

Letter from Sigmund Freud to Stefan Zweig, June 2, 1932

Sigmund Freud

Vienna, Hohe Warte¹
June 2, 1932

Dear Stefan Zweig

Whenever a work of mine is published I feel reluctant for a long time to give it any further thought. I should be sorry if this were true for you too, for I intend to draw your attention back to that book² of yours, a third of which you devoted to me and my work.

A friend of mine who has recently been in Venice found in a bookshop there the Italian translation of *Mental Healers*, and made me a present of it. As a result I reread parts of your essay and discovered on page 272 an error of representation which cannot be looked upon as unimportant and which, if you don't mind my saying so, actually belittles my merit. It declares that Breuer's patient under hypnosis made the confession of having experienced and suppressed certain "*sentimenti illeciti*" (i.e., of a sexual nature) while sitting at her father's sickbed. In reality she said nothing of the kind; rather she indicated that she was trying to conceal from her father her agitated condition, above all her tender concern. If things had been as your text maintains, then everything else

- 412 -

would have taken a different turn. I would not have been surprised by the discovery of sexual etiology, Breuer would have found it more difficult to refute this theory, and if hypnosis could obtain such candid confessions, I probably would never have abandoned it.

What really happened with Breuer's patient I was able to guess later on, long after the break in our relations, when I suddenly remembered something Breuer had once told me in another context before we had begun to collaborate and which he never repeated. On the evening of the day when all her symptoms had been disposed of, he was summoned to the patient again, found her confused and writhing in abdominal cramps. Asked what was wrong with her, she replied: "Now Dr. B.'s child is coming!"

At this moment he held in his hand the key that would have opened the "doors to the Mothers,"³ but he let it drop. With all his great intellectual gifts there was nothing Faustian in his nature. Seized by conventional horror he took flight and abandoned the patient to a colleague. For months afterwards she struggled to regain her health in a sanatorium.

I was so convinced of this reconstruction of mine that I published it somewhere. Breuer's youngest daughter (born shortly after the above-mentioned treatment, not without significance for the deeper connections!) read my account and asked her [father](#) about it (shortly before his death). He confirmed my version, and she informed me about it later.

Very sincerely yours
Freud