
The Psychopathology of Everyday Life: Forgetting, Slips of the Tongue, Bungled Actions, Superstitions and Errors (1901)

Sigmund Freud

Nun ist die Luft von solchem Spuk so voll,
Dass niemand weiss, wie er ihn meiden soil.

Now fills the air so many a haunting shape,
That no one knows how best he may escape.

(Payard Taylor's translation)

Zur Psychopathologie Des Alltagsleben (Über Vergessen, Versprechen, Vergreifen, Abergläube und Irrtum)

James Strachey

(a) German Editions:
1901 Monatsschr. Psychiat. Neurolog., 10 (1) [July], 1-32, and (2) [August], 95-143.
1922 8th ed. Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag. (Reprint of above.)
1923 9th ed. Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag. (Reprint of above.)
1924 G.S., 4, 1-310.
1929 11th ed. Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag. (Reprint of 10th ed.)
1941 G.W., 4, Pp. iv + 322.

(b) English Translation:


WARNING! This text is printed for personal use of Brown. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

1938 In The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, New York: Modern Library. Pp. 35-178. (Same trans.)

1949 London: Ernest Benn. Pp. vii + 239. (Same trans.)


The present, entirely new, translation is by Alan Tyson.

Only one other of Freud's works, the Introductory Lectures (1916-17), rivals this one in the number of German editions it has passed through and the number of foreign languages into which it has been translated. In almost every one of its numerous editions, fresh material was included in the book, and in this respect it might be thought to resemble The Interpretation of Dreams and the Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, to both of which Freud made constant additions throughout his life. But the cases have in fact no similarity. In these other two books, the fresh material consisted for the most part of important enlargements or corrections of clinical findings and theoretical conclusions. In The Psychopathology of Everyday Life almost the whole of the basic explanations and theories were already present in the earliest editions; the great mass of what was added later consisted merely in extra examples and illustrations (partly produced by Freud himself but largely by his friends and pupils) to throw further light upon what he had already discussed. No doubt he felt particular pleasure both in the anecdotes themselves and in being presented with such widespread confirmation of his views. But the reader cannot help feeling sometimes that the wealth of new examples interrupts and even confuses the main stream of the underlying argument. (See, for instance, pp. 67-80 and 194 n.)

Here, as in the case of Freud's books on dreams and on jokes but perhaps to a still greater degree, the translator has to face

1 Besides the English version of 1914, The Psychopathology of Everyday Life was during Freud's lifetime translated into Russian (1910), Polish (1912), Dutch (1916), French (1922), Spanish (1922), Hungarian (1923), Japanese (1930, two versions), Serbo-Croat (1937), Czech (1938), as well as Portuguese and Swedish (dates unspecified).

2 A few new points of theory were discussed in the later editions of the last chapter of the book.

WARNING! This text is printed for personal use of Brown. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

the fact that a large proportion of the material to be dealt with depends on a play upon words which is totally untranslatable. In the previous version the problem was dealt with in a drastic fashion by Brill; he omitted every example which involved terms that could not be rendered into English and inserted a certain number of examples of his own which illustrated similar points to the omitted ones. This was no doubt an entirely justifiable procedure in the circumstances. At the date at which Brill made his version, Freud's work was almost unknown in English-speaking countries, and it was important not to put up unnecessary obstacles to the circulation of this book which had been designed by Freud himself expressly for the general reader (cf. p. 272, footnote). How well Brill succeeded in this aim is shown by the fact that by 1935 sixteen printings of his translation had been issued, and many more were to follow. His own examples, too, were for the most part excellent and two or three of them were in fact included by Freud in later editions of the German original. Nevertheless there are obvious objections to perpetuating this situation, especially in any edition intended for more serious students of Freud's writings. In some instances, for example, the omission of a piece of Freud's illustrative material inevitably brought with it the omission of some important or interesting piece of theoretical comment. Moreover, though Brill announced in his preface his intention 'to modify or substitute some of the author's cases', in the text itself these substitutions are not as a rule explicitly indicated and the reader may sometimes be uncertain whether he is reading Freud or Brill. Brill's translation, it must be added, was made from the German edition of 1912 and has remained unaltered in all the later reprints. Thus it entirely passes over the very numerous additions to the text made by Freud during the ten or more subsequent years. The total effect of the omissions due to these different causes is a startling one. Of the 305 pages of text of the latest edition, as printed in the Gesammelte Werke, between 90 and 100 (almost one third of the book, that is) have never hitherto appeared in English. The completeness of the present translation must, therefore, be weighed against the undoubted loss of readability caused by the Standard Edition policy of dealing with play upon words by the pedestrian method of giving the original German phrases.
and explaining their point with the help of square brackets and footnotes.

We find the first mention by Freud of a parapraxis\(^1\) in a letter to Fliess of August 26, 1898 (Freud, 1950a, Letter 94). He there speaks of having ‘at last grasped a little thing that I have long suspected’—the way in which a name sometimes escapes one and a quite wrong substitute occurs to one in its place.\(^2\) A month later, on September 22 (Standard Ed., Letter 96), he gives Fliess another example, this time the familiar one of ‘Signorelli’, which he published that same year in a preliminary form in the *Monatsschrift für Psychiatrie und Neurologie (1899b)* and subsequently used for the first chapter of the present work. In the following year the same periodical published a paper by Freud on screen memories (1899a), a subject which he further discussed on rather different lines in Chapter IV below. But his time was fully occupied by the completion of *The Interpretation of Dreams (1900a)* and the preparation of his shorter study *On Dreams (1901a)* and it was not until late in 1900 that he took up *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* seriously. In October of that year (Freud, 1950a, Letter 139) he asks leave from Fliess to use for the motto of his work the quotation from Faust which in fact appeared on its title-page. On January 30, 1901 (Letter 141) he reports that it is ‘at a standstill, half-finished, but will soon be continued',\(^3\) and on February 15

\(^1\) In German ‘Fehlleistung’, ‘faulty function’. It is a curious fact that before Freud wrote this book the general concept seems not to have existed in psychology, and in English a new word had to be invented to cover it.

\(^2\) Since Freud never used the example elsewhere, it may perhaps be repeated here, though its explanation is not given: ‘This happened to me not long ago with the name of the author of Andreas Hofer (“Zu Mantua in Banden . . .”). It must, I feel sure, be something ending in “au”—Lindau, Feldau. The man was, of course, Julius Mosen [1803-1867, dramatist and poet]; the “Julius” had not slipped my memory. I was able to show: (1) that I had repressed the name Mosen because of certain connections it had, (2) that infantile material played a part in this repression and (3) that the substitute names which had been interpolated had arisen, like symptoms, from the two groups of material. The analysis was perfectly complete, but unfortunately I cannot make it public any more than my big dream. . .’

\(^3\) He had spent January in preparing the ‘Dora’ case history, though this was not in fact published for another four years (1905e).

(Letter 142) announces that he will finish it during the next few days. It actually appeared in July and August in two issues of the same Berlin periodical as the preliminary studies.

Three years later, in 1904, the work was for the first time issued as a separate volume, with scarcely any alterations, but thereafter additions were made almost continuously over the next twenty years. In 1901 and 1904 it was in ten chapters. Two more (what are now Chapters III and XI) were first added in 1907. An interleaved copy of the 1904 edition was found in Freud's library, in which he had made rough notes of further examples. The majority of these were incorporated in later editions: others, so far as they seem to be of interest, have been included here as footnotes at the appropriate point.

The special affection with which Freud regarded parapraxes was no doubt due to the fact that they, along with dreams, were what enabled him to extend to normal mental life the discoveries he had first made in connection with neuroses. For the same reason he regularly used them as the best preliminary material for introducing non-medical enquirers into the findings of psycho-analysis. This material was both simple and, on the surface at least, unobjectionable, as well as being concerned with phenomena which every normal person had experienced. In his expository writings he sometimes gave parapraxes a preference even over dreams, which involved more complicated mechanisms and tended to lead rapidly into deeper waters. Thus it was that he opened his great series of *Introductory Lectures* of 1916-17 with three devoted to parapraxes— in which, incidentally, many of the examples in the following pages make their re-appearance; and he gave parapraxes similar priority in his contributions to *Scientia (1913j)* and to Marcuse's *encyclopaedia (1923a)*. But though these phenomena were simple and easily explained, it was possible for Freud to demonstrate on them what was, after all, the fundamental thesis established in *The Interpretation of Dreams*— the existence of two distinct modes of mental functioning, what he described as the primary and secondary processes. Moreover, there was another fundamental belief of Freud's which could be convincingly supported by the examination of parapraxes—his belief in the universal application of determinism to mental
The Forgetting of Proper Names

In the 1898 volume of the *Monatsschrift für Psychiatrie und Neurologie* I published under the title of ‘The Psychical Mechanism of Forgetfulness’ [*Freud, 1898b*] a short paper the substance of which I shall recapitulate here and take as the starting-point for more extensive discussions. In it I applied psychological analysis to the frequent circumstance of proper names being temporarily forgotten, by exploring a highly suggestive example drawn from my self-observation; and I reached the conclusion that this particular instance (admittedly commonplace and without much practical significance), in which a psychical function—the memory—refuses to operate, admits of an explanation much more far-reaching than that which the phenomenon is ordinarily made to yield.

If a psychologist were asked to explain why it is that on so many occasions a proper name which we think we know perfectly well fails to enter our heads, he would, unless I am much mistaken, be satisfied with answering that proper names succumb more easily to the process of being forgotten than other kinds of memory-content. He would bring forward the plausible reasons why proper names should thus be singled out for special treatment, but would not suspect that any other conditions played their part in such occurrences.

My close preoccupation with the phenomenon of names being temporarily forgotten arose out of my observation of certain characteristics which could be recognized sufficiently clearly in individual cases, though not, it is true, in all of them. These are cases in which a name is in fact not only forgotten, but wrongly remembered. In the course of our efforts to recover the name that has dropped out, other ones—*substitute names*—enter our consciousness; we recognize them at once, indeed, as incorrect, but they keep on returning and force themselves on us with great persistence. The process that should lead to the reproduction of the missing name has been so to speak *displaced* and has therefore led to an incorrect substitute. My hypothesis is that this displacement is not left to arbitrary psychical choice but follows paths which can be predicted and which conform to laws. In other words, I suspect that the name or names which are substituted are connected in a discoverable way with the missing name: and I hope, if I am successful in demonstrating this connection, to proceed to throw light on the circumstances in which names are forgotten.

The name that I tried without success to recall in the example I chose for analysis in 1898 was that of the artist who painted the magnificent frescoes of the ‘Four Last Things’ in Orvieto cathedral.¹ Instead of the name I was looking for—Signorelli—the names of two other painters—Botticelli and Boltraffio—thrust themselves on me, though they were immediately and decisively rejected by my judgement as incorrect. When I learnt the correct name from someone else, I recognized it at once and without hesitation. The investigation into the influences and the associative paths by which the reproducing of the name had been displaced in this way from Signorelli to Botticelli and Boltraffio led to the following results:

(a) The reason why the name Signorelli was lost is not to be found in anything special about the name itself or in any psychological characteristic of the context into which it was introduced. The name I had forgotten was just as familiar to me as one of the substitute names—Botticelli—and much more familiar than the other substitute name—Boltraffio—about whose owner I could scarcely produce any information other than that he belonged to the Milanese school. Moreover the context in which the name was forgotten seemed to me harm less and did not enlighten me further. I was driving in the company of a stranger from Ragusa in Dalmatia to a place in Herzegovina: our conversation turned to the subject of travel in Italy, and I asked my companion whether he had ever been to Orvieto and looked at the famous frescoes there, painted by…
and it was revealed as a case in which a topic that has just been raised is disturbed by the preceding topic. Shortly before I put the question to my travelling companion whether he had ever been to Orvieto, we had been talking about the customs of the Turks living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I had told him what I had heard from a colleague practising among those people—that they are accustomed to show great confidence in their doctor and great resignation to fate. If one has to inform them that nothing can be done for a sick person, their reply is: ‘Herr [Sir], what is there to be said? If he could be saved, I know you would have saved him.’ In these sentences we for the first time meet with the words and names Bosnia, Herzegovina and Herr, which can be inserted into an associative series between Signorelli and Botticelli—Boltraffio.

(c) I assume that the series of thoughts about the customs of the Turks in Bosnia, etc., acquired the capacity to disturb the next succeeding thought from the fact that I had withdrawn my attention from that series before it was brought to an end. I recall in fact wanting to tell a second anecdote which lay close to the first in my memory. These Turks place a higher value on sexual enjoyment than on anything else, and in the event of sexual disorders they are plunged in a despair which contrasts strangely with their resignation towards the threat of death. One of my colleague's patients once said to him: ‘Herr, you must know that if that comes to an end then life is of no value.’ I suppressed my account of this characteristic trait, since I did not want to allude to the topic in a conversation with a stranger. But I did more: I also diverted my attention from pursuing thoughts which might have arisen in my mind from the topic of ‘death and sexuality.’ On this occasion I was still under the influence of a piece of news which had reached me a few weeks before while I was making a brief stay at Trafoi. A patient over whom I had taken a great deal of trouble had put an end to his life on account of an incurable sexual disorder. I know for certain that this melancholy event and everything related to it was not recalled to my conscious memory during my journey to Herzegovina. But the similarity between ‘Trafoi’ and ‘Boltraffio’ forces me to assume that this

reminiscence, in spite of my attention being deliberately diverted from it, was brought into operation in me at the time of the conversation.

(d) It is no longer possible for me to take the forgetting of the name Signorelli as a chance event. I am forced to recognize the influence of a motive in the process. It was a motive which caused me to interrupt myself while recounting what was in my mind (concerning the customs of the Turks, etc.), and it was a motive which further influenced me so that I debarred the thoughts connected with them, the thoughts which had led to the news at Trafoi, from becoming conscious in my mind. I wanted, therefore, to forget something; I had repressed something. What I wanted to forget was not, it is true, the name of the artist at Orvieto but something else—something, however, which contrived to place itself in an associative connection with his name, so that my act of will missed its target and I forgot the one thing against my will, while I wanted to forget the other thing intentionally. The disinclination to remember was aimed against one content; the inability to remember emerged in another. It would obviously be a simpler case if disinclination and inability to remember related to the same content. Moreover the substitute names no longer strike me as so entirely unjustified as they did before the matter was elucidated: by a sort of compromise they remind me just as much of what I wanted to forget as of what I wanted to remember; and they show me that my intention to forget something was neither a complete success nor a complete failure.

(e) The way in which the missing name and the repressed topic (the topic of death and sexuality, etc., in which the names of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Trafoi appeared) became linked is very striking. The schematic diagram which I have
inserted at this point, and which is repeated from the 1898 paper [Fig. 1], aims at giving a clear picture of this.

The name Signorelli has undergone a division into two pieces. One of the pairs of syllables (elli) recurs without alteration in one of the substitute names: while the other, by means of the translation of Signor into Herr, has acquired a numerous and miscellaneous set of relations to the names contained in the

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 4, Page 8

1 [In 1901 only, the sentence ended: ‘my intention to forget something was not a complete success.’]

WARNING! This text is printed for personal use of Brown. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

repressed topic, but for this reason it is not available for [conscious] reproduction. The substitute for it [for Signor] has been arrived at in a way that suggests that a displacement along the connected names of ‘Herzegovina and Bosnia’¹ had taken place, without consideration for the sense or for the acoustic demarcation of the syllables. Thus the names have been treated in this process like the pictograms in a sentence which has had to be converted into a picture-puzzle (or rebus). Of the whole course

FIG. 1

of events that have in ways like these produced the substitute names instead of the name Signorelli no information has been given to consciousness. At first sight it seems impossible to discover any relation between the topic in which the name Signorelli occurred and the repressed topic which preceded it in time, apart from this recurrence of the same syllables (or rather sequence of letters).

Perhaps it is not superfluous to remark that the conditions which psychologists assume to be necessary for reproducing and for forgetting, and which they look for in certain relations and dispositions,² are not inconsistent with the above explanation.

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 4, Page 9

1 [These two portions of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy used to be habitually spoken of together, almost as though they formed a single word.]

2 [I.e. ‘mental traces’. See Stout, 1938, 21.]
All we have done is, in certain cases, to add a *motive* to the factors that have been recognized all along as being able to bring about the forgetting of a name; and, in addition, we have elucidated the mechanism of false recollection (paramnesia). These dispositions are indispensable to our case as well, in order to make it possible for the repressed element to get hold of the missing name by association and draw it with itself into repression. In the case of another name with more favourable conditions for reproduction this perhaps would not happen. It is probable indeed that a suppressed element always strives to assert itself elsewhere, but is successful in this only when suitable conditions meet it halfway. At other times the suppression succeeds without any functional disturbance, or, as we can justly say, without any *symptom*.

The conditions necessary for forgetting a name, when forgetting it is accompanied by paramnesia, may then be summarized as follows: (1) a certain disposition for forgetting the name, (2) a process of suppression carried out shortly before, (3) the possibility of establishing an *external* association between the name in question and the element previously suppressed. The difficulty of fulfilling the last condition need probably not be rated very high, since, considering the low standards expected of an association of this kind, one could be established in the great majority of cases. There is, however, the profounder question whether an external association like this can really be a sufficient condition for the repressed element's disturbing the reproduction of the lost name—whether some more intimate connection between the two topics is not required. On a superficial consideration one would be inclined to reject the latter demand, and accept as sufficient a temporal contiguity between the two, even if the contents are completely different. On close enquiry, however, one finds more and more frequently that the two elements which are joined by an external association (the repressed element and the new one) possess in addition some connection of content; and such a connection is in fact demonstrable in the *Signorelli* example.¹

The value of the insight that we have gained in analysing the *Signorelli* example naturally depends on whether we want to

——

¹[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 4, Page 10

¹ [See the footnote below, p. 13.]

WARNING! This text is printed for personal use of Brown. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

pronounce that instance as typical or as an isolated occurrence. I must affirm, then, that the forgetting of names, accompanied by paramnesia, takes place with uncommon frequency in the way in which we have explained it in the *Signorelli* case. In almost every instance in which I could observe this phenomenon in myself, I have also been able to explain it in the way described above, i.e. as motivated by repression. I must also draw attention to another consideration which supports the typical nature of our analysis. I think there is no justification for making a theoretical separation between those cases in which the forgetting of names is accompanied by paramnesia and the sort where incorrect substitute names have not presented themselves.¹ These substitute names occur spontaneously in a number of cases; in others, where they have not emerged spontaneously, it is possible to force them to emerge by an effort of attention; and they then show the same relation to the repressed element and to the missing name as they would if they had appeared spontaneously. Two factors seem to be decisive in bringing the substitute names to consciousness: first, the effort of attention, and secondly, an inner condition that attaches to the psychical material. We might look for the latter in the greater or lesser facility with which the necessary external association between the two elements establishes itself. A good portion of the cases of name-forgetting *without* paramnesia can thus be added to the cases in which substitute names are formed — to which the mechanism of the *Signorelli* example applies. I shall however certainly not venture to affirm that all cases of name-forgetting are to be classed in the same group. There is no question that instances of it exist which are much simpler. We shall, I think, have stated the facts of the case with sufficient caution² if we affirm: *By the side of simple cases where proper names are forgotten there is a type of forgetting which is motivated by repression.*

——

¹[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 4, Page 11

¹ [Freud returns to this question in the next chapter, p. 12.]

² [In 1901 only, ‘correctly’ appears instead of ‘with sufficient caution’. — A short account of the *Signorelli* example was given by Freud in a letter to Fliess of September 22, 1898 (Freud, 1950a, Letter 96), immediately on his return to Vienna from the trip along the Dalmatian coast during which the episode occurred.]
II The Forgetting Of Foreign Words

The current vocabulary of our own language, when it confined is to the range of normal usage, seems to be protected against being forgotten. With the vocabulary of a foreign language it is notoriously otherwise. The disposition to forget it extends to all parts of speech, and an early stage in functional disturbance is revealed by the fluctuations in the control we have over our stock of foreign words—according to the general condition of our health and to the degree of our tiredness. In a number of cases this kind of forgetting exhibits the same mechanism disclosed to us by the Signorelli example. In proof of this I shall give only a single analysis, one which is distinguished, however, by some useful characteristics: it concerns the forgetting of a non-substantival word in a Latin quotation. Perhaps I may be allowed to present a full and clear account of this small incident.

Last summer—it was once again on a holiday trip—I renewed my acquaintance with a certain young man of academic background. I soon found that he was familiar with some of my psychological publications. We had fallen into conversation—how I have now forgotten—about the social status of the race to which we both belonged; and ambitious feelings prompted him to give vent to a regret that his generation was doomed (as he expressed it) to atrophy, and could not develop its talents or satisfy its needs. He ended a speech of impassioned fervour with the well-known line of Virgil's in which the unhappy Dido commits to posterity her vengeance on Aeneas: 'Exoriar ...' Or rather, he wanted to end it in this way, for he could not get hold of the quotation and tried to conceal an obvious gap in what he remembered by changing the order of the words: 'Exoriar(e) ex nostris ossibus ultor' At last he said irritably: 'Please don't look so scornful: you seem as if you were gloating over my embarrassment. Why not help me? There's something missing in the line; how does the whole thing really go?'

'I'll help you with pleasure,' I replied, and gave the quotation in its correct form: 'Exoriar(e) ALIQUIS nostris ex ossibus ultor.'

'How stupid to forget a word like that! By the way, you claim that one never forgets a thing without some reason. I should be very curious to learn how I came to forget the indefinite pronoun "aliquis" in this case.'

I took up this challenge most readily, for I was hoping for a contribution to my collection. So I said: 'That should not take us long. I must only ask you to tell me, candidly and uncritically, whatever comes into your mind if you direct your attention to the forgotten word without any definite aim.'

'Good. There springs to my mind, then, the ridiculous notion of dividing up the word like this: a and liquis'

'What does that mean?' 'I don't know.' 'And what occurs to you next?' 'What comes next is Reliquien [relics], liquefying, fluidity, fluid. Have you discovered anything so far?'

'No. Not by any means yet. But go on.'

'I am thinking', he went on with a scornful laugh, 'of Simon

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 4, Page 13
of Trent, whose relics I saw two years ago in a church at Trent. I am thinking of the accusation of ritual blood-sacrifice which is being brought against the Jews again just now, and of Kleinpaul's book [1892] in which he regards all these supposed victims as incarnations, one might say new editions, of the Saviour.'

‘The notion is not entirely unrelated to the subject we were discussing before the Latin word slipped your memory.’

‘True. My next thoughts are about an article that I read lately in an Italian newspaper. Its title, I think, was “What St. Augustine says about Women”. What do you make of that?’

‘I am waiting.’

‘And now comes something that is quite clearly unconnected with our subject.’

‘Please refrain from any criticism and’

‘Yes, I understand. I am thinking of a fine old gentleman I met on my travels last week. He was a real original, with all the appearance of a huge bird of prey. His name was Benedict, if it's of interest to you.’

‘Anyhow, here are a row of saints and Fathers of the Church: St. Simon, St. Augustine, St. Benedict. There was, I think, a Church Father called Origen. Moreover, three of these names are also first names, like Paul in Kleinpaul.’

‘Now it's St. Januarius and the miracle of his blood that comes into my mind—my thoughts seem to me to be running on mechanically.’

‘Just a moment: St. Januarius and St. Augustine both have to do with the calendar. But won't you remind me about the miracle of his blood?’

‘Surely you must have heard of that? They keep the blood of St. Januarius in a phial inside a church at Naples, and on a particular holy day it miraculously liquefies. The people attach great importance to this miracle and get very excited if it's delayed, as happened once at a time when the French were occupying the town. So the general in command—or have I got it wrong? was it Garibaldi?—took the reverend gentleman aside and gave him to understand, with an unmistakable gesture towards the soldiers posted outside, that he hoped the miracle would take place very soon. And in fact it did take place …’

‘Well, go on. Why do you pause?’

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 4, Page 15
by the subject of relics.

‘No, I'd much rather you didn't. I hope you don't take these thoughts of mine too seriously, if indeed I really had them. In return I will confess to you that the lady is Italian and that I went to Naples with her. But mayn't all this just be a matter of chance?’

‘I must leave it to your own judgement to decide whether you can explain all these connections by the assumption that they are matters of chance. I can however tell you that every case like this that you care to analyse will lead you to “matters of chance” that are just as striking.’¹

I have several reasons for valuing this brief analysis; and my

¹ [Footnote added 1924:] This short analysis has received much attention in the literature of the subject and has provoked lively discussion. Basing himself directly on it, Bleuler (1919) has attempted to determine mathematically the credibility of psycho-analytic interpretations, and has come to the conclusion that it has a higher probability value than thousands of medical ‘truths’ which have gone unchallenged, and that it owes its exceptional position only to the fact that we are not yet accustomed to take psychological probabilities into consideration in science.

WARNING! This text is printed for personal use of Brown. It is copyright to the journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to redistribute it in any form.

thanks are due to my former travelling-companion who presented me with it. In the first place, this is because I was in this instance allowed to draw on a source that is ordinarily denied to me. For the examples collected here of disturbances of a psychical function in daily life I have to fall back mainly on self-observation. I am anxious to steer clear of the much richer material provided by my neurotic patients, since it might otherwise be objected that the phenomena in question are merely consequences and manifestations of neurosis.¹ My purpose is therefore particularly well served when a person other than myself, not suffering from nervous illness, offers himself as the object of such an investigation. This analysis is significant in a further respect: it throws light on the case of a word being forgotten without a substitute for it appearing in the memory. It thus confirms my earlier assertion [p. 7] that the appearance or non-appearance in the memory of incorrect substitutes cannot be made the basis for any radical distinction.²

¹ [Cf. Freud's similar remarks on the subject of his choice of dreams for analysis in his preface to the first edition of the Interpretation of Dreams (Standard Ed., 4, xxiii).]

² Closer scrutiny somewhat diminishes the contrast between the analyses of Signorelli and of aliquid in regard to substitutive memories. In the latter example too it appears that the forgetting was accompanied by a substitutive formation. When subsequently I asked my companion whether in the course of his efforts to recall the missing word no substitute whatever came into his mind, he reported that at first he had felt a temptation to introduce an ab into the line (perhaps the detached portion of a-liquis)—nostris ab ossibus; and he went on to say that the exorare had thrust itself on him with peculiar clarity and obstinacy, ‘evidently’, he added with his characteristic scepticism, ‘because it was the first word in the line’. When I asked him to attend all the same to the associations starting from exorare, he produced exorcism. I can therefore very well believe that the intensification of exorare when it was reproduced actually had the value of a substitutive formation of this sort. This substitute would have been arrived at from the names of the saints viä the association ‘exorcism’. These however are refinements to which one need attach no importance. [The next two sentences were added in 1924:] (On the other hand Wilson, 1922, stresses the fact that the intensification of exorare is of great significance to the understanding of the case, since exorcism would be the best symbolic substitute for repressed thoughts about getting rid of the unwanted child by abortion. I gratefully accept this correction, which does not weaken the validity of the analysis.) It seems possible, however, that the appearance of any kind of substitute memory is a constant sign—even though perhaps only a characteristic and revealing sign—of tendentious forgetfulness which is motivated by repression. It would seem that substitutive formation occurs even in cases not marked by the appearance of incorrect names as substitutes, and that in these it lies in the intensification of an element that is closely related to the forgotten name. For example, in the Signorelli case, so long as the painter's name remained inaccessible, the visual memory that I had of the series of frescoes and of the self-portrait which is introduced into the corner of one of the pictures was ultra-clear—at any rate much more intense than visual memory-traces normally appear to me. In another case, also described in my 1898 paper, which concerned a visit which I was very reluctant to pay to an address in a strange town, I had forgotten the name of the street beyond all hope of recovery, but my memory of the house number, as if in derision, was ultra-clear, whereas normally I have the greatest difficulty in remembering numbers. [Cf. pp. 41 and 267, below.]
The chief importance however of the *aliquis* example lies in another of the ways in which it differs from the Signorelli specimen. In the latter, the reproducing of a name was disturbed by the after-effect of a train of thought begun just before and then broken off, whose content, however, had no clear connection with the new topic containing the name of Signorelli. Contiguity in time furnished the only relation between the repressed topic and the topic of the forgotten name; but this was enough to enable the two topics to find a connection in an external association. Nothing on the other hand can be seen in the *aliquis* example of an independent repressed topic of this sort, which had engaged conscious thinking directly before and then left its echoes in a disturbance. The disturbance in reproduction occurred in this instance from the very nature of the

---

1 I am not entirely convinced of the absence of any internal connection between the two groups of thoughts in the Signorelli case. After all, if the repressed thoughts on the topic of death and sexual life are carefully followed up, one will be brought face to face with an idea that is by no means remote from the topic of the frescoes at Orvieto. — [Dr. Richard Karpe has suggested that there may be a connection here with the visit to an Etruscan tomb near Orvieto mentioned in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), Standard Ed., 5, 454-5. See also Freud's earlier paper (1898b).]

---

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 4, Page 18

---

1 [Freud writes ‘Namervergessen’ — ‘the forgetting of names’: but this is doubtless an oversight.]

---

III The Forgetting of Names and Sets Of Words

Observations such as those mentioned above [Chapter II], of what happens when a portion of a set of words in a foreign tongue is forgotten, may make us curious to know whether the forgetting of sets of words in our own language demands an essentially different explanation. We are not usually surprised, it is true, if a formula learnt by heart, or a poem, can be reproduced only inaccurately some time later, with alterations and omissions. Since, however, this forgetting does not have a uniform effect on what has been learnt as a whole but seems on the contrary to break off isolated portions of it, it may be worth the trouble to submit to analytic investigation a few instances of such faulty reproduction.

A younger colleague of mine told me in conversation that he thought it likely that the forgetting of poetry in one's own language could very well have motives similar to the forgetting of single elements from a set of words in a foreign tongue. At the same time he offered to be the subject of an experiment. I asked him on what poem he would like to make the test, and he chose ‘Die Braut von Korinth’, a poem of which he was very fond and of which he thought he knew at least some stanzas by heart. At the beginning of his reproduction he was overcome by a rather remarkable uncertainty.