

Freud on the First World War (Part 2)

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Abstract: The article “Freud on the First World War (Part 2)” analyzes Sigmund Freud’s controversial attitude towards the First World War. It exposes Freud’s attitude towards the medical procedure known as the *faradization*, and his double role regarding the Great War. His public persona was that of a pacifist scholar, while his personal correspondence reveals a nationalist who lived from one German victory to the next. This article demonstrates there are *two Freuds* regarding the Great War. The ‘first Freud’ was his public medical persona, who lamented the partisan attitudes of scientists carried away by their emotions. The ‘second Freud’ is Freud in communication with his closest friends and colleagues, where he admits his nationalism, and he identified himself with the Austro-German side and displays a war enthusiasm. In the only study dedicated to the Great World, the study titled “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death”, Freud offered a rich and valid insight into human nature, human’s capacity for destruction, and also human’s attitude towards its own immortality. Freud draw a clear distinction between war and death, and while in the first essay he dealt with discontent and disillusionment, in the second he says that human’s unconsciousness believes in its own immortality. The article also exposes Freud’s legendary meetings with artists during the Great War, and most notably with Lou Andreas-Salomé and with Rainer Maria Rilke.

Key words: Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis. First World War, faradization, nationalism, two Freuds, *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*, the question of War, the question of Death, Lou Andreas-Salomé, Rainer Maria Rilke.

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I. The Curious Role of Freud in the Case against Doctor Julius Wagner Jauregg (War Neurotic or Malingerer?)

During the war, soldiers were tortured not only by the enemies, but also by their military commanders. The general attitude of the Austrian military doctors was to proclaim that patients were lying about their war traumas. The 'medical procedure' often consisted in prescribing so-called *faradization* (the term originated from the name of Michael Faraday, the physicist who studied electromagnetism in therapy). The traumatized soldiers were exposed to the application of faradic currents to stimulate muscles and nerves. The electrical shocks were often as painful as the actual traumas, and by critics they were regarded as *concealed military torture!* But, despite being painful, were the electric currents actually useful in healing neurotic symptoms? According to Freud, they were not.

Two decades prior to the Great War, in his book *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), Freud reported that faradization is ineffective. In the book he writes about his own usage of electrical currents in treatments of nervous disorders in one of the five clinical cases described, that of his patient *Elisabeth von R.* Freud concluded the case history with the clear assessment: electrotherapy is useless. Freud writes: 'The fact is that... electrical reactions lead nowhere' (Freud & Breuer 2000, p. 158). Although Freud was aware the electric currents 'lead nowhere', he still recommended them (Freud & Breuer 2000, p. 138):

We recommended the continuation of systematic kneading and faradization of the sensitive muscles, regardless of resulting pain, and I reserved to myself treatment of her legs with high-tension electric currents, in order to be able to keep in touch with her.

This is one of Freud's earliest mentions of electrotherapy. From the development of the case study of Elisabeth von R. we learn that Freud did not believe that electrotherapy actually works, and considered it his little 'pretence' treatment. But he still used electric shocks to achieve two things: a) By gimmicking and pretending that electrotherapy works, he wanted to continue the treatment ('to be able to keep in touch with her') because on several occasions Elisabeth von R. wanted to stop the treatments, and b) Elisabeth von R. started to like the pains caused by electroshocks so much that she forgot her own pains. Freud writes (Freud & Breuer 2000, p. 138): "She seemed to take quite a liking to the painful shocks produced by the high-tension apparatus, and

the stronger these were the more they seemed to push her own pains into the background”.

This pre-history of Freud’s opinion on electrotherapy is important because when he testified about faradization as a form of military torture, Freud surprisingly gave a radically different opinion from the one expressed in his books. Two years after the war, in 1920, Freud was asked to give his expert opinion in the case of harsh military usage of faradisation and electric shocks by doctor Julius Wagner Jauregg, the director of the Psychiatric Division at the Vienna General Hospital, and seven years later, in 1927, a Nobel Prize winner for his discovery of the fever treatment of neurosyphilis. After the war, Wagner Jauregg faced severe criticism for his advocacy and use of faradization as a form of military torture. In 1920 the Austrian War Ministry opened an enquiry, and appointed a special commission to investigate the charges against Wagner Jauregg. Although in his writings Freud dismissed the electric currents as a successful method, when called to testify in a personal appearance before the commission, Freud defended Wagner Jauregg. Freud also submitted a *Memorandum* of his expert opinion on the matter in which he distinguished two types of neuroses: the *neurosis of peace* and the *war neurosis*. The neurosis of peace is connected to disturbances of the emotional life. But the *war neurosis*, Freud now writes, should be traced back to the mere desire of soldiers to withdraw from army service (Szasz 1988, p. 88):

A soldier in whom these affective motives [to quit the service — JK] were very powerful and clearly conscious would, if he was a healthy man, have been obliged to desert or pretend to be ill. Only the smallest portion of war neurotics, however, were malingerers; the emotional impulses which rebelled in them against active service and drove them into illness were operative in them without becoming conscious to them. They remained unconscious because other motives, such as ambition, self-esteem, patriotism, the habit of obedience, and the example of others, were to start with more powerful until, on some appropriate occasion, they were overwhelmed by the other, unconscious-operating motives.

In the complicated distinction between conscious and unconscious motives, one can read what appears to be Freud’s *refusal* to recognize the war neurosis as a valid and operative diagnosis. Why this refusal? According to Thomas Szasz, Freud used the case against Wagner Jauregg as an opportunity to self-glorify his discipline. (Freud is well past halfway in his *Memorandum* before he even mentions the issue of

electric shocks or Wagner Jauregg.) Completely disregarding all medical rationality and against all the evidence of the Great War pathologies, Freud claims that soldiers who are implicated as war neurotics are *malingers* (idlers, lazy soldiers) whose basic motivation is to avoid military service. Freud's verdict is that Wagner Jauregg rightly advocated the harsh and painful faradization in order to bring the 'malingerers' back to army service (Szasz 1988, p. 89):

Since the war neurotic's illness serves the purpose of withdrawing him from an intolerable situation, the roots of the illness would clearly be undermined if it was made even more intolerable to him than active service. Just as he had fled from the war into illness, means were now adopted which compelled him to flee back from illness into health, that is to say, into fitness for active service. For this purpose, painful electrical treatments was employed, and with success.

Similarly to the military psychiatrists of his time, Freud purposely confused malingerers with war neurotics, suggesting that soldiers lie about their symptoms. The soldier's illness does not consist of actual symptoms; the illness is 'invented' in order to avoid the army. Although later in his autobiography, even Wagner Jauregg himself acknowledged that his treatments were harsh measures, Freud was not as sympathetic towards the war neurosis, and by mixing the rhetoric of illness and health, he defending the military interests, moral duties, patriotism and loyalty, instead of defending the medical interests. In the archives of the Austrian Ministry of War one can find the testimony of one of Wagner Jauregg's accusers. The soldier appeared before the commission and stated that the doctor did him harm. In the public hearing, as we shall see below, Freud refuted the testimony and said that Wagner Jauregg acted out of 'his humaneness'. The doctor's only 'guilt', Freud says, is that he was not direct and transparent in telling the soldier he was a liar who just wanted to avoid military service, that he was not a war neurotic. If Wagner Jauregg had used Freudian psychoanalysis, he would have told the patient that he was 'not ill', that he falsified the illness, and Wagner Jauregg missed the opportunity to expose the patient as a liar, as a war malingerer! The stenographic transcript goes as follows (Szasz 1988, p. 91):

PROF. FREUD: I believe that Hofrat Wagner caused this [the patient's antagonism towards himself], in part, by reason of the fact that he did not avail himself of my therapy. I don't demand of him that he do so; I cannot possibly demand it of him; even my own students cannot do it.

PROF. WAGNER: I used disciplinary treatment, which was very much recommended, instead of persuading him that he is not ill.

PROF. FREUD: Your treatment had no success here; it only brought him to misunderstand the doctor's intentions. Well, I have overstepped my duty as an expert witness, but I have stated the impressions I gained from the deliberations.

CHAIRMAN: The expert expresses the point of view that he would have found it correct to give psychoanalytical treatment.

PROF. FREUD: In this case, yes.

Freud not only altered the commission's agenda and used the opportunity to promote psychoanalysis, as Thomas Szasz writes, but he also implicitly questioned the existence of war neurosis as a valid diagnosis, in order to promote his method of healing. Freud did not even care to speak about the potential benefits or risks of electric shocks; his agenda was to rank psychoanalysis higher than other methods, even if the price to be paid was to expose all soldiers as malingerers by default. For the historical record, Freud equally distrusted all other methods of healing (hydrotherapy, diets, hypnosis, etc.), not just electrotherapy. After the war, in 1919 in his preface to Theodor Reik's book *Ritual: Four Psychoanalytic Studies*, Freud wrote (Reik 1962, p. 7): "Psychoanalysis was born out of medical necessity. It sprung from the need for bringing help to neurotic patients, who had found no relief through rest-cures, through the arts of hydrotherapy or through electricity".

Freud proposed that psychoanalysis is the only answer to traumas. He considered the trauma as something that affects the psyche, not the soma. Despite millions of people with actual physical and psychological wounds as a direct result of the war, Freud insisted that all stress is caused by an emotional stressor. And curiously Freud was not alone in this reserved attitude towards war neurosis and shell shock diagnoses. In his posthumously published autobiography (1983), Emil Kraepelin, one of the most influential psychiatrists of the nineteenth and twentieth century, also warned about the 'excessively liberal' (Kraepelin 1987, p. 189) use of the terms, which led to generous pensions, public sympathy, and retroactively only prolonged the distress, the endless grief and further damaged society. Kraepelin's comments triggered further controversies about the actual status of the *war neu-*

rosis, and only proved that the Great War was a difficult ordeal for medical science in general.

II. Freud's Personal Opinion about the Great War (On Freud's 'War Enthusiasm')

All my libido is given to Austro-Hungary
(Jones 1961, p. 336)

This is a well known sentence attributed to Freud regarding the First World War. It is quoted by his biographer, Ernest Jones, from the letter Freud sent to Karl Abraham. Although Ernest Jones was much criticized for presenting an over-positive and acclamatory portrayal of Freud in his three volumes *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (1952–1957), Jones's portrait of Freud during the First World War provides a picture that is less sympathetic than the rest of the pages dedicated to other aspects of Freud's life and work. The sentence was quoted numerous times in various books. For the sake of historical evidence, the Freud's letter written to Karl Abraham on 2 August 1914, just five days after the beginning of the First World War on 28 July 1914 (for the researchers, the letter is referenced as '239 F'), actually reads as follows: At the time of my writing the great war can be regarded as certain; I should be with it with all my heart if I did not know England to be on the wrong side (Brunner 2001, p. 112).

Freud was 58 when the Great War broke out. His immediate response to the war was not one expected by a pacifist scholar; Freud did not greet the war with horror, as many others did; instead, he displayed "youthful enthusiasm" (Jones 1961, p. 336), Jones writes. For the first time in 30 years Freud felt himself to be an Austrian; he felt that Vienna was not a foreign city to him any longer. Since the Austro-Hungarian army had no victories of its own, Freud lived from one German victory to the next (Brunner 2001, p. 112); he was carried away by Germany's role in the war; he talked about 'our battles' and 'our victories', and (as obvious from the letter to Abraham), he was concerned that England was on the wrong side of the war. When in December 1914 Freud was offered a place of asylum in Baltimore by the American psychoanalyst Trigant Burrow, he declined. Freud's three sons joined the Central Powers: his eldest son Martin went to war in July 1914 as a gunner fighting in Galicia and Russia, his youngest son Ernst was fighting in Italy, and his other son Oliver was engaged in engineering work, constructing war tunnels and barracks. In

the 1919 edition of his masterpiece *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud added the acknowledgement in which he explained that in one of his dreams during the war he dreamt that one of his sons was alive but wounded. Freud analyzed his dream as envy for his sons' youth. Freud (Freud 2010, p. 526) writes:

Deeper analysis... enabled me to discover... the concealed impulse... which might have found satisfaction in the dreaded accident to my son: it was envy which is felt for the young by those who have grown old, but which they believe they have completely stifled.

There exists an extensive psychoanalytical literature explaining how the maturing of one's own children into adulthood shatters the sense of perpetual youth "because identification of the childhood self with young children is no longer possible" (Colarusso & Nemiroff 1994, p. 319). But, Freud's 1914 dreams can be read beyond just the envy for his sons' youth. Freud was experiencing what we could call 'the war joy'. Psychoanalysis was among several important forerunners of the concepts of individual and collective traumas, and the war offered endless opportunities to study them. Excited, but also disconcerted, Freud and his circle to a great extent ignored the political implications of the war. As Jones writes, they were *slow* to apprehend the gravity of the international situation (Jones 1961, p. 336), and as Schwartz writes, they were not good "at questioning the political and military goals of the war itself!" (Schwartz 2010, p. 198). For the first time, Freud was able to witness the full dimensions of the ruthless promiscuity of destruction. In Freud's private correspondence we find a multitude of mixed sentiments (the perverted pleasure that his theories about human destructiveness are true, the fascination with human nature, envy of youth, etc.), but we cannot find the expected disgust with the war. By his own admission to Ferenczi, he spent 1916 reading up to four newspapers a day, and even in 1917, Freud was still writing to Ferenczi: I am, strange to say, quite well in all of this, and my mood is unshaken. Proof of how little basis one needs for this (Falzeder & Brabant 1996, p. 186.). José Brunner comments that throughout the war, Freud managed 'to separate his personal sentiments from the public medical persona as disinterested observer of universal human affairs' (Brunner 2001, p. 111), and it took him 'a rather long time — until May 1917 — to call the war a "disaster [Unglück]' and to start longing for peace" (Falzeder & Brabant 1996, p. 112). Publicly Freud worked hard to retain the image of a cool, objective scientist, a 'pure'

analyst outside of the sphere of war, the absent third party. Much of this was the result of his true dedication to his science, but some of it was a good 'cover up' for his lack of political awareness.

Freud did not volunteer to serve in the war, like many other doctors, and instead he spent the war years in Vienna. During and after the war Vienna suffered from inflation that destroyed the middle class, and lots of people were starving. The circumstances of war did not bypass Freud's life. Two things Freud that hated most throughout his life — helplessness and poverty — became everyday reality for him. In October 1914 Freud had two patients, both of them Hungarian aristocrats, and in November 1914 he was left with one patient. The Vienna psychoanalytical society, established by Freud, stopped its regular weekly meetings. Part of Freud's preoccupation during the war was to preserve the continuity of his psychoanalytic publications, and he managed to keep *Zeitschrift* and *Imago* running throughout the war, but the journal *Jahrbuch* never appeared again after 1914 (Jones 1961, p. 342). As other citizens of Vienna, Freud had difficulty procuring food; his study could not be heated, and all scientific writing had to be given up in the winter months. Freud's family was still better off for food than most Viennese because of the constant financial efforts of Ferenczi and Anton von Freund (a doctor of philosophy and a wealthy director of a beer brewery in Budapest). Both men (mis)used their military position to help Freud; Anton von Freund financially helped Freud to establish an independent publishing firm, *Verlag* (Jones 1961, p. 350) and in 1918 he donated a sum of almost two million crowns for the advancement of psychoanalysis, which Freud called 'the overpayment worthy of note' (Falzeder 2015, p. 125).

The Great War marked what is today known as the second period of Freud's writing. The lack of patients meant more time for writing, and Freud's productivity grew significantly in 1914 and 1915. In 1915 Freud completed *seven* of some of his most important studies: *Mourning and Melancholia*, *The Unconscious*, *Repression*, the case history of the *Wolf Man* (published in 1918), *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*, *The Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams* and the twin essay *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*. During 1916 and 1917 Freud delivered 28 lectures at the University of Vienna which he published in 1918 as *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. The book had 717 pages, equal to Freud's printed production in all three previous war years. With the end of the war, Jones tells us that Freud's practice had revived and in 1918 he was treating nine or ten patients a

day. Freud's family did not sustain losses in the war and his two sons came home safely. After the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Freud once again resumed his regular lament that his discipline would be forgotten, and psychoanalysts would no longer be needed as during the war. In a letter to Ferenczi (Falzeder & Brabant 1996, p. 311), Freud writes:

No sooner does it begin to interest the world on account of the war neuroses than the war ends, and once we find a source that affords us monetary resources, it has to dry up immediately. But hard luck is one of the constants of life. Our kingdom is indeed not of this world.

III. Freud on Death

(Thoughts for the Times on War and Death)

In 1915, six months after the outbreak of the war, Freud wrote his only study dedicated exclusively to the Great War. The study was a set of twin essays entitled *Thoughts for the Time of War and Death*. But immediately upon finishing it, in a letter to Abraham, Freud dismissed his work as “a piece of topical chit-chat [*zeitgemäßes Gewäsch*] about war and death to keep the self-sacrificing publisher happy” (Brunner 2001, p. 112). As pointed out above, in the matter of the war two different versions of Freud can be seen: a public and a private one.

This article demonstrates there are *two Freuds* regarding the Great War. The ‘first Freud’ is his public medical persona, who laments the partisan attitudes of scientists carried away by their emotions, a Freud who sees the war as the greatest discontent and disillusionment for the human race. His study *Thoughts for the Time of War and Death* is written by the ‘first Freud’. The ‘second Freud’ is Freud in communication with his closest friends and colleagues, where he admits his nationalism, he identifies with the Austro-German side, he displays a silly war enthusiasm, and he even defends military torture performed by his colleagues, as we saw in previous sections of this article. But, despite Freud's private nationalism, the study *Thoughts for the Time of War and Death* remains a valid and rich insight into human nature, our capacity for destruction, about how war alters our attitude to death, and the study offers a complex theory of human aggression. Eric Fromm argues that the First World War ‘constitutes the dividing line within the development of Freud's theory of aggressivity’ (Dufresne 2000, p. 29). Freud's study incorporates the themes of death, loss and destruction into his analysis of culture and is today regarded as

the earliest precursor of his most important and widely read work, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930).

The title of the study *Thoughts for the Time of War and Death* suggests that Freud wanted to draw a clear *distinction* between war and death (Drassinower 2003, p. 15). The *first essay* about war deals with discontent and disillusionment with the human race, and the *second essay* addresses the problem of death. Freud makes a clear distinction between war and death, because as he says: *two problems* occur as a result of war. The first and 'less' problematic is that disillusionment with civilization occurs in war; war destroys all the precious and common possessions of humanity, including artistic and scientific achievements; war brings humanity to its lowest level. But, the second and much larger problem, according to Freud, is that war alters our attitude towards death! The following sections offer a reading and summary of Freud's seminal work relating to the Great War.

1. The Problem of War

Freud distinguishes several aspects of war, which contribute to the disillusionment with the human race: a) the clash between technology and humanity, b) disillusionment in ideas of goodness, c) war showcases the brutality of humans, d) destruction is paradoxically greater in knowledgeable people and in more advanced civilizations, e) war results in the passivization of communities, f) war introduces greater tension between society and instincts, and g) war upsets the balance between good and evil.

Freud says that the increased perfection of weapons of attack and defense makes the Great War 'more bloody and more destructive than any war of other days'; war 'disregards all the restrictions known as International Law', and it 'ignores the prerogatives of the wounded and the medical service' (Freud 2000). Further, Freud says, people act 'as though there were to be no future and no peace among men after it is over'. The war cuts all the common bonds between nations and, paradoxically, it appears that the more civilized the community is, the more 'barbaric' it appears to be. Another problem is that due to the cruelty of the war, communities are being anaesthetized, and they 'no longer raise objections'. According to Freud (Freud 2000, p. 3072):

When the community no longer raises objections, there is an end, too, to the suppression of evil passions, and men perpetrate deeds of cruelty, fraud, treachery and barbarity so incompatible with their level of civilization that one would have thought them impossible.

War brings 'low morality shown externally by states', but also the 'brutality shown by individuals'. How do we imagine the process by which an individual becomes brutal? Freud says that even though we believe that people are 'noble from birth', and that human development consists in 'eradicating the evil human tendencies', in reality 'there is no such thing as 'eradicating' evil'! The psychoanalytical material, says Freud, demonstrated that the *deepest essence* of human nature consists of 'instinctual impulses which are of an elementary nature'. War perfectly demonstrates that people's earliest instincts are never forgotten, they are present, only war makes them visible, active again. This explains what Freud calls *the mystery of hatred*, when whole communities 'hate and detest one another'. War makes people 'all of a sudden behave without insight, like imbeciles', says Freud, which causes the re-establishment of primitive stages of being and regresses in civilization. Societies obey their passions far more readily than their interests, and because instincts are 'easily rationalized' the war nations rationalize the instincts of people.

These impulses 'in themselves are neither good nor bad'; according to Freud, the impulses which society classifies or condemns as evil, selfish or cruel are 'inhibited' in all people, and they never change into altruism, or 'cruelty into pity'. Freud gives example of the most common pair: intense love and intense hatred are to be found together in the same person, and the 'two opposed feelings not infrequently have the same person for their object'. For Freud the instincts are not formed from the beginning, they change with time (Freud 2000, p. 3074):

Those who as children have been the most pronounced egoists may well become the most helpful and self-sacrificing members of the community; most of our sentimentalists, friends of humanity and protectors of animals have been evolved from little sadists and animal-tormentors.

The transformation of 'bad' instincts is brought about by the human need for love, and according to Freud, we learn to value being loved as an advantage, for which we are willing to transform the egoistic trends into altruistic and socially acceptable attitudes. People incline to turn their egoism into altruism because of the 'benefits in the way of love' and because of 'rewards and punishments'. This means that for Freud, humans are neither good nor bad. People are generally inclined to appraise people as 'better' than they actually are, or in his

words (Freud 2000, p. 3074): “A human being is seldom altogether good or bad; he is usually ‘good’ in one relation and ‘bad’ in another, or ‘good’ in certain external circumstances and in others decidedly ‘bad’”.

The actions of people are regarded as good or bad only in relation to the current cultural point of view, and for Freud good actions are not an outcome of good impulses. People ‘choose’ to behave well for their private, selfish purposes. From the cultural standpoint it does not matter if people are selfish or altruistic as long as they are culturally acceptable. Theoretically speaking, one cannot even distinguish between good and bad impulses. In the book *Psychoanalysis and Faith* (1963) one can find an exchange of letters between Freud and a Swiss Lutheran minister and lay psychoanalyst, Oskar Pfister. Just before the end of the war, in his letter to Pfister from October 1918, Freud writes (Heinrich & Ernst 1963, pp. 61–62):

I do not break my head very much about good and evil, but I have found little that is ‘good’ about human beings on the whole. In my experience most of them are trash, no matter whether they publicly subscribe to this or that ethical doctrine or to none at all.

2. *The Problem of Death*

War is devastating, says Freud, but not only because of the destruction of all common possessions of humanity. More distressing and alarming for Freud is that war alters our understanding of death! Freud opens his essay with the thesis that people do not regard death as something natural, quite the opposite: ‘death seems unnatural to people’. Of course, people ‘know’ that death is a necessary outcome of life, but they are accustomed to behave as if death does not exist. According to psychoanalysis, people tend to eliminate death from life, because for our unconscious we are immortal, and could imagine our own death only as spectators. Freud writes (Freud 1914, p. 3088):

Our unconscious does not believe in its own death; it behaves as if it were immortal. What we call our ‘unconscious’ — the deepest strata of our minds, made up of instinctual impulses — knows nothing that is negative... it does not know its own death.

While we consider ourselves immortal, we have no problem acknowledging death in strangers or enemies. In fact, we humans tend to ‘get rid of anyone who stands in our way’, and of anyone who has offended or injured us. Freud says: ‘Our unconscious will murder even

for trifles... If we are to be judged by our unconscious wishful impulses, we ourselves are, like primeval man, a gang of murderers' (Freud 1914, p. 3089). Acknowledging other people's death mean that we somehow are 'aware' that death exists. That is why, Freud says, civilized people invented all kinds of rituals to speak of death considerately. When someone dies, we adopt a special attitude towards the deceased, a kind of 'admiration'; we are 'always deeply affected', and most importantly we 'lay stress on the fortuitous causation of the death — accident, disease, infection, or advanced age' (Freud 1914, p. 3082). We do this in order to reduce death from a necessity to a 'chance event'! However, there are three categories of people who do talk about death without the restrictions: a) Children, who could say unashamedly: 'Dear Mummy, when you're dead I'll do this or that' (Freud 1914, p. 3082). b) Doctors and lawyers who 'deal with death professionally', and c) Artists, who talk about death in their works of fiction, as a way for humans to 'reconcile ourselves with death'. But war changes our perspective on death. War sweeps away the conventional treatment of death. What is disturbed in war is ethical striving. Freud writes (Freud 1914, p. 3083):

(In war) people really die; and no longer one by one, but many, often tens of thousands, in a single day. And death is no longer a chance event. To be sure, it still seems a matter of chance whether a bullet hits this man or that; but a second bullet may well hit the survivor; and the accumulation of deaths puts an end to the impression of chance.

War means that death is no longer a 'chance event'. What is disturbed in war is ethical striving. War means that people are allowed to kill, and war, says Freud, invalidates the most important prohibition made by religion: 'Thou shalt not kill'. The commandment itself, for Freud, is the strongest proof that humanity springs from endless generations of murderers. In his study *Totem and Taboo* (1913) published just one year prior the First World War, following Darwin, Freud says that the primal crime of mankind is *patricide*, the killing of the primal father by the horde. The commandment was produced as a force which would stop people from killing.

How to justify killing? War introduces the concept of heroism, and for Freud the secret of heroism, its rationale, rests on a judgement that the subjects' own life is so precious that they have to kill in order to acknowledge their immortality. The primitive races invented various

rituals in which they had to atone for the murders they committed in war; the rituals helped them express their 'bad conscience about the bloodguilt' (Freud 1914, p. 3087). But civilized men, says Freud, have lost their ethical sensitivity, and that is another reason for the vast number of traumas related to the Great War. In times of war, Freud says, the dichotomy of love-hate is annihilated, and it forces people to believe they are heroes who cannot die, while they murder others, whose death is desired. In the same year Freud wrote the study *On Narcissism* (1914); here he considered narcissism to be the libidinal aspect of egoism, and assumed that aggression was an integral part of the complex of self-preservation. In his later theory the wish to live became part of the vast complex of Eros, in opposition to Thanatos.

IV. Instead of a Conclusion

Two of the most legendary meetings and exchanges Freud had with artists regarding the Great War were with Lou Andreas-Salomé and Rainer Maria Rilke. In the letter to Andreas-Salomé from November 1914 Freud writes (Unwerth 2005, p. 9):

I have no doubt that humanity will get over this war, but I know for certain that I and my contemporaries will see the world cheerful no more... My secret conclusion is: since we can only regard the highest present civilization as burdened with an enormous hypocrisy, it follows that we are organically unfitted for it. We have to abdicate, and the Great Unknown, He or It, lurking behind Fate will someday repeat this experiment with another race.

Freud met Rainer Maria Rilke in the autumn of 1914, when Rilke was training for military service in Vienna. In her book *Time*, Eva Hoffman (Hoffman 2009, p. 113) describes their meeting and conversation as follows:

During a brief walk which has entered literary history, Freud met Rainer Maria Rilke — a poet who experienced a terror of mortality and who disconsolately felt that, ultimately, they had no value; they didn't count. Not so, responded Freud. It is the transience of nature and human beings — of the loved human face — that gives them their poignant significance; it is because we know all things living shall pass that we cherish them.

Sigmund Freud concluded his only study dedicated to the Great War, *Thoughts for the Time of War and Death* (1915), with the following enigmatic passage (Freud 1914, p. 3091):

To tolerate life remains, after all, the first duty of all living beings. Illusion becomes valueless if it makes this harder for us. We recall the old saying: If you want to preserve peace, arm for war. It would be in keeping with the times to alter it: If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death.

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