

Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Freud and Nietzsche*, translated by Richard L. Collier, Jr. London and New York: Continuum, 2002. Paperback. £12.99.

Reviewed by Paul Bishop, Glasgow

“Another thing I don’t like to hear,” Nietzsche wrote, “is the infamous ‘and’ [*ein berüchtigtes ‘und’*]: the Germans talk of ‘Goethe *and* Schiller’ [...] and with my own ears, although only from university professors, I have heard talk of ‘Schopenhauer and Hartmann’...”.<sup>1</sup> So what, one wonders, would he have made of “Nietzsche *and* Freud” — a conjunction which, in the words of Paul-Laurent Assoun, “has been recognized and accredited for a long time, indeed from the very beginnings of psychoanalysis” (p.1)? Over the last decade or so, the presence of Nietzsche in Freud’s work has received increasing attention, in the form of monographs written in a variety of languages, including English<sup>2</sup> and German.<sup>3</sup> In the French-speaking world, one of the first book-length treatments was Assoun’s, followed in 2003 by Éric Vartzbed’s study.<sup>4</sup> Assoun’s monograph, *Freud et Nietzsche*, was first published in 1980 as the conclusion to a trilogy that had begun with *Freud, la philosophie et les philosophes* (1976) and continued with *Marx et la répétition historique* (1978). In 1998, the work was reissued with a new preface, which acts in several respects as a convenient summary of its central argument. Assoun, himself a psychoanalyst, as well as a professor of philosophy at Paris VII, has written prolifically on an extraordinarily wide range of philosophical and cultural questions relating to psychoanalysis. In addition, he is a regular participant in programmes about psychoanalysis broadcast on France Culture (including, last year, a discussion of the celebrated Schreber case).<sup>5</sup> Yet, until now, little of his work has been

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<sup>1</sup> *Twilight of the Idols*, “Expeditions of an Untimely Man,” §16.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Lehrer, *Nietzsche’s Presence in Freud’s Life and Thought: On The Origins of A Psychology of Dynamic Unconscious Mental Functioning*, New York, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Reinhard Gasser, *Nietzsche und Freud*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Éric Vartzbed, *La troisième oreille: Essai sur un précurseur de Freud*, Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> See *La vie comme elle va*, “Le couple,” 6 April 2006; *Radio libre*, “Freud et la philosophie,” 8 April 2006; and, most recently, *Les vendredis de la philosophie*, “Entre chair et cuir,” 9 February 2007. For further information on Assoun’s contribution to the programme *Les chemins de la connaissance* in the series ‘Les cinq psychanalyses de Freud’, [4/5], Le Président Schreber, 4 May 2006, see the following link:

available in English, so it is greatly to the credit of Continuum, the titles of whose expanding catalogue never fail to fascinate (see [www.continuumbooks.com](http://www.continuumbooks.com)), that it has reissued in paperback this English version (first published by The Athlone Press in 2000) of Assoun's study. With it a *Standardwerk* among European analysts and scholars is widely available to the English-speaking world. It is also a matter for rejoicing that, a quarter of a century after its first publication in French, Assoun's work can be seen to have withstood the test of time.

One of the most famous methodological metaphors is genealogy; Nietzsche is an obvious example (although the genetic method is found much earlier in, say, Herder). Freud made use (as did, later, Foucault) of the idea of archaeology. For Assoun, however, the relationship between Nietzsche and Freud is best grasped in terms of *palaeontology*: the reconstitution of two skeletons with partially similar bones, which "belong to the same genre" but "remain under specific principles of organization" (p. 50, cf. p.184). At the same time, Assoun is concerned to show that, in the Nietzsche-Freud relationship, a broader disciplinary issue is at stake, and so he notes (in his preface to the 1998 edition) that his "exegesis-critique" also "interrogates the interface between philosophy and psychoanalysis" (p. xv). Although both philosophy and psychoanalysis engage Assoun's interest, it would be fair to say that, in terms of method, psychoanalysis has the upper hand.

In *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood* (1910), Freud wrote that "psychoanalysis has made us familiar with the intimate connection between the father-complex and belief in God; it has shown us that a personal God is, psychologically, nothing other than an exalted father."<sup>6</sup> For Assoun, this means that "what psychoanalysis never ceases articulating is that the subject is taken in a constituent relation to prohibition, which is personified in the (unconscious) function of the father" (p. xxxvi). Eschewing "any 'psycho-biographical' temptation", Assoun nevertheless reads the proclamation of the death of God in the light of the early death of Nietzsche's father. Licence for this approach can be found in Nietzsche's enigmatic remarks in *Ecce Homo*,

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[http://www.radiofrance.fr/chaines/france-culture2/emissions/chemins/fiche.php?diffusion\\_id=40538](http://www.radiofrance.fr/chaines/france-culture2/emissions/chemins/fiche.php?diffusion_id=40538).

For an audiofile (mp3) of the programme itself, see the following online sound-archive:

<http://psychologue-quimper.fr/audio/mp3-psychologie.php>.

“as my father I have already died, as my mother I still live and grow old”; and, “in yet another point I am merely my father once more and as it were the continuation of his life after an all too early death”.<sup>7</sup> In his early autobiographical texts, Nietzsche returned time and again to his father’s death (and, although Assoun does not investigate this possibility, it is perhaps worth noting that, some forty years ago, the late R. J. Hollingdale suggested one scene in “Of the Vision and the Riddle”, §2, in Part III of *Zarathustra*, had its source in Nietzsche’s memory of discovering his dead father).<sup>8</sup> Freud argued that the identification with the dead father constituted a central element of melancholy—and it is melancholy that, in Assoun’s view, could well have marked “the great scene of Nietzsche’s final collapse, in Turin” (p. xxxvii).

At the same time, Assoun is constantly alert to the historical dimension of Freud’s engagement with Nietzsche—to what he calls their “strange contemporaneity”; after all, Nietzsche was only a dozen years older than Freud (p.3). So when, in 1868, Nietzsche became professor of philology at Basel, Freud had yet to begin his medical studies; in 1873, the year of publication of the first *Untimely Meditations*, Freud entered the Faculty of Medicine in Vienna; in 1882, as Nietzsche explored the idea of eternal recurrence, Freud became a physician; while Nietzsche continued work on *Zarathustra*, Freud was studying hysteria in Paris with Charcot; when Nietzsche was approaching his final crisis in 1888, Freud had only just started outlining his psychoanalytic ideas in his correspondence with Fliess; and when Nietzsche collapsed, Freud was still only 33; not until 1899, the year of Nietzsche’s death, did *The Interpretation of Dreams* appear. The passing-away of Nietzsche thus coincides with the birth of psychoanalysis.

Furthermore, Nietzsche’s presence in the early years of psychoanalysis, when its tenets were being formulated, is unmistakable. For instance, he formed the topic of discussion at the meetings of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society on at least two occasions: on 1 April 1908, when Eduard Hitschmann discussed the ascetic ideal in Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*; and again on 28 October 1908, when Adolf

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<sup>6</sup> Freud, *Standard Edition*, vol. 11, p.123.

<sup>7</sup> *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so Wise,” §1, §5.

<sup>8</sup> See “Notes,” no. 25, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, p. 341.

Häutler presented a lecture on *Ecce Homo* (pp. 6-11). During the discussion in the second meeting, Freud observed: “Nietzsche has transformed ‘being’ (*ist*) into ‘duty’ (*soll*), but such a ‘duty’ is a stranger to science. In that, Nietzsche remained a moralist and thus was unable to free himself from the theologian” (cited p.186). In this remark—a deliberate echo of Hume’s discussion of the “is”-“ought” dilemma or the fact-value distinction in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (Book 3, Part 1, §1)?—Assoun locates an important distinction between Nietzsche and Freud. Both thinkers refer to the Copernican revolution,<sup>9</sup> but their intentions are, as Assoun observes, significantly different. For Nietzsche’s revolution is “axiological, metonymizing *Sein* into *Sollen*,” while Freud’s “upholds *Sein*, even if to erect it in *Sollen*, and erecting in consequence the requirement for a cognizance of ethics” (p.188). Assoun concludes that Nietzsche and Freud are “like two discourses set up face to face that, despite their different codes and distinct keys, nevertheless cross the same zones of language and there determine the form, each radical in their fashion, of subversion” (p.189).

On 21-22 September 1911 the Third International Psychoanalytic Congress was held in Weimar. Thus “by an accident of history and geography,” the “Freudian court” actually sat “in the Nietzschean citadel,” that is, the town where Nietzsche spent his final years, as well as “a place that, symbolically, held the vestiges of the great Goethe” (pp.11-12). Hanns Sachs and Ernest Jones paid a visit to Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche; Assoun notes the “limited but precise” significance of the event, Nietzsche being the sole contemporary philosopher who received, “at the very moment of its institutionalization,” such a “manifestation of respectful sympathy from a faction of the official analytic movement” (p.14). And it was in Weimar that Lou Andreas-Salomé—a living link with Nietzsche, and the great rival to his sister—made contact with Freud. Again, an affinity; again, a difference. For Assoun, Lou’s account of Freud’s reaction to Nietzsche’s “Hymn to Life” (based on her own “Prayer to Life”) is highly revealing. “A difference of sensibility” traces “a line of divergence between Nietzsche and Freud,” he writes, distinguishing “the cry from the murmur, the dithyramb from the elegy, tragedy from witticism” (p.28), so that “where Nietzsche’s soul dilates, Freud’s soul ‘contracts’”—in

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<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche in *The Will to Power*, §1, [5]; Freud in “A Difficulty in the Path of Psychoanalysis” and in the eighteenth of the *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*.

the phrase from Wilhelm Busch—“into the tiny cavity of a molar” (p. 29). In short, “this is what stops Freud at the gates of the temple of Dionysus!” (p. 28).

So if, in these early—and defining—years, Freud is, as Assoun writes, “bombarded with Nietzschean solicitations; everywhere around him, he discovers Nietzsche,” it is also the case that “he has constantly to reiterate his act of avoidance” (p. 25). These solicitations, together with these acts of avoidance, take numerous forms, and Assoun’s study offers a comprehensive consideration of Freud’s explicit—and not so explicit—remarks on Nietzsche. In the conclusion of his letter to Eduard Silberstein of 13 March 1875, Freud’s reticence to conclude his letter “And thus we live, thus fortune guides our steps” is explained by Freud himself with reference to Nietzsche’s onslaught in his first *Untimely Meditation* (§4) on David-Friedrich Strauss for using this phrase (pp. xxi, xxiii). One might also remember the origin of this phrase in a poem by Goethe; and by noting the subterranean presence of Goethe in the writings of both thinkers (p. xxvi), Assoun hints at the significance of this shared intellectual and literary source.

Likewise, Assoun compares Nietzsche’s “transvaluation of values” (*Umwertung aller Werte*) with Freud’s attempt, amid the “general collapse of all values” (*Sturz aller Werte*)—as he put it in his letter to Fliess of 21 September 1897—to preserve intact psychoanalysis, which undertakes (as he wrote in *The Interpretation of Dreams*) to understand how, between the dream-material and the dream itself, “a complete ‘transvaluation of all psychic values’ [*eine völlige ,Umwertung aller psychischen Werte‘*] takes place.”<sup>10</sup> “At the moment when he finds himself on the track of the foundational theory of desire,” Assoun comments, “Freud spontaneously resorts to the expression with which Nietzsche had named his own project” (p.19). Or, to put it another way, “the master expression of Nietzsche’s axiology serves spontaneously to express for Freud his own essential mutations” (p.20). Writing—again, to Fliess—on 1 February 1900, Freud confided that, hoping to find in Nietzsche “the words for many things which remain mute within me”, he had been, he said, “too lazy for the moment” to have actually opened any of Nietzsche’s works. “This remarkable formula,” Assoun remarks, expresses well “the sense of Freud’s initial personal investment in Nietzsche.” *Tout est là*: “here is summarized all the strangeness of the relation between Freud and Nietzsche” (pp. 20-21).

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<sup>10</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Standard Edition*, vol. 4, p.330.

Moreover, the discourse of Nietzsche informed some of psychoanalysis's earliest (and most bitter) polemics, such as Alfred Adler's borrowing of the notion of will-to-power to support his theory of overcompensation, or C.G. Jung's symbolic citation of Zarathustra in a letter to Freud: "One repays a teacher badly if one remains only a pupil"<sup>11</sup>—thus furnishing, Assoun observes, "the dissident disciple" with "the mode of expression for his emancipation" (p. 25). This choice of, as it were, not just passing, but parting, allusion also serves, Assoun notes, as "an indication of Nietzschean ideas in Jung's work"—which is, of course, another story altogether. Before long, a "Nietzscheo-Freudianism" had arisen. Ludwig Binswanger (whose uncle had helped care for Nietzsche in Jena) argued that Freud had undertaken "the rigorous and systematic elaboration" of what Nietzsche, "through the flash of corrosive aphorisms," had developed—a "technique of unmasking" (p. 32). In the work of Otto Gross, we find a different combination of "Freudian techniques with Nietzschean concepts" (p. 202), and yet another disciple-turned-apostate, Otto Rank, attempted an "ambitious synthesis" of Freud and Nietzsche—"a model of articulation between psychoanalysis and Nietzschean philosophy" (p. 32).

Now, Freud's "personal encounter" with Nietzsche forms but a preliminary to the "systematic comparison of the themes and the thoughts" of the two men in the second part of Assoun's study (p.16). Here he discusses such foundational concepts as: (1) the instinct (*Instinkt*) and the drive (*Trieb*), uncovering the sources of Nietzsche's thought in Schiller, Hölderlin, Emerson, and Wagner; (2) the idea of psychology or psychoanalysis itself; and (3) the principles of the drive, pointing to a "functional homology" between will-to-power and the libido (p. 91).

Next, Assoun turns to major themes: (1) sexuality, especially the theory of sublimation; (2) the unconscious, noting that the idea of the unconscious appears in Nietzsche as early as the inaugural lecture, "Homer and Classical Philology" (1869)—Assoun notes the resemblance between Nietzsche's "self" (*Selbst*) in *Zarathustra* and Freud's "id" (*Es*), although the affinity with Jung's notion of the self suggests itself more strongly; and (3) the interpretation of dreams. Assoun points out that, "in Nietzsche's philosophy, dreams [...] take on an active significance, not only as an

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<sup>11</sup> See Jung's letter to Freud of 3 March 1912; cf. *Zarathustra*, "Of the Bestowing Virtue," §3.

object of psychology, but as a mode of the transmission of truth,” citing the case of “the great Noontide” in *Zarathustra* as an example (p.129). Compared with the “double function” played by dreams in Nietzsche’s thinking—both as an aesthetic principle (the Apollonian) and a psychological one (a manifestation of the inner world)—the significance of dreams for Freud is, Assoun argues, more specific. For if “the image and its Dionysian colours serve, in a typical Nietzschean metaphor, to exhibit the luxuriance of instinct; by contrast, for Freud, understood literally, dreams only express a regressive, and as such a more significant, mode of expression” (p.133). The affinity between Nietzsche and Jung, for whom dreams unveiled the vast potential of the collective unconscious, is striking, if here left unspoken.

Finally, Assoun addresses some of the implications in the work of Nietzsche and Freud, examining: (1) the relation between neurosis and morality—that is, the realm of pathology; (2) the theory of culture: Assoun highlights Nietzsche’s seminal discussion in *Daybreak* (§173) of the social significance of labour, noting that “science regularly appears in Freud as an alternative to religion—a role that for Nietzsche was delegated to art” (p.171); and (3) the possibility of therapy. The kind of Nietzschean therapy outlined in §109 of *Daybreak* is, Assoun remarks, very different from what Freud would offer! And when, in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), Freud talks about the Saturnalia of the Romans and the modern carnival in terms of “the abrogation of the ideal” which allows the ego “once again [to] feel satisfied with itself,” constituting “a magnificent festival for the ego” (§11),<sup>12</sup> Assoun comments that “this is the festival that Nietzsche dreams about, while for Freud it can only be the paranoid projection of an impossible reconciliation”, and “that is why Nietzsche’s festivity is opposed to the sober enjoyment of Freud’s Law” (p.178). Again, Jung’s comments on the function of carnival in his essay on the trickster archetype (which actually mentions the “ass festival” of *Zarathustra*) spring to mind as a possible corrective to Freud’s thought; but is it really true to identify, as Assoun does in a footnote, the idea of festivity with Nietzsche’s “maniacal explosion” following his collapse in Turin in January 1889 (p. 227)? Such an interpretation of Nietzsche’s concept of festival—remember that the Ugliest Man turns to the other Higher Men and tells them, “one day, one festival with Zarathustra has taught

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<sup>12</sup> Freud, *Standard Edition*, vol. 18, p.131.

me to love the earth” (“The Drunken Song,” §1)—seems, at least on this occasion, uncharacteristically reductive.

Even within the scope of a relatively long review, it is impossible to capture fully the subtlety and richness of Assoun’s monograph. It remains simply one of the most important accounts of the intellectual relations between two “*maîtres penseurs*,” and it is to be hoped that further translations of Assoun’s research will appear. Finally, then, a word on the quality of the translation. Richard L. Collier, Jr., is to be congratulated on having undertaken to transfer Assoun’s elegant French prose into English; not an easy task, given the considerable differences between the conventions of French and Anglo-American academic writing. So such slips as there are, are ones of style, rather than substance. “*Hitschmann propose une lecture commentée de la troisième dissertation de “La généalogie de la morale”*” is translated as ‘Hitschmann proposed a lecture commenting on the third essay’ (p. 6), whereas he “offered a reading commenting on the third essay” would be more accurate; instead of “At the same time, Freud throws a wink towards Nietzsche” (p. 38), perhaps “a nod in the direction of Nietzsche” might better render *Là intervient aussi du même coup un clin d’œil vers Nietzsche*; and does *enjeu* always have to be translated as “stake”? Yet Collier also helps his author, silently correcting a couple of incorrect references (part 2, book 1, chapter 3, n. 14; part 2, book 3, chapter 3, p.172). Overall, his version can be relied upon for its accuracy, and Collier has performed an exceptionally useful service by translating what remains, after so many years, a scintillating account of an area still requiring further exploration within the larger context of discerning the cultural sources of psychoanalysis.