

# A public inquiry into Freud's influence upon Cambridge

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Steve Pile 

The Open University, UK

John Forrester and Laura Cameron, *Freud in Cambridge*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, 812 pages, ISBN: 9780521861908

Undeniably, at just over 700 pages, Forrester and Cameron's *Freud in Cambridge* is a big book. It is reminiscent of the kinds of reports that are produced by public inquiries: those major investigations set up by governments to provide an official review of particular events or actions, often with recommendations (that can be binding, or not). This, then, is the final report of the public inquiry into the influence of Freud upon Cambridge, despite Freud never having set foot in Cambridge. The purpose of the inquiry is to counter the suggestion that Freud had no significant impact on the intellectual life of Cambridge – and therefore that Cambridge is not, and never has been, subject to the charms and seductions of psychoanalytic thought. More than this, the argument is that Cambridge's Freudian influences have been forgotten, hidden and (perhaps) repressed. As in any public inquiry, searching for evidence of Freud's influence requires the work of forensically attentive detectives: tirelessly gathering scraps of information; carefully assembling fragments into a coherent whole; meticulously laying out events, actions, timelines and pathologies. No clue too small to be overlooked. No lead to be left dangling. This book is a work of indefatigable researchers, determined to lay out all evidences, to make their conclusions incontrovertible. Freud was in Cambridge. And he still is. The public inquiry is now closed – and we can agree with its recommendation: that intellectual influences are not always visible or celebrated, and tracing them out requires fortitude, determination and a forensic attention to detail. And also creativity.

Creativity? Yes, the Forrester and Cameron inquiry into the influence of Freud requires the careful gathering of facts about, and interviews with, leading figures (albeit posthumously). Yet this book also has another homologue: Freud's own Royal

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## Corresponding author:

Steve Pile, The Open University, Department of Geography, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK.  
Email: [steve.pile@open.ac.uk](mailto:steve.pile@open.ac.uk)

Commission Into the Purpose and Meaning of Dreams. As Forrester and Cameron put it: ‘Psychoanalysis began with the emergence of the dream. A common thread weaving through our stories of Cambridge lives, the dream is, appropriately, where we too must start’ (p. 6). That start is with a dream reported by Sir Arthur Tansley; I will return to this dream later. For now, it is important to note that in dream analysis, elements in the dream – like any clue discovered by a detective working a case – may have many meanings and, through the process of their interpretation and contextualisation, they can point towards entirely opposite conclusions than may at first appear obvious. In Freud’s royal commission, a key method was to follow these meanings, interpretations and contexts as they connected to one another, in what he called ‘chains of associations’. Each clue would lead to further clues, setting up chains of evidence that would lead to new ideas and support alternative interpretations of events and actions. *Freud in Cambridge* is, taken together, part public inquiry and part Freudian royal commission.

To celebrate this work, I will not repeat its evidential basis, its contents. Rather, inspired by this inquiry, I will pursue some clues that lead us to Cambridge’s Freud via other chains of association. One chain follows the identification of a man of science; the other involves that nightmarish encounter between dreams and empire. My point, in tracing out these chains of association, is to celebrate *Freud in Cambridge* as a process of detection and as a work of interpretation – but also to point out that big books do not exhaust a subject; rather, they create further opportunities for enlivening it.

So, our first chains of associations are tethered to the idea that Freud is a ‘man of science’. Chapter 3 begins with a quote from page xix of James Strachey’s general preface to his standard edition of Freud’s work (1966). In a section on translations, Strachey writes: ‘The imaginary model which I have always kept before me is of the writings of some English man of science of wide education born in the middle of the nineteenth century’ (cited on p. 57). The significance of this observation is revealed by the sentence that precedes this quote. Strachey explains that a large amount of ‘remodelling’ has taken place in the process both of translation and of selecting between translations. Strachey admits: ‘This unfortunately has involved the discarding, in the interests of this preferred uniformity, of many earlier translations that were excellent in themselves’ (also p. xix). Thus, Strachey’s man of science is, intriguingly, a kind of Rosetta Stone for decoding his encryption of Freud into English.

Although James Strachey is strongly associated with Bloomsbury, he also falls within the orbit of Cambridge, having studied at Trinity College. Strachey’s standard edition, as Forrester and Cameron explain in Chapter 9, is infamous for its recasting of Freud according to Strachey’s preferred uniformity. Critical in this debate is the way that Strachey seeks to ‘scientize’ Freud, both by introducing terms, such as *cathexis*, and also by removing words with double (or multiple) meanings. What detectives Forrester and Cameron have is a clue to understanding the underlying codebook for Strachey’s scientific cryptography. Now what they have to do is identify the unnamed man of science. Their search alights upon William H. R. Rivers, a Cambridge man of science.

Our detectives set to work, compiling evidence, following clues, interpreting, contextualising. Rivers is certainly English, having been born in Chatham in Kent in 1864; this also qualifies him as one ‘born in the middle of the nineteenth century’. He is therefore a

reasonable candidate for Strachey's man of science. What makes Rivers a great candidate, however, is his fascination with Freud's interpretation of dreams – and also that, in 1912, he set up a diploma of psychological medicine along with C. S. Myers (the subject of Forrester and Cameron's Chapter 5). Indeed, Forrester and Cameron observe that 'Rivers's response to Freud has rightly been viewed as something of a litmus test for the receptivity of English science to psychoanalysis' (p. 61). Although Rivers was critical of key Freudian notions, such as repression and infantile sexuality, he nonetheless appreciated the revolution in clinical psychology that Freud initiated.

In particular, Rivers was drawn to psychoanalysis as a method, especially as a method for decoding the cypher of dreams. This interest intensified during the First World War, as a consequence of the treatment of soldiers' psychological traumas (war neuroses). After the war, despite widespread hostility to Freud's (scandalous) understanding of infantile sexuality, Rivers publicly defended psychoanalysis in the *Lancet*, especially for its conceptualisation of the unconscious and its understanding of the role of symbolisation both in dreams and in neurosis.

By 1917, Rivers had begun a process of self-analysis, seeking an understanding of the workings of his own unconscious, subjecting himself to 'the severest scrutiny' (cited on p. 66). Indeed, it was Rivers' experience of interpreting one of his own dreams that led him to be convinced both of Freud's ideas about dreams and also of their use and significance in a clinical setting (p. 67). Yet Rivers still shied away from Freud's notion of repression. Dreams, for Rivers, were the guardians of sleep, as Freud argued, but by seeking to resolve waking conflicts, rather than by finding disguised ways to fulfil repressed wishes. Thus, a dream might be decoded by seeing the substitutions that took place in a dream, where one idea was simply a replacement for another. This = that. For Freud, recognising this/those substitutions was simply the first step in getting to other thoughts and ideas, often contradictory and topsy-turvy. While it is certainly interesting to trace Freud's influence upon Rivers' own ideas, I will focus on how Rivers functions, for Forrester and Cameron, as a Rosetta Stone for decrypting Strachey's scientific recoding of Freud's writings.

Through his experience of 'numberless nerve-shattered soldier patients' (C. S. Myers, cited on p. 98) and his unflinching self-analysis, Rivers came to Freud, not as a faithful servant, but as a scientist. In using Freud, Rivers was prepared to reject and amend what, for Freud, were central tenets of psychoanalysis (such as infantile sexuality and repression). Like Rivers, Strachey intended to be a faithful servant, but he was also fully prepared to alter Freud's texts: not just as an act of translation, but as a robust re-presentation of Freud as a man of science. Through their identification of Rivers as *the* man of science, Forrester and Cameron, in Chapter 9, are able both to show the extent of this re-presentation and also to reveal Strachey's underlying desire to consolidate and emphasise Freud's ideas as in essence scientific, where – like those of Rivers – their main contribution was to be found in the clinic, in the rehabilitation of the numberless nerve-shattered. Thus, Rivers, Strachey and Freud all align beautifully: Freud is a Cambridge man of science.

But what if it is not Rivers? Where might these other candidates take us? Let us look at two other candidates: Frederic Myers and Henry Sidgwick. Frederic Myers was born in Keswick in 1843, while Henry Sidgwick was born in Skipton in 1838. Significantly, like

Strachey, both were educated at Trinity College (unlike Rivers, who was at St John's). Of the two, Sidgwick is perhaps harder to consider as having been 'born in the middle of the nineteenth century' (although he was born two years closer to it than Rivers, it might be noted). That said, arguably, Sidgwick has left the more lasting impression upon Cambridge, with an entire site being named after him. It is hard to imagine that James Strachey would have been unaware of either of these men of science, or of their engagements with psychology, or of their relationship to Freud. Significantly, as men of science, what these two candidates expose is an occult vein both in Freudian thought and in Cambridge's intellectual history. So, for example, Myers is responsible for the idea of the subliminal self. His researches included the study of telepathic abilities and sightings of ghosts. He was one of the founding members of the Society for Psychical Research, in 1883. It was in the proceedings of this society that Freud famously published his first conceptual paper on the unconscious in 1911, mainly, it seems, to challenge the ascendancy of Myers' notion of the subliminal self. But also perhaps to allow Freud to open up a conversation about the spookier aspects of mental life with like minds. Meanwhile, Henry Sidgwick was also a founder of the Society and, furthermore, its first president. Despite his scientific investigations into spirit mediums (in Cambridge), it is nevertheless hard to make a case for Sidgwick being Strachey's man of science. Best known for his writings on ethics, Sidgwick was much more the moral philosopher. Which leaves us with Myers. So, what (or, so what?) if Strachey's man of science is Frederic Myers?

Well, then, we have an alternative history. To imagine Myers as the man of science enables a narrative about Strachey remodelling Freud to counteract a dangerous trend in Cambridge towards an occult account of human psychology, based on the idea of a subliminal self and the persistence of spirit after death. This explains the extent and intensity of Strachey's recoding of Freud. It also resites Freud in the history of Cambridge. Instead of Freud being inside Cambridge, he is being imposed on Cambridge by Strachey from the outside. Here, Strachey would be fighting the same battle Freud started when he published in the proceedings of the Society. More than this, Strachey would be siding with Freud's pre-eminent champion in England, Ernest Jones. For science. Against the occult.

The focus on both the man and the idea of the man of science leads Forrester and Cameron down an illuminating path of associations. However, out of the corner of the eye, perhaps we can glimpse another story. Of a Cambridge that is busy exploring other psychologies, psychologies that share an intuitive interest in the composition of the self and the soul, and in the experience of occult phenomena such as telepathy and the appearance of ghosts. All of which is hidden. Repressed, perhaps. Our public inquiry into the influence of Freud on Cambridge has turned up something unexpected: the occult. And its denial.

We are now in a position to trace out our second chain of associations. This time, in the phrase 'English man of science', we are more interested in tracking down the word *English*. Strachey himself confirms that inserting the word *English* is significant: 'And I should like, in an explanatory and no patriotic spirit, to emphasize the word "English"' (cited on p. 57). So, how are we to interpret *English* in this context – and the immediate denial that its use is motivated by patriotism? We will start, as promised above, with a dream. The dreamer is Arthur Tansley, a Cambridge botanist (see

Chapter 2). Tansley's interest in psychoanalysis was sparked by a dream. My intention is not to reinterpret the dream, but to call attention to specific symbols in the dream. Tansley reports the dream this way: 'I dreamed that I was in a sub-tropical country, separated from my friends, standing alone in a small shack or shed which was open on one side so that I looked out on a wide open space surrounded by bush or scrub. In the edge of the bush I could see a number of savages armed with spears and the long pointed shields used by some South African native tribes' (Tansley, cited on p. 7).

The dream continues with some fairly clear sexual imagery: his wife dressed entirely in white, a loaded gun that may or may not have been fired at the savages who are blocking his way (but not his wife's). The sexual nature of the dream was not lost upon Arthur Tansley. In the months that followed the dream, Tansley read in sequence Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. By 1921, Tansley had, via Ernest Jones, arranged to meet Freud, with both Jones and Freud concluding that Tansley would be an excellent addition to the psychoanalytic community. As a man of science, Tansley was keen to make the connection between biology and sexual life, especially in relation to the idea of a fragile equilibrium present in both psychology and botany, which he would famously develop through the idea of ecology. However, I am not interested in Tansley as a man of science – nor in Rivers or Strachey as such – but in them as English men of empire.

Tansley's description of the savages in his dream is a clear reference to Zulu warriors, with their iconic assegai spears and distinctive animal skin shields. While Tansley would undoubtedly have been aware of the Zulu victory at Isandlwana and the British defence of Rourke's Drift in 1879, his dream of the savages may have been prompted by popular Zulu imagery. This would include Charles Edwin Fripp's paintings, such as *The Battle of Isandlwana* (1885). Indeed, *Incident at the Battle of Isandlwana* (also 1885) could almost be a depiction of a scene from Tansley's dream. Alternatively, there were also wooden toy sets, anthropological photographs and cigarette cards. For example, in 1909, W. S. Kimball and Company issued a series of cigarette cards with the imperialist title *Savage and Semi-Barbarous Chiefs and Rulers*. One card illustrated the Zulu King Cetewayo, leader during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879.

The Zulu warrior was a familiar figure in popular representations of the nations of empire. The Zulu warrior was not just iconic, with his [sic] short spear and long pointed shield; he was also chained to a particular 'noble savage' narrative. Thus, Churchman's cigarette card of 1929 offers this description: 'The Zulu warrior was quite fearless, very athletic, most moral and extremely superstitious. The army was organised into regiments, the colour of the shields varying with each unit.' Tansley's dream seems to evoke the threat posed by these fearless athletic warriors, but perhaps also their discipline and morality. Even so, perhaps the dream imagery was prompted by a colleague's (Robert Adamson, possibly) tales of visiting the Cape, where black men flamboyantly dressed as Zulu chiefs were pulling rickshaws for white people. Or something else. We cannot know. However, we do know that Tansley was dreaming of the Zulu. Yet in popular imagery, the Zulu were both feared and admired. The interchangeability of *Zulu* and *savage* is therefore critical in understanding the dream, as it affords the opportunity to invoke civilisation and also to deny it, evoking sexual acts, sexual danger and sexual repression at one and the same time. Tansley's unconscious was, we can surmise,

liberally playing with the idea of the savage, conjuring up the latent content of imperial fantasies about African people (of the kind that Frantz Fanon would easily recognise). The dream is laced with the intermeshed ideas of white supremacy, of masculinity and of (thwarted, threatened, threatening) sexual desire. Tansley was not alone in this. There, too, was Rivers.

In the course of their discussion of Rivers' analysis of his dream, Forrester and Cameron carefully reveal his 'covert and ill-defined' homosexuality (p. 82). Developing a theme of repressed sexuality, they elaborate an intriguing relationship between William Rivers and John Layard. In 1914, accompanying Rivers on an expedition to the archipelago of Vanuatu in the South Pacific Ocean, Layard became one of the first anthropologists to visit Atchin, an islet off the Malakula coast. While Rivers continued his travels, Layard stayed on Atchin to immerse himself in the local culture, learning its oral history, myths and musical traditions. Upon his return, Forrester and Cameron report, Layard suffered a nervous breakdown and, by late autumn 1916, was undergoing daily psychotherapy with Rivers. The treatment came to an abrupt end when Layard 'declared his (transferential) love to Rivers' (p. 83). For Forrester and Cameron, this episode underscores the way that Rivers disputed, or denied, any connection between sexuality and war neuroses. Thus, Rivers' repression of his own homosexuality, especially when confronted with Layard's, becomes key to understanding why he denied Freud's theories of sexuality. Yet there is also another possibility here.

Forrester and Cameron quote extensively from Rivers' president's address to the British Psychological Society in 1919. In this passage, Rivers reiterates that war neuroses are not connected to sexuality. However, he anticipates that peace neuroses will likely have sexuality as a cause, because the re-emergence of civilisation – of civil life – will require the reimposition of social taboos. Rivers is careful to suggest that the conflict between civilisation and instincts is not fought out solely on the battleground of sexuality, but here are Freud's ideas about civilisation and its discontents being played out as a transition between war neuroses and peace neuroses. That is, there is a clear parallel being drawn between less and more civilised times (war and peace) and less and more civilised cultures (Melanesians, perhaps, and the English). Indeed, Freud himself is folded into this imperial logic of superiority by Strachey when the latter describes Freud as undergoing a traditional Victorian upbringing – as there simply could not be anything more civilised than that. Nor anything more English. (Nor repressed, we might add.)

What Forrester and Cameron reveal about Cambridge is the imbrication of sexual, imperial and racial dynamics in its intellectual life: its repressions, its obsessions and its savageries. The dream of sex and savages, in empire, is persistent – and an uncomfortable path to travel down, even in Cambridge. It is not just that their work exposes Cambridge as an engine of race and sex and empire, but also that Cambridge is a machine that chews up our famed Viennese Jewish doctor and spits him out as an Englishman. We may not wish to take Freud out of Cambridge, but much can still be done to take the Cambridge out of Freud. We must celebrate Forrester and Cameron's detective skills, as they provide us with a book of clues to follow as we seek to address, and redress, the offences reported in the *Freud in Cambridge* inquiry.

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### **ORCID iD**

Steve Pile  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1503-2382>

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### **Author biography**

**Steve Pile** teaches geography at The Open University. He has published widely on issues concerning place and the politics of identity. Steve is author of *The Body and the City* (1996), *Real Cities* (2005) and *Bodies, Affects, Politics* (2021), which variously explore the relationship between Freudian psychoanalysis and human geography.