Into the Wilds of Psychoanalysis

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After seeing how a diverse group of Mexican readers responded to psychoanalytic theories, we will now explore Freud's ideas about Mexico, a country he never visited but one which occupied an important place in the Austrian imagination. But before considering the adult Freud's vision of this country, we will discuss his first encounter, as an adolescent, with the Spanish-speaking world.

Few of Freud's disciples knew that their mentor could speak, read, and write Spanish. It was a well-kept secret, one that Freud would occasionally divulge, but only under the right circumstances: when his translator sent him the first Spanish versions of his books; when a young Peruvian forwarded a copy of the first psychoanalytic book published in Latin America; when a Mexican judge mailed him an article on psychoanalysis and the law. In all of these cases, Freud avowed he could read Spanish, usually with a mixture of surprise and joy, like a little boy revealing his aptitude at an exotic sport: "In my youth," he wrote to one of his Latin American disciples in 1934, "I had the pleasure of learning your beautiful language, and thus I'm in the position to appreciate [your article]." On each of these rare occasions, Freud marveled at his own ability to understand a tongue so far removed from his everyday life and seems to have experienced a moment of derealization — much like when, in 1904, upon visiting the Acropolis for the first time, he had trouble acknowledging that the magnificent site before his eyes was indeed real.
But how did Freud learn Spanish? And when did he get to use it? This was a language that occupied a very special place in Freud's affective life: unlike the other languages he knew—German, French, English, and, like most cultured Europeans in his time, Latin and Greek—Spanish was a private language employed exclusively for the rituals of a playful secret society.

Freud learned Spanish as a teenager, when he was about fifteen years old. In a letter to Martha Bernays, the girl who would later become his wife, he tells the story of this curious linguistic enterprise: he studied without a teacher, along with one of his friends from the Vienna Gymnasium, a Romanian boy his own age named Eduard Silberstein. The two schoolboys shared a fascination for Cervantes, a rich imagination, and a gift for languages. With the help of a language textbook, they taught themselves Spanish.

From the very beginning, Spanish was a language of fantasy for the two boys: they formed an “Academia Española,” a secret society devoted to the use of Castilian. Though the Academy had no members other than the two boys, it possessed an impressive bureaucratic structure: bylaws, articles, rules, official documents, and even a wax seal, featuring the initials “AE.”

Soon after they met, Eduard left Vienna to study in Leipzig, and the two boys began to exchange letters. Their missives were supposed to be written entirely in Spanish, “the official language of the Academia Española,” but they often slipped and wrote in German. Their multilingual correspondence continued for almost a decade, until the two reached their mid-twenties and life took them in very different directions. Only Freud’s letters survived, and in 1989 they were published by Walter Bochlic in an annotated edition. Since then, the volume has been translated into English, French, Italian, and Spanish, though the letters themselves have received scant scholarly attention.

The Academia Española was a game, and most of the letters exchanged between the two boys reveal an extremely imaginative psychic life. They did not sign the letters as Sigmund and Eduard, but as “Cipión” and “Berganza,” the names of the canine protagonists in “The Colloquy of the Dogs,” one of Cervantes’s Exemplary Novels. Freud took the name of Cipión, and began his missives with the salutation “¿Querido Berganza?” In some letters, his signature, “Cipión,” was followed by either “p.e.h.d.S.,” shorthand for “perro en el hospital de Sevilla,” (dog in the hospital of Seville) an allusion to the setting of Cervantes’s tale, or “m.d.I.A.E.” (“miembro de la Academia Española,” member of the Spanish Academy).°

The letters are written in an extremely curious style: they employ archaic terms like “Vuestra Merced,” borrowed from Cervantes’s seventeenth-century texts, that seem almost campy when used by teenage boys in the 1870s; they feature an unusual form of broken Spanish: grammatically accurate for the most part, but full of strange unidiomatic expressions that read as literal translations from the German. In a postcard written on December 12, 1871, for instance, Freud tells Eduard: “Le ruego a Vm., que viene mañana debajo a la séptima clase, porque no habrá tiempo de venir a él / Quedo su atento servidor / Cipión.”° The American edition renders this request as “I beg Your Honor to go down to the seventh class tomorrow, as I shan’t have the time to go to it. / I remain your devoted servant / Cipión,” an English approximation that evokes the archaic tone of Freud’s language, but sacrifices a number of fascinating features of the original Spanish: Freud translated the German verb “herunterszukommen” literally as “venir debajo” (to come below), and then transposed German syntax—including the splitting of separable prefixes—into Spanish. He wrote without a dictionary, and when he was at a loss for the right term, he invented curious neologisms by taking German words and giving them Spanish

**FIGURE 5.1** Wax seal of the Academia Española. © Sigmund Freud Copyrights. Image courtesy Library of Congress.

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Chapter 5 | Freud’s Spanish
endings. In one letter he writes: "yo no he enviado arco de geigolina, como V. pedía en su carta [I have not sent a geigolina bow, as you requested]." Geigolina is not a Spanish word, but its meaning becomes clear when we think of "Geige," the German word for violin.

Playful is certainly the best characterization of the letters. The entire project of the Academia Española was an elaborate literary game, and Freud never missed an opportunity to extend the rule. During a trip to England to visit relatives, he signed a letter to Eduard as "perro en la isla de Inglaterra [dog in the Isle of England]." In another, he promises making their correspondence even more Spanish by "translating" the names of all Austrian and German cities into Castilian equivalents: Germany would become "the Seville hospital," Berlin would appear as Madrid, and the Romanian port of Brăila as Cadiz (even before implementing this rule, Freud had routinely referred to Freiberg as "Montelibe" in his letters).

At one point the boys began altering generic idiomatic expressions to make them more Spanish—and more undecipherable. "Members of the Spanish Academy," Freud wrote Eduard in one letter, "must never say that somebody 'has died,' but rather that he has departed from Seville." In the world of the Academy, even life and death had to be given Spanish inflections. Spanish words and Castilian place names allowed the two boys to communicate in a coded language that no one else could understand.

Occasionally, the friends would break the cardinal rule of the Academy requiring that all correspondence be written in Spanish, and dabble in other tongues. In an 1871 postcard, Freud uses Latin to complain about a terrible toothache ("Magnis doloribus me dientes afficient atque - pravissima teneam, impediunt," [a great pain in my teeth afflicts me to the point of impeding me from keeping my promise] he quips), and in another letter he gossips about another boy's arrogance in both Spanish and Italian, telling Eduard that the snob "Saludaba de un dedo... Salutava d'un dito." One of the last letters is written entirely in English: it opens with "My dear Edward," and closes with the haughty admonishment that "Wonderful! is an exclamation of ignorance and not the acknowledgement of a miracle." Other letters include Greek words: a zoological dissection is characterized as a "zooteknos," or beast-killing science.

Freud played not only with a palette of languages, but also with the form of the letters he sent to Eduard. He often described the Spanish Academy as a type of edifice, and one of his longer epistles is structured like a house divided into three textual floors (including a "first floor" assigned to "literary and friendly correspondence in general and of our own in particular"). And once he composed a short message about school meetings as a papal bull titled "bulla 'no podemos' presente cadaver." Freud, like a typical adolescent, seems to be trying out different identities: one day he could be a Spaniard; the next, a Greek speaker... an architect, or even His Holiness the Pope!

A number of letters are written in a mixture of Spanish and German, a curious Spandwich combining the vocabulary and syntax of both languages. We find a telling example of this curious bilingualism in Freud's account of his interest in a girl named Gisela Fluss, a young girl from Freiberg whom Freud met around 1872:

Ich muß bedauern, meine Kraft verteilte zu haben, und wie das nicht wiederholt
was in meinem Tagebuche ohnedies steht. Deshalb will ich nur sagen, que
be tomando inclinacion para la mayor llamada Gisela que partiré mañana y esa
ausencia me devolvera una firmeza de la conducta que hasta aqui no se cono-
ciido... Und nun, ich bin des trockenen Tones satt, ist das Leben nicht eines
der sonderbarsten Dinge, die auf der Welt existieren?10

[I regret that I have divided my forces and do not intend to repeat what is, in
any case, recorded in my diary, so let me just say, that I took a fancy to the eldest,
by the name of Gisela, who leaves tomorrow, and that her absence will give me
back a sense of security about my behavior that I have not had up to now... And
now—I have had enough of this dry tone—isn't life one of the strangest things
in the world?]11

In this letter German and Spanish serve different purposes: German conveys
abstract ideas, rational thoughts, and philosophical questions ("I have divided
my forces," "isn't life one of the strangest things in the world?"); Spanish, on
the other hand, expresses affect; it is the language of love and attraction. The
sole mention of Gisela causes Freud to switch from German to Spanish, mid-
sentence. The first clause, "let me just say," a rhetorical expression that by it-
self lacks affective content, is written in German, while the second, detailing
Freud's feelings for Gisela, is in Spanish: "Deshalb wir ich nur sagen que he
tomado inclinacion por la mayor llamada Guiseva," Spanish was the language of the "inclinacion" that dare not say its German name.
These early Freudian texts raise a number of questions that I propose to tackle in this chapter: why would two German-speaking boys choose Spanish as the "official language" for their correspondence? Why did they base their literary game on "The Colloquy of the Dogs," one of the most difficult and arcane of Cervantine novellas? And, above all, what did Spanish mean to Freud, who would grow up to develop a theory in which everything, from dreams to involuntary ticks, is overdetermined with unconscious meanings and affective content?

The few psychoanalysts who have written about Freud's correspondence with Eduard Silberstein have focused on a rather obscure detail: a reference found in several letters to a person the two boys call "Ichtyosaura," a prehistoric animal that the Oxford English Dictionary defines as "an extinct marine reptile of the Mesozoic era resembling a dolphin," and which appears as the protagonist of "Der Ichtyosaurus," a comic poem by the nineteenth-century author Joseph Victor von Scheffel. Several critics, starting with Ernest Jones and continuing with Kurt Eissler and Walter Boehlich, have argued that this was a code name for Gisela Fluss. The letters to Eduard, they argue, document his first adolescent love—or at least his first youthful infatuation.

Other scholars, including Angela Ackermann Pilarí, the Argentinian critic who edited the Spanish edition of the Freud-Silberstein letters, disagree with Jones's insistence on reading "Ichtyosaura" as a pet name for Gisela Fluss, and claim that there is no evidence to support his assertion.

In any case, scholars have exaggerated the importance of both Gisela Fluss and Ichtyosaura in the letters. A careful reading of these documents does not uncover a fascination with Gisela Fluss—or with any other girl, for that matter. It is true that Freud wrote Eduard he fancied Gisela Fluss—but he told his inclination para la mayor llamada Guisela—but we should not make too much of this declaration: Freud himself acknowledged that he had no intention of ever acting on his "inclination" for Gisela: "Instead of approaching her," he wrote Eduard, "I have held back, and nobody, not even she, knows any more about it." Freud's fancy for Gisela seems no more real than the papal bulls or academic bylaws he composed for Eduard: it was merely a rhetorical game, much like Renaissance sonnets, in which the loved one is merely an excuse to devise a literary composition.

So much for Gisela. Ichtyosaura, on the other hand, inspired one of the most elaborate creations of the Academia Española. In 1873 Freud and Eduard composed a "Hochzeitscarmen," an epilaleum about the marriage of Ichtyosaura, signed "by a Homerian of the Academia Española." Boehlich reads this poem as evidence that Freud was truly in love with the girl concealed behind the saurian pseudonym, and was heartbroken when she married another man. "All his concealed sorrow," Boehlich writes, "was nothing compared with the sorrow of this separation." But we just have to read the poem to realize that, regardless of the true identity of Ichtyosaura, Freud did not write to express pain or disappointment. The "Hochzeitscarmen" is a mock epic, presenting a parodic portrait of the bride, her groom, and the wedding. It opens with the following verses:

Sing me, oh Muse, the praises of Ichtyosaura communis,
Once great in the Lias and other Formations,
The Academia so bright an example.
That for her presence they offered a prize.

The epic tone suggests the poem will intone a celebration of Ichtyosaura and an ode to her accomplishments, but after a few grandiloquent verses, the language drops to a parodic register, as we can see in the following description of her body:

Not too large was her stature, unlike the poplar's,
Spherical she appeared and gloriously rounded,
Rounded her face, wittily sparkling her eyes,
Rounded her girth, and if the poet be free
To probe with a curious eye what is normally hidden from view,
He will find the sphere's principle pervading the forms.
Blessed night reveals to the fortunate groom.

The poor Ichtyosaura was not only plump but also cursed with voluminous buttocks!

The "Hochzeitscarmen" includes other details about Ichtyosaura that are equally unflattering: she butchers the French language ("Heard her stammer the tongue of the Gauls through proudly full lips"); and her only talents are mending socks ("To the clicking of needles the stocking soon grows in her..."
hands") and slicing fish ("Nimbly she cuts through the herring and laves it in water"). The poem concludes with a blessing of sorts—or is it a curse?—on the newlyweds: "And so may they both live out their allotted span. / Like the insects and worms that inhabit the earth. / Blessed with splendiferous digestion and lungs. / Never plagued by the spirits, such is the Academia’s wish."

Boehlich performs an impressive display of hermeneutic acrobatics in arguing that the "Hochzeitscarmen" betrays Freud’s intense pain and disappointment at losing Gisela to another man, but most readers will surely find that the caricature of a plump, sock-mending and kosher-observant saurian beast is a jovial, playful tale that could not be further away from the narcissistic wounds evoked by this critic.30

Freud’s choice of a beastly nickname for Ichthyosauria shows that the young man did not think too highly of the girl who inspired the poem. The Ichthyosauria, Webster’s Third International Dictionary of the English Language tells us, were "an order of Mesozoic marine reptiles most abundant in the Lias, having an ichthyoid body, elongated snout, short neck, dorsal and caudal fins, limbs modified into paddles by the flattening of the bones, multiplication of the phalanges and addition from one to four digits, eyes very large and protected by a ring of bony sclerotic plates, and numerous teeth set in groves and adapted for catching fish." This was one ugly beast, and Freud, mischievous teenager that he was, probably gave this zoological nickname to a girl in his circle who was not known for her charms or her beauty.

Though Gisela and Ichthyosauria receive only fleeting mentions, Freud’s letters reveal a sustained fascination with another childhood friend: Eduard Silberstein, his partner in the creation of the Academia Española. In their search for Freud’s first love, most critics have been sidetracked by the obscure references to girls in the correspondence, neglecting the rich and detailed account of this passionate friendship. In almost every letter, Freud expressed intense feelings for his friend—including the ups and downs of a typically adolescent relationship—in the most lyrical and poetic passages. Like Poe’s purloined letter, the object of Freud’s adolescent passion is so conspicuous that it has been missed by overzealous critics intent on cracking the correspondence’s secret hermeneutics.

Freud writes to Eduard with an unusual expressiveness, with a passion so intense that his messages read more like love letters than friendly missives. His letters "express an adolescent longing to pour out his ambitions and fears to a single, intimate friend," as Phyllis Grosskurth has argued.31 And, as

S. B. Vranich observes, "nowhere else in the childhood of Freud do we find such a strong identification."

The relationship was intimate indeed: Freud sent Eduard a photograph of himself (with a poen inscribed on the back),32 and then asked—no fewer than five times33—that Eduard reply in kind. Eduard wrote nocturnes to Freud,34 and at one point the two scheduled to room together in Berlin so they could share "the simplicity and Arcadian poetry of the A.E." while attending university, but the plan fell through (had it not, Silberstein would have gone down in history as Freud’s college roommate). Freud tells his friend that he longs to be with him and with no one else: "as long as I have time to spend, I should prefer to spend it with you alone. I suspect we have enough to tell each other to dispense with a third for an audience." The correspondence is so full of sweet nothings that at one point Freud noted they had become like husband and wife. "You are my friend of many years," he wrote in 1873, "weddéd [anénto] to me by common destiny and the Academia Castellana."35 Despite its bureaucratic structure, enumbered by obscure ordinances and bylaws, the Academia was so politically progressive that it foreshadowed the wedding of common destinies that would become known as gay marriage in the twenty-first century.

Like any lover, Freud tries to keep his correspondence with Eduard secret. He once signed off with the dramatic warning: "No mano otra tosta esta carta [Let no other hand touch this letter]." (figure 5a)36 And in several letters he urges his friend to be discreet: "I trust you do not show my letters to anyone, if they should ask to see them, because I want to be able to write with complete candor about whatever comes into my head."37 (Concerned about leaks, a suspicious Freud asks his friend: "to whom do you show my letters?"). Confidentiality is a constant concern in the correspondence: Freud longs to be reunited with Eduard so the two can resume their "secret studies"38 and "secret walks,"39 and even refers to "Cipión" and "Berganza" as "our own . . . secret names."40 For these two boys Spanish became a cloak of stealth to protect their confidences. Freud expressed his feelings for Eduard with unusual clarity and eloquence for a teenager. Consider, for instance, the following passage from a letter dated September 9, 1875, in which Freud, anticipating his reunion with Eduard, overflows with glee. "I am delighted," he writes,

that you recently had occasion to use the noble lengua castellana . . . and I am longing for the hours and walks next year during which, after a twelve months'
FiguRe 5.2

separation interrupted by a three days' meeting, we shall be able to exchange words for words, and, God willing, thoughts for thoughts as well: I really believe we shall never be rid of each other; though we became friends from free choice, we are as attached to one another as if nature had put [us] on this earth as blood relations; I believe we have come so far that the one loves the very person of the other [der eine im andern schon die bloße Person liebt] and not, as before, merely his good qualities, and I am afraid that were you, by an unworthy act, to prove quite different tomorrow from the image [Bild] I keep of you, I could still not cease to wish you well. That is a weakness [Schwäche], and I have taken myself to task for it several times. 40

This is one of Freud's most passionate love letters. In contrast to the passages about Gisela, which are short, flat, and formulaic, his affection for Eduard gushes forth as he pours lyrical phrases and poetic images onto the page. Gisela was the passive object of a shy "inclination," but Eduard appears as the willing partner in a fantasy of "longing," "exchanges," "attachments," "weaknesses," and adolescent love. This outpour of charged words is prefaced by a mention of Spanish, "[la] noble lengua castellana," but curiously, the entire passage is written in German, as were most of Freud's other elaborations of his affection for Eduard—a flagrant violation of the fundamental precept of the Academia Española requiring its members to communicate exclusively in Spanish.

Freud expressed his fancy for Gisela in Spanish, but used German to write his love for Eduard. Spanish was the language of Cervantes's stories and of the Academia Española, the imaginary institution invented by the two boys; it was the language of literature, of fanciful stories and fictional characters. Freud's choice of Spanish to write about his romantic interest in Gisela suggests that this love story—like the romance between Don Quixote and Dulcinea—was a figment of the imagination, a fantastic invention. His affection for Eduard, on the other hand, was real, and the feelings it unearthed were too intense and too overwhelming to express in any language other than his native tongue. Spanish was the language of fantasy; German, the idiom of reality. In contrast to Freud's Spanish, awkward and halting as he is, a language learned from a textbook, his German, even at the tender age of nineteen, was elegant and lyrical, a prefiguration of the later Freud's masterful prose. And nowhere did Freud's German flow as delicately—adorned by pastoral images and playful turns—as when he wrote about his love for Eduard. The contrast between Freud's wooden Spanish and his expressive German is apparent in his choice of words: Gisela was the object of "inclinacion," a cold, affectless term, whereas Eduard was the focus of Freud's "Liebe," a passion filled with Sturm und Drang.

But the friendship between the two boys was not always so rosy: it included, like most adolescent loves, episodes of insecurity, doubt, and jealousy. The most dramatic scene occurred early in 1875, when Eduard wrote to Freud about his interest in a sixteen-year-old girl he had met in Leipzig, where he was studying. Although Eduard's romance was as harmless—and as unreal—as Freud's own "inclinacion" for Gisela, Freud became upset and attempted to dissuade his friend from pursuing the exchange of "secret correspondence" that threatened the exclusive epistolary arrangement between the two friends.

"It is very wrong of you," Freud lectured Eduard, "and causes great harm to yourself and deep sorrow to me, to encourage the imprudent affection of a sixteen-year-old girl and— the inevitable outcome—to take advantage of it." Abandoning the playful complicity and camaraderie found in most letters, Freud adopts a grave tone and erects himself as a suprego of sorts, passing judgment on Eduard's behavior and warning him about the catastrophic consequences of his flirtation: "Do not become the cause of the first transgression of a young girl—one who has barely outgrown childhood—against a justified moral precept, by arranging meetings and exchanging letters against her
parents’ wishes... Is this not too great a price to exact for the satisfaction of a romantic whim?"

Freud goes on to lecture his friend for several paragraphs, and concludes with the following piece of rather forceful advice:

I should be overjoyed if instead of laughing at my sermonizing—which, alas, I cannot avoid—you were to heed my advice and eschew both rendezvous and secret correspondence. And if you feel you are too weak, then hasten back to Vienna... How ashamed I would be if you returned to Vienna and I had to keep an episode of your life in Leipzig from our friends and my parents. So much in sober vein. You will appreciate my requests and my anxieties."

In this letter we find a young Freud tormented by jealousy, and willing to use every rhetorical weapon at his disposal to turn Eduard away from the girl: he paints a catastrophic scenario of lost honor and disgraced maidenhood that evokes the pseudo-chivalrous scenes in Don Quixote, a book that Freud gave as a present to Eduard in 1875; he appeals to his friend’s reason, sense of duty, and respect for social decorum; and, in case all of these fail, he resorts to emotional blackmail, warning Eduard that he will have to share the details of his flirtatious exploits with "our friends and my parents."

Freud wrote all the passages quoted above in German, another example of how he turned to his native tongue whenever he needed to express intense affects and complex emotions: the torrent of insecurities and anxieties unleashed by adolescent jealousy were too overwhelming to communicate in any language other than his own. As Freud once explained: "I felt the urge to speak my mind fully and that I could only do in the mother tongue."

Historians of psychoanalysis, from Jones to Boehlich, have been too quick to heterosexualize the young Freud, and their attitude is understandable; it is difficult to conceive of Doctor Freud, so often pictured as a bearded gentleman holding a cigar, as anything but the embodiment of Viennese masculinity. But the correspondence with Eduard Silberstein reveals an altogether different Freud: a boy in the midst of adolescence, a transitional period during which identity is extremely malleable, having left behind the infinite possibilities of childhood but not yet confined to the rigid paths of adulthood. As a teenager, Freud was racked by libidinal ambivalence—he was attracted to both boys and girls—but also, less typically, by a linguistic ambiguity that led him to switch from German to Spanish, depending on the intensity of his affection.

Freud loved girls in Spanish and boys in German. Like his command of the language of Cervantes, his affection for girls was clumsy, rigid, and academic. His passion for boys, in contrast, was expressed fluently and naturally in the language of Goethe and German Romanticism. Freud explored his attraction to both genders in two languages that sometimes came together in an unusual patois: a bilingual bisexuality—a linguistic-affective ambiguity that makes his letters to Eduard Silberstein a treasure trove of symptoms of what William J. McGrath has called "adolescent Sturm und Drang.""

**Freud’s Dogs**

Like most adolescents, Freud had a vivid imagination and he often played at being someone else: when he wrote to Eduard he was no longer Sigmund but Cipión, one of the canine protagonists of “The Colloquy of the Dogs.” The question of why Freud might have identified with this literary character to the point of adopting its name and signing his letters as “perro en el hospital de Sevilla” has puzzled Cervantine critics: How did Cervantes come to mediate the special friendship between the two boys? Why did Freud choose such an obscure novella instead of the more canonical Don Quijote? How do these dogs relate to Freud’s emotional attachment to Spanish?

“The Colloquy of the Dogs” is the last of the Exemplary Novels, a collection of twelve novellas Cervantes wrote between 1590 and 1612, and published in 1613. It tells the story of two dogs who meet at a hospital in the city of Valladolid and, having acquired the gift of speech, spend a long night engrossed in conversation. One of the dogs, Cipión, listens and asks leading questions, while the other, Berganza, recounts his picaresque adventures while serving a long list of masters—including a shepherd, a rich merchant, a constable, a soldier, a gypsy, a Moor, a poet, and a group of actors—and living in places as diverse as a slaughterhouse, a bourgeois house, a pastoral field, and a hospital. Regardless of whom he was serving or where he was living, the dog found himself beaten, starved, tricked, abused, and—in an episode 1 will analyze later on—sexually harassed. The moral of Berganza’s tale is that human beings,
regardless of gender, race, social class, or nationality, are invariably selfish, cruel, and corrupt.

Despite its colorful cast of characters—talking dogs, lecherous witches, and duplicitous peasants—"The Colloquy of the Dogs" is one of Cervantes' darkest and most difficult texts. In contrast to the lighthearted prose of Don Quixote or the straightforward plots of novellas like "La gitanailla" or "La española inglesa," the "Colloquy" features a labyrinthine plot, constantly interrupted by Berganza's digressions, Cipión's protestations, and endless metaphysical disquisitions on subjects ranging from the inherent evil of human nature to the etymology of the word "philosophy." Frustrated by these countless distractions, Cipión compares Berganza's sentences to the tentacles of an octopus. Allan Forcione, one of the most astute readers of the "Colloquy," has argued that the story's very structure resembles an octopus, with its proliferation of narrative tentacles tangling the reader's mind. The story's syntax and vocabulary are equally difficult, rendering entire passages hermetic even to the most seasoned Cervantistas.

Given its syntactic and linguistic complexity, it comes as a surprise that a fifteen-year-old Austrian boy would choose the "Colloquy" to teach himself Spanish. Since the publication of the correspondence with Silberstein, scholars have puzzled over Freud's fascination with Cervantes' novella, and have raised a number of questions that remain, for the most part, unanswered: Where did Freud first encounter the "Colloquy"? How much of its complex language did he understand? And why did he identify with one of Cervantes' canine protagonists to the point of adopting its name?

In an article on the influence of Cervantes on Freud, León Grinberg and Juan Francisco Rodríguez suggest that there are certain parallels between the "Colloquy" and Freud's later psychoanalytic theories: the novella features two protagonists, one who listens attentively while the other speaks, interrupting only to request clarifications or to help the other along with his narration. In the first pages, Cipión tells Berganza: "Speak until daybreak... for I will very gladly listen to you, without stopping you unless I think it necessary." Grinberg and Rodríguez believe the relation between the two dogs evokes a "psychoanalytic atmosphere," with Berganza playing the role of the patient: "we observe how Berganza begins to enquire about his true identity, alongside his therapist Cipión, about his real parents and origins and his life story." The critics point out that Freud identified with Cipión, the analytic listener, and let his friend Eduard assume the role of Berganza, the talking subject. Another respected Cervantista, E. C. Riley, believes that "the choice of roles was obvious. Freud/Cipión was the dominant one and the more didactic of the two, the driving force in their game and epistolary exchange." Along the same lines, S. B. Vranich noted that Cipión is clearly "the one who tried to understand, counsel, and guide, and who listened patiently while Berganza unburdened himself, recounting his life's misfortunes, traumas, trivias, confused thoughts and dreams." Grinberg and Rodríguez even claim that one of the most prominent themes in the "Colloquy," the difficulty in distinguishing between fantasy and reality, corresponds to one of the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis.

Other critics have suggested that Freud's youthful interest in Cervantes prefigured his later "capacity to identify with great men" (or, in this context, with great dogs!). Grinberg and Rodríguez read the young man's identification with Cipión as an expression of "his quixotic dream of being a great man and conquering the world by creating psychoanalysis." Joseph Bei and Víctor Hernández add that Freud and Cervantes had much in common: "both admired military heroes... and both actually transformed themselves into heroes, able to 'conquer' the enemy with understanding and the word." In addition to Cervantistas, psychoanalysts have also puzzled over Freud's interest in the "Colloquy," Kurt Eissler, an influential analyst and one of the founders of the Freud archives, has interpreted the young man's identification with Cipión as a "symptomatic product" that reveals the inner conflicts and anxieties of a turbulent adolescence. William J. McGrath, another analytically minded critic, argues that the "Colloquy," like Don Quixote, "provided [Freud's] phantasy life with a pantheon of heroes who were to affect his thoughts and feelings for many years to come."

None of these interpretations, however, accounts for the link between Freud's interest in the "Colloquy" and his intense friendship with Eduard Silberstein. But as we will see, the two activities that consumed much of the adolescent Freud's time; reading Cervantes and writing to Eduard were closely related experiences.

There are several elements in the "Colloquy" that echo the main themes in Freud's correspondence with Eduard. Like the Academia Española, the "Colloquy" is an exclusively masculine world. The only two members of the Academia are boys, and the two protagonists of the "Colloquy" are male dogs. The Academia is a platform for male bonding, and so is the use of language for Cipión and Berganza, who spend all night sharing their life stories (only Berganza gets to speak, but in the framing story Cervantes hinted that there would be a
sequel, never written, in which Cipión would recount his own life). All of Berganza’s masters are male, and throughout their conversation both dogs privilege masculine role models.

More importantly, every single woman Berganza encounters during his picaresque adventures turns out to be a corrupt, lying cheat—a representation of femininity that parallels the negative portrayal of girls in the Freud-Silberman correspondence. The first female character to make an appearance in the “Colloquy” is a “very beautiful girl” who, after distracting Berganza with her good looks, steals his food; then there is a lecherous maid servant who sneaks men into her master’s house; a madam who blackmails her clients; and finally, a band of gypsy girls who “employ . . . trickery and deception” to flitch money from strangers.44

But of all the unsavory women Berganza encounters, one stands out as a monument to the horrors of femininity. Near the end of the story, as Berganza performs circus tricks on the street, he is approached by an old witch named Cañizares who lures him to her home, promising to tell him the story of his birth. She tells Berganza that he is really a human being, and that he was changed into an animal by an evil spell. She attempts to kiss him on the mouth—a gesture the dog finds repulsive (Cipión agrees and tells him: “You were right, because there’s no pleasure, only torture, in kissing or being kissed by an old woman”)45—and, with the pretext of revealing the details about his mysterious canine metamorphosis, Cañizares subjects the dog to a bizarre ritual, undressing and rubbing her body with a mysterious ointment. If Berganza’s previous adventures had instilled in him a certain degree of misogyny, the sight of Cañizares’s naked body sends him into a panic, “I was very frightened,” he tells Cipión, “to find myself locked up in that narrow room with that awful figure before me, which I’ll describe to you as best I can.” He then proceeds to paint the following horrific portrait:

She was more than seven feet tall and a veritable sack of bones covered with a dark, hairy, leathery skin. Her belly, which was like a sheepskin, covered her private parts and hung half-way down her thighs. Her breasts were like the udders of a wrinkled, dried-up cow; her lips were black, her teeth were like fallen tombstones, and her nose was hooked and misshapen. With her wild eyes, disheveled hair, sunken cheeks, scraggy neck, and shriveled breasts, she was, all in all, a bag of diabolical skin and bones.46

Of all the misadventures Berganza experiences during his canine life, the encounter with the witch Cañizares’s body stands out as the most traumatic. He was “overcome with fear” and wanted to bite her, but “could find no place on her person where [he] could do it without revulsion” (Cervantes used the term “asco,” which could also be translated as “disgust”).47 Overwhelmed by this abject sight, Berganza explodes, flies into a rage, and attacks the witch in what is surely the most sadistic scene in the entire novella. “I shook myself free, and grabbing hold of the long folds of her belly, I shoved and dragged her all around the courtyard while she cried out for someone to save her from the jaws of that malignant spirit.”48

Alban Forcione shows that the Cañizares episode is the focal point in the “Colloquy”: the witch embodies the themes of monotony and grotesqueness so crucial to the story. “Berganza’s description of the naked body of the moribund Cañizares,” writes Forcione, “is certainly the most shocking of the numerous passages in a work that cultivates the ugly at all levels, and its most ugly detail in the description of her gigantic belly.”49 The female body emerges as the epitome of the monstrous: it is her exaggerated womanly attributes—her sagging breasts, her genitalia covered by dangling folds of fat—that render the witch so horrific.

The “Colloquy” is ultimately a tale of male bonding in which Cipión and Berganza spend the night together at the hospital in Valladolid, telling stories and using language to get intimate. Their platonic communication is repeatedly haunted by the specter of women, who appear as deceitful, unreliable, and frighteningly carnal. Even the lone female dog in the novel—a little yapping lap dog who makes her appearance in the last page, jumping out of her mistress’s arms to bite the luckless Berganza—sparks an outburst of sadistic fantasies in the male protagonist: “If I came across you in the street, you rotten little beast, I’d either ignore you or tear you to pieces with my teeth.”50 The two male dogs bond by conversing, but also by expressing their horror of female sexuality.

Readers might object that this interpretation exaggerates the importance of female characters in the “Colloquy.” After all, one could argue that in this dark tale all human beings, male and female, appear as selfish and corrupt. Even Cañizares might be more horrifying because she is a witch than because she is a woman. Isn’t it far-fetched to focus on one episode as proof that the “Colloquy” revolves around a horror of femininity? Wouldn’t it be more appropriate to read it as a misanthropic tale, denouncing the vanities of humankind?
That would be so, were it not for a crucial fact that has been mostly overlooked in the discussion of Cervantes's influence on Freud: "The Colloquy of the Dogs" is actually a story within a story, a tale framed by the plot of the previous novella, "El casamiento engañoso" ("The deceitful marriage"). The dialogue between Cipión and Berganza is actually folded into the plot of this penultimate novel—another dark tale presenting women in a less-than-favorable light.⁶⁸

"The Deceitful Marriage" tells the story of the soldier Campuzano, who is recovering from an illness at the hospital in Valladolid, where he runs into an old friend named Peralta and recounts his recent woes: he was tricked into marriage by a woman named Estefania, who presented herself as a wealthy aristocratic lady but turned out to be a deceitful wench who left him in abject poverty and gave him the terrible case of syphilis that landed him in hospital. At the end of his autobiographical narrative Campuzano tells his friend that from his hospital bed, he saw—and heard—two dogs engaged in conversation. Not wanting to miss a word, he transcribed their dialogue into a notebook, and offered to entertain his friend by having him read the strange colloquy. It is at this point that the reader turns the page and finds the opening of "The Colloquy of the Dogs."

Like the "Colloquy," "The Deceitful Marriage" revolves around a monstrous female character, in this case a liar who tricked Campuzano into marriage. One of the novella's main themes is the duplicity of women: Estefania seemed to be a rich, aristocratic, and upright lady, but she turned out to be a penniless, promiscuous cheat. "All that wicked woman has said to you," another character tells him, "is downright falsehood. She has no house nor property, nor even any other clothes than those she carries on her back."

If Campuzano had been tricked by a man, he might have lost his riches; but he was duped by a woman, and lost not only money but also his health. The deceitful Estefania has left him, as he tells Peralta in a particularly sharp translation, "reduced and emaciated frightfully... a rheumatic cripple, suffering the most excruciating torture and agony.⁶⁹" The moral of the story is that women—like appearances—are not to be trusted.

Campuzano's tale presents an opposition between the beneficial effects of masculine conversation, on the one hand, and the devastating consequences of feminine seduction, on the other. By recounting his woes to Peralta, Campuzano is engaging in a form of the "talking cure," a therapeutic procedure designed to complement the medical treatment provided by the hospital. Talking to another man is a form of therapy, but talking to women—as the plot of the story demonstrates—can land one in the sick ward. Harry Sieber has written that "Campuzano is a victim of language," and I would add that he is a victim of a very specific type of language: feminine language.⁷¹

Cervantes presents the masculine conversation between Campuzano and Peralta as a tale of seduction. Throughout the story, Campuzano draws out the suspense of his narrative, interrupting his tale to announce that he is about to recount even more fantastic and more outlandish adventures. Each interruption piques his friend's interest and heightens his desire to hear more. This procedure—which Harry Sieber has described as a narrative "strip tease"—reaches its most dramatic point when Campuzano waves the manuscript of "The Colloquy of the Dogs" before his friend's incredulous eyes. Peralta can barely contain his curiosity, and the narrator tells us that "All these preambles and embellishments the Ensign told before narrating what he had seen kindled Peralta's desire until he asked him, with no lesser embellishments, to immediately recount the untold marvels."⁷²

As Sieber points out, there is a parallel between Estefania's seduction of Campuzano and Campuzano's seduction of Peralta. But while Estefania uses her body to attract attention, Campuzano uses words to "kindle Peralta's desire." Campuzano's surrender to Estefania's flesh lands him in hospital, but Peralta's submission to his friend's words has much more beneficial effects: by giving in to his "desire," he gets to enjoy the story of "The Colloquy of the Dogs." Through these narrative tricks, the reader of the Exemplary Novels—whose appetite for narratives has been whetted by the various interruptions and digressions—is also drawn into this web of masculine seduction.

"The Deceitful Marriage" and "The Colloquy of the Dogs" thus share a number of important narrative elements: they are both tales of platonic bonding in which two male characters achieve intimacy by recounting their misfortunes (upon first listening to the dogs, Campuzano observes that they speak like "varones sabios" or "wise males," thus insisting on the masculine character of their dialog);⁷⁴ both stories portray women as dangerous, lecherous, and deceitful cheats, to be blamed for the protagonist's traumas; and both stories distinguish between masculine and feminine languages: men use words to engage in edifying conversation, while women use them to trick, seduce, and traumatize men. Both novellas narrate a peculiar form of male bonding founded on a shared horror of female sexuality.

If we now return to Freud and Silberstein, we can see what drew the two adolescents to "The Colloquy of the Dogs." Their correspondence has much in common with the dialogue between Cipión and Berganza: the two dogs
marvel at their ability to speak and to use the Spanish language, and so do the two friends, who constantly write admiringly about the “noble lengua castellana”. Cipión and Berganza express a fear of eavesdroppers, and Freud repeatedly warns Eduard to keep their correspondence private. 

Like Cervantes' male characters, Freud and Eduard engage in an elaborate ritual of male bonding revolving around the use of language. They, too, use Spanish to recount their adventures, even if as teenagers their lives were less worldly than those of the soldiers, licentiates, and dogs in Cervantes' universe. Finally, the two boys share a crucial trait with the protagonists of “The Colloquy of the Dogs” and “The Deceitful Marriage”: their letters express a predominantly negative view about women that at times manifests itself as an outright horror at female sexuality.

There are many dark representations of women in Freud's correspondence with Silberstein. We have already analyzed Freud's extreme reaction at learning of Eduard's innocent courtship of the sixteen-year-old girl from Leipzig: his response, warning his friend about the terrible consequences of succumbing to feminine charms, could well be taken from one of Campuzano's speeches. And when Eduard's incipient romance soured, Freud wrote him a long letter on March 5, 1875, that would also be at home in one of Cervantes' novels. Freud carefully analyzed Eduard's failed relationship with the girl (this is surely his earliest published interpretation of the psychological effects of love), and ultimately blamed the girl's mother for the failure. His interpretation makes her into the cunning architect of a “deceitful marriage” of sorts.

Freud writes Eduard that the girl's mother is “a shrewd woman” who "does her utmost to bring out the innate but latent coquetry of the sixteen-year-old daughter of Eve" by encouraging the teenager to lead boys on. "Your part in the whole business," he tells Eduard, "was that of a dressmaker's dummy masculine, that is, of a tailor's dummy," in other words a pawn in an elaborate ploy of procurement in which any man would do.  

Freud's interpretation makes the girl's mother into a Celestina, a witch-like go-between who tricks hapless men into unhappy marriages. The Celestina had been a stock figure in Spanish literature since the medieval Book of Good Love, and Cervantes invented many characters, from Cántaraz to Estefanía, that are avatars of this treacherous woman. Freud portrays the girl's mother as yet another incarnation of the dangerous matchmaker: a calculating, Machiavellian figure eternally on the lookout for unsuspecting male victims. Freud's last mention of the girl's mother—in a letter from March 13, 1875—sums up his opinion of this woman: "If [the] mother is cruel enough to wish ruin upon the poor child by turning her from a decorous china doll into an indecorous flirt, then do not be party to her plan."  

But there is an even more striking example of the negative image of women found in Freud's correspondence with Eduard. In a letter dated August 11, 1874, Freud makes a most unusual suggestion: that the two friends make a human sacrifice to prove their allegiance to the Spanish Academy. "An old superstition has it," he writes, "that no building is sound whose foundations have not cost a human sacrifice." And since Freud had repeatedly presented the Spanish Academy as a building, he asked his friend to take the necessary steps to ensure that its foundations were indeed solid.  

He playfully suggested that "to the competence of our own AE [v] confirmada [renewed and consolidated] we sacrifice 2 victims, 2 princesses or reinas, que antes en nuestro reino han imperado [que who previously reigned over our realm]."

The well-being of the Academia Española required the sacrifice of two female victims, probably the two girls that Freud and Eduard had playfully courted—including Gisela Fluss, suggests Angela Ackermann Pilarí. A ritual murder of this sort would solidify not only the foundations of the Academy, but also the friends' platonic bond, by ensuring that no girls would ever come between them. The Academia Española was a secret society into which women could enter only as dead bodies.

Of course the sacrifice in question was a product of the young Freud's overactive imagination; he was merely playing with Spanish words, with literary plots and Cervantine themes, and there was never any indication that the two boys took active steps to find out a flesh-and-blood sacrificial victim. Several critics, however, have pointed out that Freud was probably drawn to the Exemplary Novels because Cervantes' plots often revolved around the inability to differentiate between fantasy and reality—a problem that is at the core of the other maladies of the psyche that became the archive of psychoanalytic research. And, like Cervantine tales, the two boys' project to turn women into sacrificial victims also blurred the line between real and imagined events. What began as jest would eventually culminate in tragedy.

The two boys continued to write letters, in Spanish, German, and Spanisch Deutsch, until their mid-twenties. Freud wrote his last letter to Eduard on January 24, 1881, about a decade after the two had first begun their epistolary exchange. In the last years of their friendship, Freud's letters became less romantic, less playful, and less intimate. One gets the sense that Freud's early passion for Eduard gave way to an interest in research and scientific work. As he became increasingly serious about his scholarly work, he drifted away from Eduard.

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Chapter 5 | Freud's Spanish
The rift deepened after Eduard chose to return to Romania to work in the family business, a decision that greatly disappointed Freud, who had grand intellectual ambitions for his friend (already in 1878, Freud expressed his unhappiness at Eduard’s plan to study law rather than science: “you would undoubtedly have become a Humboldt had that cursed jurisprudence not diverted your energies from the contemplation of nature,” he wrote).43 Years later, Freud remembered the end of their friendship as follows: “The drifting apart which had gradually developed between us became apparent again when I advised him from Wandsbek against marrying a stupid rich girl whom he had been sent to have a look at. And then we lost contact with each other. He obviously got used to the money-bags . . . he is prepared to marry the girl so as to establish his independence as a merchant. . . . That is the story of my friend Silberstein, who has become a banker, because he didn’t like jurisprudence.”44 As is obvious from the tone of his description, even after the end of their relationship Freud continued to exhibit an intense hostility toward Eduard’s girlfriends.45

In the 1880s, after the friendship ended, Freud would rise to become an ambitious young doctor and medical scholar, while Eduard settled on a petit-bourgeois existence in Brăila. Along with their platonic bond, the former friends apparently renounced their fear of women: Freud married Martha Bernays in 1886, and Eduard wed Pauline Theiler some years later. But despite having drifted apart, the destinies of the two founders of the Academia Española would cross again in an episode that would rekindle their youthful anxieties about femininity.

Around 1891, Eduard’s wife Pauline began to exhibit neurotic symptoms. He had heard that Sigmund, his former childhood friend, was now an established doctor in Vienna, so he sent her to him for treatment. Pauline traveled to Vienna to meet with Freud, who had opened a consulting room at 8, Maria Theresienstrasse, a few blocks away from his later address at Berggasse 19. At this point the story took a decidedly novelististic turn: on May 14, 1891, Pauline went to Freud’s building accompanied by her maid, climbed three flights of stairs, and jumped to her death from one of upper floors. It has never been established whether this sad incident occurred before or after her consultation.46 The daily Neues Wiener Tagblatt reported Pauline’s death as follows:

Suicide. Yesterday at about 4:10 in the afternoon, a young woman made her way to one of the rear wings of the institutions in Maria Theresa St. where doctors reside to go in for a course of treatment. The patient left the girl accompanying her to wait, climbed up three flights and threw herself down over the balustrade. Having shattered her skull, the unlucky girl was immediately dead. The ensuing police inquiry has revealed that the deceased was a foreigner who was seeking treatment due to a severe nervous disorder. The deed was most likely conceived in a moment of mental derangement. The body will be taken in the coffin to the Scotts.47

Seventeen years after the two friends vowed, in jest, to sacrifice a girl to ensure the stability of their relationship, their sadistic fantasy became reality, and Pauline Silberstein their sacrificial victim. A plan that had no doubt been repressed from consciousness returned to haunt the two grown men. As James Hamilton has shown, Freud found this episode so traumatic that he obliterated all references to Pauline Silberstein from his published work or private correspondence. He must have found the episode deeply disturbing, in part because, like his later theorization of uncanny experiences, it blurred the distinction between fantasy and reality.

Various critics have commented on the extremely negative perception of femininity presented in Freud’s correspondence with Eduard. Grinstein observes that “Freud’s letters indicate how troubled he was about his own hetero-sexual strivings,”48 while William J. McGrath goes further and argues that “the adolescent Freud found the thought of heterosexual intercourse frightening.”49 Eisler secures the opinion, writing that “the adolescent [Freud’s] unconscious or preconscious fantasy about women . . . says: women are dangerous monsters, a fear-arousing species whose phallic nature seems obvious.”50

To see how this perception of women related to Freud’s early views on sexuality, we will now turn to another episode in his correspondence with Eduard—an episode that does not involve dangerous romances or exotic literature but, rather, an unusual type of animal—the eel—that helped shape Freud’s early views on sexual development.

EELS

The letters to Silberstein contain a curious episode that sheds light on the young Freud’s intense affective life: his first trip to Italy, a land that years later would gain almost mythical dimension in his imagination (“Unser Herz zeigt
Freud had been studying zoology in Vienna, and in the spring of 1876 he spent several weeks in Trieste, researching marine animals at the Royal Zoological Station.

Freud arrived in Trieste in March 1876 and stayed for about one month. During this time, he wrote Eduard three letters describing his daily activities, his research project, and his general impressions of Italy. He was enraptured by the port city, but had little time to enjoy its beauty: armost every hour of the day was devoted to his work ("I sit at [my] table," he tells Eduard, "from eight to twelve and from one to six, working quite diligently," except for evenings and Sundays, which he devoted to exploring the port and its surroundings.

Freud was always imaginative and playful in his correspondence with Eduard, but the letters from Trieste overflow with joy as he describes the sunshine over the Adriatic coast, the fishermen bringing in the morning catch, his attempts to speak Italian, or dinner at a lively osteria. "I, a landlubber for eighteen years," he confesses, "am transplanted suddenly to the shores of one of the most beautiful seas."

The form of these letters differs radically from that of Freud’s earlier correspondence: Freud not only pens long descriptions of his Italian surroundings, but also tries his hand at drawing various details of his everyday life for Eduard’s enjoyment. In one letter, he sketches his room, his desk, the various marine animals (figures 5.3 and 5.4) he has been studying, and even the hairstyle popular among Italian girls (figure 5.5). His experience of the south was so emotionally intense that words alone no longer sufficed to express it, and his letters broke free from written language, overflowing into plastic representations. Later in life Freud produced a good number of scientific drawings, but the Trieste sketches stand out as the only instance in

nach dem Süden [our heart points to the south]," he wrote years later in a famous letter. Freud had been studying zoology in Vienna, and in the spring of 1876 he spent several weeks in Trieste, researching marine animals at the Royal Zoological Station.

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which he drew not to explain a theory or illustrate an article, but for pure pleasure: they were a gift to Eduard, another product of their inventiveness and complicity.

The trip to Trieste was a turning point for Freud: for the first time in his life, he had the opportunity to conduct original research, and he spent his time at the Royal Institute trying to elucidate some of the mysteries concerning the life cycle of eels. The love of scientific work and passion for knowledge that characterized his adult life appeared for the first time here. At the end of his stay, Freud published his first article, a scientific paper bearing the inordinately long title "Beobachtung über Gestaltung und feineren Bau der als Hoden beschriebenen Lappenorgane des Aals" (Observations on the form and finer structure of the lobed organs of the eel described as testes)."

In his letters to Eduard, Freud gives a detailed account of his daily routine. Work began early in the morning, as zoology students rushed to meet the fishermen and select the raw materials for their research. "Every day," he wrote Eduard, "I get sharks, rays, eels, and other beasts, which I subject to a general anatomical investigation." Each student focused on a different kind of marine animal: one "gets the worms and the crabs" while a second "abducts the ascidians, which he searches for fleas: copepods, small crustaceans that live on them as parasites." To help Eduard visualize his endeavors, Freud included a drawing of an eel in his letter (figure 5.6: plate 5).

In the same letter, Freud describes his eel experiments—which involved vivisections and dissections—in gory detail: "I serve the beast-killing (zooektos-nos) science," he writes, "hands stained with the white and red blood of marine animals, cell detritus swimming before my eyes, which disturbs me even in my dreams, in my thoughts nothing but the great problems connected with the words ducts, testicles, and ovaries, world-renowned words.""

Freud spent the entire month in Trieste dissecting eels—four hundred of them, as he reported in the resulting article—and studying a problem that had fascinated naturalists since antiquity: the mating ritual of these unusual animals. For over two millennia, scientists have puzzled over the mystery of eel reproduction, proposing the most wildly speculative hypotheses.

In his History of Animals, Aristotle was at a loss to explain how these animals reproduce. "Eels," he wrote, "are not produced from sexual intercourse, nor are they ovi-oviparous." He noted that they seem to emerge out of nowhere, as if by spontaneous generation—"after rain they have been reproduced in some marshy ponds, from which all the water was drawn and the mud cleaned out."

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**Figure 5.6**
Freud's drawing of an eel in a letter to Eduard Silberstein, April 4, 1876. © Sigmund Freud Copyrights, Image courtesy Library of Congress.
In the end he concluded that they "originate in what are called the entrails of the earth," and spring from the ground.86

Some centuries later, Pliny the Elder gave a slightly different hypothesis in his Natural History: "To reproduce themselves," he wrote, "eels rub their bodies against the rocks: from the shreds of skin thus detached come new ones."87 Much more imaginative was Oppian of Corycus, a poet who lived under Marcus Aurelius in the second century CE, and devoted a section of his Halieutis, or fishing poem, to the "loves of Roman eels," painting them as lecherous animals that had the terrible custom of copulating with snakes:

Full of eagerness, drunk with desire, the Roman eel comes out of the sea to go and meet her mate. Urged by devouring passions, the odious, lustful snake goes crawling to the water’s edge. Seeing a hole in a rock, he vomits his fatal poison: he empties his teeth entirely, clearing them of the black, pernicious fluid with which they are armed to kill; for, flying to his love, he wishes only to be gracious and amiable. Arriving on the beach, he stops and intones his whistling love song. As soon as she hears his voice, quicker than an arrow, the black Roman eel darts towards the shore while the snake throws himself into the sea foam and swims to meet her. Their mutual desire is satisfied. They are together. Panting with pleasure, the female draws the snake’s head into her mouth.88

The association of eels with voracious sexuality has endured: in 1883 the English novelist Graham Swift constructed the plot of Waterland around the sexual life of these creatures, and included the following meditation on the uncanny persistence of eel libido through the ups and downs of world history:

How long have eels been doing this? They were doing it, repeating this old, epic story, long before Aristotle put it all down to mud. They were doing it when Pliny posed his rock-rubbing theory. And Linnaeus his viviparity theory. They were doing it when they stormed the Bastille and when Napoleon and Hitler contemplated the invasion of England. And they were still doing it, still accomplishing these vast atavistic circles when on a July day in 1940 Freddie Parr picked up out of a trap one of their number (which later escaped and lived perhaps to obey the call of the far Sargasso) and placed it in Mary Mccall’s navy blue knickers."89

Freud never went as far as to smuggle an eel into his friends’ knickers, but he did spend an entire summer studying their reproductive behavior.

In addition to the question of origin, there was a second mystery concerning eels that Freud tried to crack: their sex. Aristotle believed that "the eel is neither male nor female,"89 and thereafter scientists had struggled to distinguish between male and female eels. This was the main problem that preoccupied Freud during his stay in Trieste, as he explained in one of his letters to Eduard. "For a long time," he wrote his friend, "only the females of this beast ([the eel]) were known; even Aristotle did not know where they obtained their males and hence argued that eels sprang from the mud. Throughout the Middle Ages and in modern times, too, there was a veritable hunt for male eels."89

Eels lack any visible organs or external traits to identify their sex, and in order to determine if a specimen was male or female, Freud had to "dissect them and discover either testicles or ovaries."89 To help Silverstein understand, Freud drew these organs in a letter (figure 5.7). Finding the elusive male eel

FIGURE 5.7
Freud’s drawing of eel testes in a letter to Eduard Silberstein, April 4, 1876. © Sigmund Freud Copyrights. Image courtesy Library of Congress.
turned out to be much more complicated than he had initially thought; “I have been tormenting myself and the eels in a vain effort to rediscover the male eels, but all the eels I cut open are of the gender sex,” he laments in a letter to Eduard. 105

In the end Freud was unable to find the elusive male eel, but he gathered enough material to publish a scholarly article in the journal of the Vienna Academy of Sciences. Despite his youthful enthusiasm and hard work, he was unable to crack the mystery of eel reproduction, which would not be solved until 1922, many years after he had given up on zoology and graduated to analyzing the enigmas of human sexuality. Scientists eventually discovered that young eels possess both male and female sex organs, and it is only in adulthood that they acquire distinctive sex traits. Freud—like most other European researchers—had dissected only young hermaphroditic eels, and thus never came across a fully developed male eel.

The mysteries of eel reproduction were eventually elucidated after a surprising discovery. Scientists had been unable to observe how these animals mate because their spawning grounds lie thousands of miles away from Europe, in the Sargasso Sea. In order to reproduce, European eels must undertake an extraordinarily complex transatlantic journey that often takes them through rivers, lakes, fields, roads, and even patches of dry land. Once they reach the Sargasso Sea, they plunge to the depths of the ocean, where they are believed to die after spawning. After their eggs hatch, the elvers begin a reverse migration back to the land of their origins. Léon Bertin, author of Eels: A Biological Study, writes that “all who have observed the . . . migration of the elvers remark on their vigour and perseverance, which no lock-gates, sluices, barriers or waterfalls can discourage.” 106 Eels are remarkable animals indeed, and Bertin muses that they “are on the whole extremely tough creatures. No other fishes known are capable of rivalling them in their resistance to such diverse surroundings.” 107

Though Freud was unable to solve these mysteries, his eel experiments exposed him for the first time in his life to the complexities of gender and sexual identity. As he struggled to understand the sexual differentiation of these marine animals, the young Freud encountered some of the same questions he would ask, many years later, about human sexuality.

In addition to anticipating the future direction of his research, the eel episode echoes the most salient themes in Freud’s correspondence with Eduard. His scientific research was driven by a quest for masculinity: he was searching for male eels, just as earlier he had been in search of a male partner for his Spanish games (though finding a male Spanish speaker turned out to be much easier than finding a male eel!).

And the fear of female sexuality that permeates the correspondence between the two boys reappears in Freud’s marine research, transformed into the “torture” and sadistic treatment of female eels. Eisler has pointed out that eels are zoological descendants of the Ichthyosaurus, the monstrous beast Freud made into a caricature of femininity in his epiphalmium, and that the young boy considered girls, like eels, as “a different species.” 108 In his letters to Eduard, Freud compares the eels on his dissecting table to the women he encountered on the streets of Trieste, referring to girls as “specimens” and describing their “anatomical features” and their physiology, and even lamenting that “it is not allowed to dissect human beings.” 109 The eel, an animal that has been considered voraciously sexual since antiquity, is one more avatar of the dangerous women haunting the Freud-Silberstein correspondence.

The eel—a hermaphroditic animal—caps the long list of ambiguous gender figures found in the Freud-Silberstein correspondence: there is the young Freud, who seems more interested in Eduard than in girls; there is Eduard, who has a difficult time deciding between girls and Freud; and there are the repeated references to Fernán Caballero, the nineteenth-century Spanish novelist, who in reality was not a “caballero” but a woman named Cecilia Bohl de Faber, a literary cross-dresser who is one of the only women who is not perceived as dangerous. 110 Like all these characters, the adolescent Freud seemed to be experiencing an instance of “gender trouble,” a transitional period during which his desires, fantasies, sexual identity, and gender identification were ambivalent and in flux. Like eels, Freud had a hermaphroditic youth—even if in his case it was only a matter of psychic hermaphroditism.

CONCLUSION: SPANISH BEYOND SILBERSTEIN

Of all the languages Freud spoke fluently, Spanish had a place apart. English and French were languages he used professionally: as a student he attended Charcot’s lectures in French, and later in life he analyzed many English-speaking patients. Like most educated men of his time, Freud also had a good grasp of Latin and Greek, and he often borrowed terms from these languages—“eros.”
"phobia, "psyche"—to explain his psychoanalytic theories. But Spanish was different: Freud did not read scientific literature written in this language, and he did not use it in his articles or books. The reader finds the occasional phrase in English, French, or Italian in works from The Interpretation of Dreams to Moses and Monotheism, but he would be hard pressed to find a Spanish word in these texts.

As is evident from his letters to his translators and Latin American readers, Freud never forgot his Spanish, and maintained fond memories of his youthful linguistic adventures until the end of his life. Yet Spanish always remained a private language whose use was limited to a single interlocutor: Eduard Silberstein. After the two friends lost touch, we have no indication that Freud ever wrote a letter or spoke a word in the language of Cervantes. If French and English were professional languages, Spanish belonged to the realm of play. Freud later theorized that the passage from childhood to adulthood involved a renunciation of the pleasure principle in favor of the reality principle. In his own case this passage had a linguistic dimension: as play gave way to work, Spanish ceded ground to English as his favored second language. If Spanish was the language of the pleasure principle, English won as the idiom of reality.

In Echolalias, Daniel Heller-Roazen analyzes the forgetting of languages and the representation of this loss in Western literature, and notes that Freud touched briefly on this question in his early work on aphasia. But Freud's own experience was different, since he never lost a language; he simply stopped speaking and writing in Spanish. In 1919, when the Peruvian Honorio Delgado, one of the first Latin Americans to become interested in his work, sent him an obsequious letter and some articles on psychoanalysis that he had published in Peru, Freud responded that he was looking forward to reading more of his work, and added: "Ich lese selbst Spanisch [I myself read Spanish], as if to encourage his correspondent to write in that language." Delgado responded with a letter in Spanish, which gave Freud great pleasure. "I'm glad," he wrote Delgado on February 22, 1920, "that when I was a young man I studied your beautiful Castilian language to read Don Quixote in the original: I have been able to understand perfectly, without a dictionary, your friendly letter."

Freud had a similar experience a few years later, in 1923, when the Spanish translator Luis López Ballesteros sent him the Castilian versions of The Psychopathology of Everyday Life and Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. Freud responded with a warm letter, thanking the Spaniard for an accurate translation. "As a young student," he wrote, "the desire to read the immortal Don Quixote in the Cervantine original led me to learn, without a teacher, the beautiful Castilian language. Thanks to this youthful passion I can now, in my old age, see the accuracy of your Spanish translation of my works. It has been a pleasure to read because of the correct interpretation of my thought and the elegance of its style. It surprises me that not being trained as a doctor or a psychiatrist you have been able to completely and accurately master an extremely complex discipline that is often obscure."112

Interestingly, Freud wrote both letters in German: even while he insisted on his continued ability to read and understand Spanish, he could not bring himself to write in Spanish for anyone else after Eduard.

Though Freud never used Spanish in his published work, Spanish words and phrases do appear throughout his correspondence, most notably in two letters to Wilhelm Fliess—a man with whom Freud had a relationship as intense and as passionate as his friendship with Eduard. In a letter from 1896 devoted to theorizing the workings of memory, Freud drew an analogy between an obscure Spanish legal concept and the workings of memory: recollections, he wrote, become invested with successive affective charges. "An anachronism persists," much in the same way that "in a particular province, fueros are still in force, we are in the presence of 'survivals." Four years later, Freud used a different Spanish term to describe himself as an explorer of the unconscious: "I am," he wrote Fliess, "by temperament nothing but a conquistador—an adventurer, if you want it translated—with all the curiosity, daring, and tenacity characteristic of a man of this sort." And in a letter sent to Romain Rolland on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, Freud quotes a medieval Spanish poem, "El Romance del Rey Moro que perdió Alhama" in the original as an example of dererealization, of an inability to acknowledge an event as real. Receiving the news that his city, Alhama, has fallen, the Moorish king kills the messenger and burns the letter: "Cartas le fueron venidas / que Alhama era ganadas: / las cartas echo en el fuego / y al mensajero mata." [Letters arrived / telling him Alhama had fallen / he threw the letters in the fire / and killed the messenger].

Out of the few Spanish words Freud used later in life, he seemed especially fond of "¿Quién sabe?" a common expression used to indicate doubt or uncertainty, which translates literally as "who knows?" Freud often resorted to this phrase at crucial—and often traumatic—moments in his life.

In 1914, Arnold Zweig asked Freud to interpret Nietzsche's personality. Freud responded that "one cannot see through anyone unless one knows
something about his sexual constitution," and that with Nietzsche "this is a complete enigma." He mentions a rumor that the philosopher had been "a passive homosexual" and "had acquired syphilis in a male brothel in Italy," but refuses to speculate, telling his friend: "Whether that is true: quién sabe?" 117

More poignant was another instance in 1938, when the Nazi occupation of Austria was imminent and Freud saw his own life under threat. "It undeniably looks like the beginning of the end for me," he wrote Marie Bonaparte. "Will it still be possible to find safety in the shelter of the Catholic Church?" he asked, before exclaiming: "Quién sabe?" 118

Freud repeated the same expression a few months later in a letter to Ernest Jones about the Anschluss. This time he wondered if the political situation—and the cancer that would eventually kill him—would prevent him from completing Moses and Monotheism. The book, he wrote: "torments me like an un laid ghost," and he then asked: "I wonder if I shall ever complete this third part despite all the outer and inner difficulties." Once again, he answered his own question with the Spanish phrase: "At present, I cannot believe it. But quién sabe?" 119

These three uses of "Quién sabe?" are extremely telling. In the first, Freud invokes the expression after confessing his inability to offer a definite pronouncement on Nietzsche's sexuality. In the second and third instances, Freud uses it to express anxieties about the future and his fear of mortality. In all cases, he lapses into Spanish to express uncertainty, indeterminacy, and anxiety. Freud had learned Spanish during his adolescence, a period during which his own subjectivity was still unformed and his life full of uncertainties: Would he study sciences or humanities? Was he more attracted to girls' bodies or Eduard's mind? Did he live in the fantasy realm of Cervantes or in the real world of Hapsburg Austria? Should he write in Spanish or German? Once Freud entered adulthood, all these ambivalences gave way to a clearly defined identity: he chose heterosexual marriage, a career in science, and a resolve acquiescence to the reality principle. But whenever this apparently immutable identity came under threat—as it did with the Anschluss—Freud was reminded of the psychic formlessness of his adolescent years, and his unconscious associations led him back to the language of his youth and of the Academia Española. In these instances, Freud—who, like Oedipus, wanted to know and find answers to all questions—had no other remedy than to throw his hands in the air and exclaim, in Spanish, "¿Quién sabe?"

Even Freud's use of the Spanish term conquistador in the letter to Fliess is ultimately an expression of ambivalence and self-doubt. The passage is often quoted to show that Freud saw himself as a great man destined to achieve fame and glory. But Freud, in fact, resorted to this Spanish word in a moment of self-doubt: his letter to Fliess chronicles his anxieties and his fear of failure. The full passage reads:

Perhaps hard times are ahead, both for me and for my practice. On the whole, I have noticed that you usually overestimate me greatly. . . . For I am actually not a man of science, not an observer, not an experimentor, not a thinker. I am by temperament nothing but a conquistador—an adventurer, if you want it translated— with all the curiosity, daring, and tenacity characteristic of a man of this sort. Such people are customarily esteemed only if they have been successful, have really discovered something; otherwise they are dropped by the wayside. And that is not altogether unjust. At the present time, however, luck has left me; I no longer discover anything worthwhile. 120

In calling himself a conquistador, Freud was in fact betraying his anxieties about failure, about not being a true man of science and not having made a significant discovery. This episode is thus consistent with his other lapses into Spanish during moments of self-doubt and anxiety.

Even in his old age, Freud associated Spanish with his adolescence and with his passionate friendship with Eduard Silberstein. Spanish continued to be a private language linked to the memories of his youth, of his first readings of Cervantes, his first love, and his first attempts at scientific research. Through Spanish, Freud discovered the Exemplary Novels, made his first male friend, gave voice to his fear of femininity, and even dissected ed's. Through these explorations, Spanish remained the language of doubt, of ambiguity and ambivalence, the tongue of adolescent formlessness, of gender undifferentiation and psychic bisexuality. It was a tongue of immense affective intensity: a Pandora's box that Freud chose not to open ever again after his last letters to Eduard.

After reading his letters to Eduard, twenty-first-century readers, immersed as they are in debates about gay rights, same-sex marriage, and queer activism, might wonder if this special friendship would be better analyzed using a more contemporary terminology; was Freud gay? Bisexual? Questioning?
Bi-curious? Would he have joined the University of Vienna's GLBTQ group if it had existed in the 1870s as it does now? Was his friendship with Eduard typical of fin-de-siècle transitional homoeroticism? And, to invoke a fitting psychoanalytic concept, did Freud ever act out his fantasies? How far did the two boys take their elaborate flirtation?

Freud's letters to Eduard Silberstein reveal nothing about a physical relationship; both men died many years ago, taking their secrets to the tomb. But as Freud might have said, sometimes fantasies matter more than deeds, and what went through the two boys' minds—and hearts—could well have been more intense, more real, and more significant than whatever they might have done together. What we do know is that the two boys played an elaborate homage to Spain, Cervantes, and the two canine protagonists of the "Colloquy," and therefore whatever they did, whether in fantasy or in reality, they did in Spanish, doggie style.

But described his Labyrinth of Solitude as a Mexican version of Marxism, there is one important difference between his essay and Paz's: Paz does not explore the rise of monotheism, one of the Freud's study. One could argue that Freud was writing about a Paz focused on post-Conquest Mexico, but even then, an heism would allow a fresh perspective on the destruction of the implantation of Catholicism in the New Spain.

He had been aware of this important omission: he returned to his last major work, In Light of India, published in 1995, was not on the themes he had explored in The Labyrinth, solitude—but on the question of monotheism, as he discovered a culture that was productive than usual, and the poems he wrote in Delhi, in his The Monkey Grammarians, sparkle with energy, pleasure, and the poems he wrote in Delhi, in his The Monkey Grammarians, sparkle with energy, pleasure, was in India that Paz met Marie-José Tramini, who would live with him until his death.
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Though Octavio Paz described his *Labyrinth of Solitude* as a Mexican version of *Moses and Monotheism*, there is one important difference between his essay and Freud's last work: Paz does not explore the rise of monotheism, one of the central themes in Freud's study. One could argue that Freud was writing about Ancient Egypt while Paz focused on post-Conquest Mexico, but even then, an emphasis on monotheism would allow a fresh perspective on the destruction of Aztec religion and the implantation of Catholicism in the New Spain.

Paz seems to have been aware of this omission: he returned to Freud's *Moses* in his last major work, *In Light of India*, published in 1995. This time, the emphasis was on the themes he had explored in *The Labyrinth*—Oedipus, Geistigkeit, solitude—but on the question of monotheism, as it related not to Mexico but to India.

India was, along with Mexico and France, one of Paz's greatest loves. He discovered this vast country in 1955, when he spent a few months working at the Mexican Embassy in New Delhi, and returned in 1962, this time for six years, after being appointed ambassador to India. The discovery of a culture that was at once radically other and strangely reminiscent of Mexico invigorated Paz: he was even more productive than usual, and the poems he wrote in Delhi, including *Blanco* and *The Monkey Grammarian*, sparkle with energy, pleasure, and humor. And it was in India that Paz met Marie-José Tramini, who would become his wife and live with him until his death.
Paz wrote many poems about India and planned to one day write a long essay about his years there. He didn't get to it until he was almost eighty, gravely ill and aware that this would most certainly be his last book, the coda to a long career that had begun with the publication of The Labyrinth in 1950. His first publication had been about Mexico; his last one would be devoted to India. Both were responses to Freud's Moses and Monotheism.

Freud was chiefly interested in the psychic and cultural effects of religions; he linked the rise of monotheism to the advance in intellectuality. Paz, on the other hand, focused on its political dimension: a monotheistic worldview, he wrote, goes hand in hand with centralized power, and "one need not share Freud's theory that the origin of Jewish monotheism was the theological absolutism of pharaoh Akhenaton (Amenophis IV) to understand the natural relation between a single power and a belief in a single god."123

In order to explore the political effects of monotheism, Paz compares two very different cultures: India, where a polytheistic religion has survived into the present, despite the incursions of Islam and Christianity; and Mexico, where pre-Columbian polytheism gave way to Spanish Catholicism, though elements of Indian rituals survived in the new religion.

India's refusal of monotheism explains, in Paz's view, its diversity and heterogeneity. "Monotheism," he writes, "has been the great unifier of different peoples, languages, races, and cultures,"124 a powerful centrifugal force that produces cohesive societies; polytheism, in contrast, accounts for the vast mosaic of peoples and customs found in India. Paz believes that the few elements that hold the country together—including the English language—were introduced by the British, emissaries of a monotheistic culture.

Mexico, on the other hand, had the opposite experience: Aztec religion was destroyed by the Spaniards, and polytheism quickly gave way to the belief in a single God. Paz credits Spanish Catholicism with accomplishing what the Aztecs never achieved: a unification of the disparate groups inhabiting the Mexican territory. Monotheism created a cohesive nation, but also produced the extremely powerful, almost despotic rulers that Paz decried in The Labyrinth and Pooh-dee: the belief in one God goes hand in hand with the rule of an almighty ruler. (In a recent book Enrique Krauze, one of Mexico's most distinguished historians, follows Paz's lead and invokes Moses and Monotheism to explain the popularity of Hugo Chávez; Venezuelans, he suggests, have adopted him as a paternal figure to atone for the guilt of having sacrificed Simón Bolívar, the country's founding father.)124

Despite their radically different historical experiences, Mexico and India face similar challenges: coming to terms with the past, preparing for the future, and reconciling tradition with the demands of modernity. In both countries, Paz sees an explosive resurgence of nationalism as a response to historical traumas that have not been worked through, and stem from the clash between polytheism and monotheism. "In countries like India and Mexico, which have been colonies and have suffered psychic wounds, nationalism is sometimes aggressive and deadly, and sometimes comic."125

But what role does Geistigkeit—another central theme in Moses and Monotheism—play in the struggle between polytheism and monotheism in India and Mexico? How does Freud's association of polytheism with Saurischkeit and monotheism with Geistigkeit relate to the political reading of religious belief offered by Paz? Does the Mexican poet accept Freud's hypothesis that monotheism produces an advance in intellectuality? This would imply that polytheistic India is somehow less intellectual than monotheistic Mexico—a notion that seems incompatible with Paz's exuberant enthusiasm for that country.

But perhaps there is another way to frame the question. Freud associated polytheism with a voluptuous, feminine sensuality and, likewise, Paz claimed the realm of the senses as a site of privileged experience for poetry. And at no time in his life did he experience sensuality as intensely as during his time in India: his poetry overflows with colors, smells, and sounds; and the erotic scenes painted in The Monkey Grammarian, with their acrobatic gymnastics—vices in the air, hands and feet entwined—would lead even the most experienced reader of the Kama Sutra to raise an eyebrow.

In India Octavio Paz discovered a sensual intensity that he had not known in Mexico, France, or any of the other monothestic cultures where he had lived. Perhaps this is why the poet, at the end of his life, chose to conclude a long and brilliant career as an intellectual by returning to a scene of sensuality. In Light of India closes with a "Farewell" that is not only an Epilogue: it is a moving gesture by an eighty-year-old poet who found himself at the end of the road. Paz, like Freud in 1939, was dying of cancer. In Light of India was his farewell, just as Moses and Monotheism had been Freud's. And to say goodbye—to his readers, to the world, to life—Paz leaves us with an evocation of his last day in India, a reminiscence that is also a tribute to what we might call the advance in Saurischkeit:
We spent the last Sunday on the island of Elephanta. It had been my first experience of Indian art; it had also been the same for Marie-José, years after mine though before we had met. There were many tourists, which at first ruined our visit. But the beauty of the place conquered all the distractions and intrusions. The blue of the sea and the sky; the curving bay and its banks, some white, others green, ochre, violet; the island fallen in the water like an enormous stone; the cave and, in the half-light, the sculptures, images of beings that are of this world and of another that we can only glimpse... I relived what we had felt years ago, but now illuminated by a more serious light: we thought that we were seeing all this for the last time. It was as though we were leaving ourselves. Time opened its doors. What was waiting for us?136

Paz began his career by writing an intellectual history of Mexico. He closed it with an ode to Indian sensuality. His beginnings and farewell were linked by an arch spanning decades and continents: Freud's Moses and Monotheism.