's viewpoint is in the direction of firm technical concepts rather than exploratory concepts based on metaphor—"id," "ego," "superego," "cathexis," "parapraxes," and "instincts" instead of "the it," "the I," "the over-I," "investment," "faulty acts," and "drives" are metaphorical terms that are close to reality, "as if" rather than an established technical concept that appears more established and proven than is warranted. This is clear in such terms as *das Ich*, which indicate that they are metaphorical uses of deliberately ordinary terms and involve putting together pieces of life. A technical reading does not capture the mood of Freud's general philosophical and ethical exploration of the nature of human nature and the way we live, with detailed applications in case histories that gave

rise to therapeutic results in consequence (see Kirsner, 2006). They were not "narrative truth" so much as precursors to further work. The movement often stymied this questioning as codifying ideas as though they were proven and not to be questioned as dogma.

In "Mourning and Melancholia" for example, Freud was not communicating hard facts but conjectures, guesses, impressions, and ideas, the flavor of which were nuanced, evocative, and suggestive. Language was central to what Freud was attempting to do—psychoanalysis is constructed around the verbal not the mathematical, it was qualitative rather than quantitative. Freud was attempting to find a way to understand psychological phenomena that was appropriate to lived experience and speech. How these ideas are expressed makes a difference—interpretation is at the root of psychoanalytic therapy that stresses finding the words to say it. He was struggling to find the right way of expressing a new way of systematically understanding our nature as intentional beings who often do not "know" our own intentions.

I want to provide an illustration of the translation issues, which are mainly nuance but provide us with a breath of fresh air from the Strachey model. The new translation of "Trauer und Melancholie," "Mourning and Melancholia" is in the Penguin Freud Classics, under the general editorship of Philips, is translated by Shaun Whiteside (1917/2005). "Mourning and Melancholia" stressed the consequences of a mind experiment. Freud noted the similarities between the melancholic's behavior and that of a person in mourning. Could there be any similarities in their mental approaches? Let us look at the depressive as if he or she were in mourning? If so, what would they be in mourning about?

In the first paragraph of the paper Freud issued the caveat that he is using only a small number of cases of psychogenic origins and that these could be typical of a small group (Freud, 1917/1964, p. 243; Freud, 1917/2005, p. 203). This is somewhat rhetorical as it made assumptions about what it is typical of. It was actually a *construction.* These cases occasion a hypothesis, they do not prove or test it.

"Mourning and Melancholia," which is an especially uncertain text, playing with ideas and developing them, is an exercise in hypothesis formation or construction. It is not so much a scientific paper proving a point but rather an attempt to formulate a way of understanding phenomena. Freud thought in alternative scenarios, parallel processing terms. It may be likened to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's (1817/1985) approach that involved the "willing suspension of disbelief" that "constitutes poetic faith" as well as bearing an uncanny resemblance to how Coleridge described William Wordsworth's approach:

> to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand. (p. 314)

The last paragraph deals with a conjecture about what happens to "the accumulation of investment," which using the term "cathexis" gives the near certainty that this is simply a quantitative notion of energies so that there is an exchange of energies (Freud, 1917/1964, pp. 257–58; Freud, 1917/2005, p. 218). Although it is true that passions have more or less quantity (e.g., hating or loving someone intensely or mildly), we cannot thereby look at quantities of psychical energies as like quantities of physical energies in anything more than an analogy or metaphor. Although it has a metaphysical sense, cathexis is very much an economic notion, which does not fit well with *Besetzung*

(Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p. 63). Labeling cathexes gives a technical luster. Freud's term *Besetzung* is a colloquial expression implying occupation and taking over—the military metaphor of capture and holding of a place is *besetzt.* A seat taken on a train is *Platz besetzt* (Ornston, 1985, p. 392). In any case, Freud used this word differently throughout his work, and it conveys the wrong impression to make it a technical Latinized term rather than the sense of investment that the new translation uses (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p. 62). The scientistic use of say cathexis makes for an interpretation of the text that is less fluid. If we look at translations of terms such as *mental pain, open wound* or the relation of love and suicide, there are no major differences although they tilt the text's mood into a more scientistic and less exploratory, metaphorical one.

In *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Popper (1945) lambasted psychoanalysis as unfalsifiable and thus not scientific. Popper famously asserted that along with Marx and Plato, Freud was an enemy of the open society because psychoanalysis made irrefutable assertions. They were, in Popper's view, unscientific because they did not consist of falsifiable propositions. However, the claim that science needs to include only falsifiable propositions is questionable in itself. Freud and Marx for example have not been surpassed because their claims were irrefutable or unfalsifiable. Rather, at least in the case of Marx, it is because many of his assertions have been shown to be just plain wrong. And this is true to a lesser extent in the case of Freud who made erroneous assertions (such as about female sexuality). What remains in Freud's case is a general perspective and approach that fits with many phenomena and that has better explanatory power than many alternative approaches in individual, clinical, or social arenas. Freud's propositions are not unscientific because they have not reached the status of falsifiable propositions, although disconfirmations ought to be sought rather than ignored or rejected. Instead, science needs to be characterized in terms of its strict adherence to evidence while commensurately nonscience consists of propositions that are not evidence based but depend on preconceptions that are never challenged or where criticism is rationalized away. Unfortunately, the psychoanalytic movement has often embodied such characteristics, which have negatively affected progress in knowledge, especially where they are institutionalized. Claims are often far in excess of what is established knowledge. However to claim a degree of science for psychoanalysis, it is not necessary to claim that Freud reached or could have reached the levels of articulation of propositions as in natural science or mathematics. Nonetheless, there are clearly stages along the way to understanding the nature of human nature and the world requiring a receptive yet at the same time critical and exploratory attitude. To the extent that psychoanalysis is a closed and dogmatic discourse with allegedly achieved answers, it is problematic because the level of knowledge is well below such levels of the claimed knowledge that may authorize the profession of psychoanalysis (Kirsner, 2000). This is what I have termed *professionalized psychoanalysis* in contrast to critical psychoanalysis (Kirsner, 1990). The question is not so much whether psychoanalysis can be scientific in the sense of having reliable knowledge, but how far it has progressed along the track. So the issue is not essentialist—is it or is it not valid or scientific—as much as whether formulations are based on conclusive evidence. Of necessity, the early work of Freud was exploratory but much of Freud's work was developing hypotheses that sought some validation in evidence notwithstanding that much was based on small samples and confirmations. This suggests that the level of achievement needs to be recognized and neither inflated nor deflated. "Mourning and Melancholia" explicitly based on a small sample and Freud made provisional claims on this basis. The big moves are in the formulation of hypotheses on the relationships between lost objects and internal objects in mourning and in melancholia. It points to a new perspective.

It is not simply a misunderstanding of a false scientism in psychoanalysis that is at play here. Science is no static concept and it certainly was not for Popper. Although Popper is best known for his earlier work in relation to psychoanalysis, it is less well-known that Popper (1976) later developed a different and more pragmatic view of science, especially social science, as fundamentally problem solving. Conjectures could be made and then refuted or developed.

> Knowledge does not start from perceptions or observations or the collection of data or facts, but it starts, rather, from *problems.* Knowledge starts from the tension between knowledge and ignorance . . . For each problem arises from the discovery that something is not in order with our supposed knowledge. (p. 88)

For Popper (1976) there was a dynamic relationship between our activity in gaining knowledge and the supposed facts.

> It is the character and the quality of the problem. . . which determine the value, or the lack of value, of a scientific achievement. . . Observation is a starting point only if it reveals a problem, or in other words, if it surprises us.

For Popper, scientific method

> consists in trying out tentative solutions to certain problems . . . The method of science is one of tentative attempts to solve our problems; by conjectures which are controlled by severe criticism. (pp. 89–90)

The point of starting from problems trying to account for contradictions between observations and theories is quintessential Freud. Slips, dreams, and neurotic behavior all show gaps and problems to be solved. Freud's own conjectures and dialogic objections and critiques of the possible pathways also provide for advances from problem to problem, as is testified by Freud's own theoretical changes throughout his life. However, the psychoanalytic movement that Freud founded has often been cultish and has brought much deserved and undeserved criticism on psychoanalysis. The Strachey translations contributed to the dissemination but also to the standardization and ossification of psychoanalysis. If science consists of "problems and solutions, and a scientific tradition" (Popper, 1976, p. 92), a critical tradition is crucial in making it possible "to criticize a dominant dogma" (p. 95). Psychoanalysts, with Freud in particular, have often been good at creating hypotheses but have been far less successful in testing and criticizing them. Considering how central the role of criticism is for the development of the field, psychoanalytic institutions have often stymied and impeded development under the guise of claims to knowledge and "standards." Even the name "standard" edition gives this away as interest—it conveys a false impression of achieved knowledge of Freud that is beyond what is warranted. I have argued that a major problem with psychoanalysis is that its claims to knowledge on which the psychoanalytic profession is based are at significant variance with the level of real knowledge in the field and that the gap between real and claimed knowledge is filled not with criticism but by anointment of experts (Kirsner, 2000).

"Mourning and Melancholia" is an exercise in construct formation that attempts to understand a reality in terms of experience and behavior that asks questions about what it can tell us about that source. The consequences of the true extent that Freud was a "master of suspicion" have often not been drawn. Freud's opus was an exercise of playing with concepts so as to develop them further but was not an exercise in proving them.

Freud's work is neither natural scientific nor hermeneutic. Grünbaum (2006, pp. 277–279) rightly pointed to problems in seeing it as exclusively hermeneutic as it is attempting to make scientific discoveries. However, the real level Freud reached has been misunderstood. If Freud's work is reframed into endeavoring to create plausible hypotheses, a new way of investigating and understanding psychical reality, we do not reach the level of whether it "is" scientific or not. Unfortunately, the Strachey translations have given credence to this overreach. What is lost in translation is the mood, the stylistic variety, the playful construction and deconstruction of concepts, their dynamism and the open-endedness of constructions rather than cutting them off.

Many of Freud's suggestions in "Mourning and Melancholia" are kite-flyers, attempts to come to terms with phenomena but can hardly be seen as "scientific" in any sense. They are expressions of Freud's mental processes in trying to come to terms with understanding difficult phenomena from another standpoint. The problem arises when they are seen as dogmatic statements of truth, and this is cemented with translations that reflect a mood that is more certain than is warranted. There is a wondering quality to Freud's explorations, not the establishment of a code. I am not suggesting that the differences in translation here are enormous but there is a slant toward greater certainty and technical assertion when the explanations are more tentative. The newer translations pick up more of the tentativeness when the newer technical Latinized terms are not used as much. They also pick up the way that Freud was using normal terms as indicators of meaning.

This means that Freud is making conjectures that are suppositions that represent a different and new theory when conflicting theories are possible. We prefer a conjecture if it is logical and appears to cover the empirical evidence at our disposal. The greater the empirical content and predictive power of a conjecture the better. In the case of slips of the tongue, Freud discovered that small seemingly unconnected acts made sense—they were "failed acts," "acts which missed their mark" (rather than Strachey's neologism, "parapraxes"). In the case of slips, Freud began from the conjecture that these acts are meaningful, that they have a sense or intention when taken in context. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud was putting together different experiences that have a link—the behavior and experience of those in mourning and those suffering from melancholia. He is linking the empirical evidence together as a theory that helps explain melancholia in terms of lost objects too.

Especially in the new translations, reading Freud gives the sense of setting up an open dialogue. Much of what he wrote is in the manner of reflections, musings even where they are argued. It is not written in a way as to create closure but rather as part of opening up a process of development. In the psychoanalytic session, the analyst proposes conjectures about the meaning of experiences and behavior that lead to further dialogue and relationship.

However, my major criticism of the Strachey translation is systemic rather than particular. Strachey's translations have had a powerful and pervasive influence on the dismissal of Freud as scientisitic, as narrow, mechanistic, and aiming to emulate 19th century positivist science. At the very least, the new translations will take some of us out of our comfort zone in making us see in detail a more inexact, uncertain, metaphorical, and nuanced Freud than we had experienced. Instead of being a particular "trade mark," the very fact of there being new and different translations opens Freud's works to further questioning about their meanings and intents in the marketplace of ideas and practices.

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