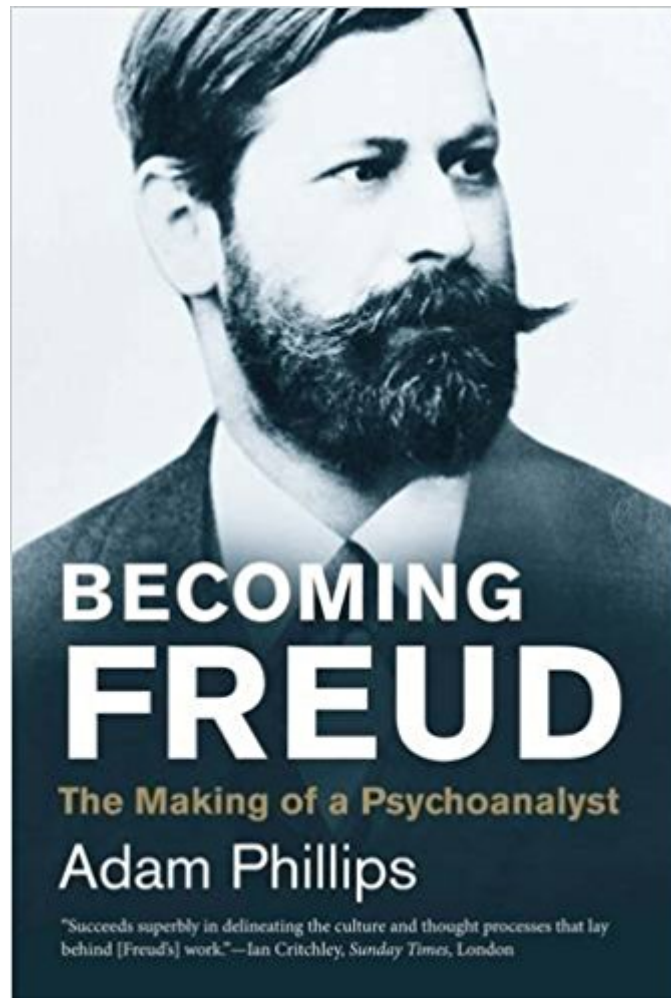




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# Becoming Freud: The Making Of A Psychoanalyst (Jewish Lives)



## Synopsis

From one of the world's foremost authorities on Sigmund Freud comes a strikingly original biography of the father of psychoanalysis. *Becoming Freud* is the story of the young Freud "Freud up until the age of fifty" that incorporates all of Freud's many misgivings about the art of biography. Freud invented a psychological treatment that involved the telling and revising of life stories, but he was himself skeptical of the writing of such stories. In this biography, Adam Phillips, whom the *New Yorker* calls "Britain's foremost psychoanalytical writer," emphasizes the largely and inevitably undocumented story of Freud's earliest years as the oldest and favored son of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and suggests that the psychoanalysis Freud invented was, among many other things, a psychology of the immigrant increasingly, of course, everybody's status in the modern world. Psychoanalysis was also Freud's way of coming to terms with the fate of the Jews in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. So as well as incorporating the writings of Freud and his contemporaries, *Becoming Freud* also uses the work of historians of the Jews in Europe in this significant period in their lives, a period of unprecedented political freedom and mounting persecution. Phillips concludes by speculating what psychoanalysis might have become if Freud had died in 1906, before the emergence of a psychoanalytic movement over which he had to preside.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

^The book^™s structure is bound by two constraints: the brevity of the period covered ^ “ the first 50 years of Freud^™s life (he lived until he was 83) - and his Jewishness. But, as with Shakespeare working within the strictures of the sonnet form, Phillips presses these potential limits to acute and dazzling effect.^™^Salley Vickers, The Daily Telegraph (Salley Vickers The Daily Telegraph 2014-06-21)^ [T]his short, meditative succeeds superbly in delineating the culture and thought processes that lay behind his work.^™^Ian Critchley, The Sunday Times (Ian Critchley The Sunday Times 2014-06-15)^ More a biographical essay than a comprehensive biography, since it ends with Freud aged 50, this beautifully lucid book is jargon-free and richly informative, which is hardly surprising since Phillips was the series editor of The New Penguin Freud.^™^Helen Meany, Irish Times (Helen Meany The Irish Times 2014-08-15)"As a writer, Mr. Phillips specializes in paradoxes and antitheses ^ " almost all of which he puts forth thoughtfully and gracefully . . . An intelligent and well-written book."^Steven Marcus, New York Times (Steven Marcus New York Times)"An audacious book. . . Its implicit goal, never stated but always clear, is to help us salvage the best parts of Freud^™s work while leaving behind the rest^™the outmoded theories and unwieldy jargon that make Freud a caricature rather than an intriguing thinker."^Joshua Rothman, New Yorker Blog (Joshua Rothman New Yorker Blog)"Clear and engaging."^Kirkus Reviews (Kirkus Reviews)"A compact intellectual biography. . . Phillips often illuminatingly reads Freud&#39;s thinking against the background of his life circumstances. . . . Probably more than any other psychoanalytically informed writer, Phillips has continued to enrich this mode of thought by literary means, through sheer force of style."^Kenneth Baker, San Francisco Chronicle (Kenneth Baker San Francisco Chronicle)"Phillips excels at re-describing concepts and experiences whose meanings appear settled, stale or too technical."^Kenneth Baker, San Francisco Chronicle (Kenneth Baker San Francisco Chronicle) "Telling a great^ story gracefully and with the clarity it deserves, in all its layers, Adam^ Phillips^ demonstrates that Freud remains central to the urgent questions of^ modernism^ " social, political and cultural,^ as well as psychological. I will be^ thinking about specific sentences in this book for a long time."^Robert Pinsky (Robert Pinsky)"Adam Phillips is, I believe, one of the most engaging writers in the world on analysis and the analytic movement . . . Phillips^™s own love of the beauty and power of psychoanalysis here serves both him and the reader wonderfully well."^Vivian Gornick, New York Times Book Review (Vivian Gornick New York Times Book Review)^ Becoming Freud offers more than enough proof that Phillips is the ideal author of a book about Freud.^™^Talitha Stevenson, Financial Times (Talitha Stevenson Financial Times 2014-05-31) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Praise for Adam Phillips "Adam Phillips is one of the richest and most rewarding essayists of our time." Los Angeles Times "Phillips has made psychoanalytic thought livelier and more poetic than ever." New York Times "The curious thing about reading Phillips is that he makes you feel smart and above the daily grind at the same time as he reassures you that you are not alone in your primal anxieties about whether you are lovable or nuts or, perhaps, merely boring." New York Times Magazine "Adam Phillips writes with far-sighted equanimity. . . . He's a little like an Oliver Sacks of psychoanalysis, both affable and unalarmed." Boston Sunday Globe "[Phillips is] one of the finest prose stylists at work in the language, an Emerson of our time." John Banville "Phillips's authority as a writer comes in no small part from his own experience as a highly regarded therapist." Boston Globe "[Phillips is] adept at making the complex comprehensible." Independent "In Phillips's hands, nothing is as ordinary as it appears to be. Each essay is a kind of mystery tour; you never know where you are going to end up." Times Literary Supplement "[Phillips has] punched lovely skylights into the gloomy Freudian edifice and in general done much to rehabilitate the psychoanalytic enterprise by honoring the idiosyncrasy of human experience and by wielding method lightly, playfully, humanely." Esquire --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Adam Phillips's slender biography of Freud published this year (2014) and titled *Becoming Freud* is one that I was quite intrigued to read. It is brief, written by an analyst who is also the editor of the new Penguin Standard Edition of Freud "someone who is editing the new translations without speaking German! Does he get Freud? Well, he spends the first chapter clarifying that, from Freud's perspective, there is no such thing as an accurate biography. From Freud's (via Phillips) perspective, the biography is more about the biographer than about the object of the biography, just as this blog is more about me than about Adam Phillips's work, and just as what you think or say about this blog is more about you than me, Phillips, or Freud. From Freud's perspective, it is the subjective experience of the person that matters. And this is, I believe, at the heart of what it is that Freud had to say and certainly Phillips takes this stance as well. So Phillips approach to Freud is not to flat footedly analyze him by attributing actions to hypothesized unconscious motivations as others have sometimes done, instead he takes a swirling, free associational stab at describing Freud's history "what is known and so much that is unknown and, in a weird approach for a

psychoanalyst, he analyzes not Freud the person so much as Freud the socio- psychoanalytic individual who emerges at a particular point in history. The history of European thought. He sees Freud as a left over Romantic as the world is becoming modern (ironically largely at his prodding) and the history of European Judaism. Freud may be a Godless Jew, but he is deeply determined, Phillips believes, by his cultural origins. To see the rest of the review, please Google Adam Phillips and the Reluctant Psychoanalyst...

I was interested in this book because of my belief that unawareness of psychology in many cases, tantamount to ignorance of it along with at best bare knowledge or acknowledgement of history accounts largely for the weakness and decline of the U.S. Failure to recognize psychology and history so as to govern decision-making for shaping action results in madcap activities little different from antics but one characterization of the decade-long U.S. commotion in Iraq and Afghanistan. So I was interested in this book to see if or how the author might make Freud relevant to today's miasmas and as some idea or answer whatever its angle or content for reintroducing the factor of psychology to today's society and its politics and policies. The book did not disappoint, and in fact exceeded by a good deal expectations I had of it, expectations raised by its author's longtime interests and credentials. As well as the general editor of new translations of Freud's works as a part of the Penguin Modern Classics, Phillips has worked as a hospital and private psychoanalyst in England and is a visiting professor of English at the University of York. He does recurrently imply or to a lesser extent, state the relevance of psychology to the contemporary world while following and analyzing the early years of Freud's career, up to 1906. "If Freud had died in 1906, we would...have been left with...the rudiments of, rather than prescriptions for, the practice of psychoanalysis." As for insights into what Freud was doing in this stage of his career as opposed to the illuminating commentary exemplified in the foregoing quote Phillips writes, "Psychoanalysis was becoming in Freud's writing in these years the artful science of our false senses of security. Freud was discovering how modern people endangered themselves by the ways in which they protected themselves. Each of the so-called mechanisms of defense was an unconscious form of self-blinding; ways of occluding a piece of reality." Such insights could apply to the conflicts of the First World War as to the US thrashing about in the Middle East which has spawned manifold threats and countless enemies in the name of security. Psychology is permanent in Humankind. Another insight regarding psychoanalysis as developed by Freud reads, "[W]hat Freud was interested in in these crucial years was not just the all-too-familiar, all-too-human imperious urgency of sex, but how the body becomes...its language;

how culture is the translation...of the body's unconscious, forbidden desire, the desire a person believes he can't afford to acknowledge. Freud was not returning sexuality to its 'rightful share,' but working out what that share might be." This quote relates to the correct, but limited view of Freud as moving from the sexual repressions of the Victorian age, which is to a considerable degree what the movement of modernism is. But it also plainly takes in LGTB, fashion, advertising, sexting, agitation on college campuses concerning rape, and other explicitly and inherently sexual phenomena and issues of today. The content of the book progresses cumulatively with Freud taking on both depth and dimension. How Freud individually and to some extent idiosyncratically pursues and develops his interests melds with interaction with various friends and associates and with different places, notably Paris. Key writings, particularly "Studies on Hysteria" written with Josef Breuer, are looked into as both summations and entrances. Origins of theory are recognized, and clinical activity described. But even more important than all this in Freud becoming Freud, the author tenders, was his experiences and observations as a father and husband. "Freud had six children in eight years" between his formative years of 1886 to 1900. Being married and being a father of several young children while endeavoring to establish himself as a psychoanalyst and earn a reputation cannot but make an impression and create effects. That all the case studies of "Studies on Hysteria" were women and the Oedipus complex is a major, central tenet of the field of psychology go to support Phillips' idea that Freud's family life was the source of psychoanalysis. Freud's education, friendships, professional associations, social environment, and other areas of his life brought embellishments or refinements to Freud's insights and concepts derived largely from his family life. Referring to these years of the first period of his married life with six young children, Phillips relates, "It is, perhaps, unsurprising that in these years Freud was beginning to really think about people's connections with each other, about what they exchanged, and wanted to exchange and failed to exchange with each other; about, in short, sexuality and development and loss." The light the author casts on Freud's family life makes perfect sense when you think about it. The family life accounts more than anything else for Freud's general orientation and also for the genesis and to a considerable extent the scenarios and specifics of the psychology Freud worked out. One could go on. Nearly every page and many paragraphs of the book merit thought, study, and reflection. Phillips' "Becoming Freud" reaffirms the value of psychology; and for ones who tend to dismiss or ignore it, the book conveys psychology's irreplaceable relevance and inestimable worth. The book is an outstanding revealing and sympathetic comprehension of the towering, pervasive Freud who more than any other individual reflects and influences the culture of modernism. (The reviewer is the author of MASSACRE IN NEWTOWN - ADAM LANZA'S DARK PASSAGE TO MADNESS.)

Adam Philips is recognized as a highly accomplished psychoanalyst, and a masterful theoretician and writer, and well deserves the recognition. This book was a pleasure to read. We are offered an intimate view of Sigmund Freud becoming the genius he was, as he struggled with his Jewishness in relation to the European intellectual Zeitgeist. Adam Philips brings Freud and his world alive. His writing style is engaging, he has a sure narrative sense, his research is impeccable. He is a gifted story teller and an original thinker. I found reading this book a pleasure, a delight. I wanted to slow down and savor it, and I wanted to keep reading at a clip because it is so fascinating.

Phillips, like Freud, is a little opaque. Fortunately he is opaque in a different enough way to shed some light on Freud before slipping into the occult practice of one person defining another. Perhaps the best thing he revealed about Freud was his own neurosis, his pathological controlling of his own history. Phillips is also correct that Freud would have left a better legacy had he died after publishing his first 5 books. We could have used our own imagination rather than getting sucked into Freud's neurosis. It is one thing to describe what we see. It is another to define it.

Adam Phillips has the amazing talent of writing well with none of incomprehensible jargon we usually associate with such a subject. He draws a most convincing picture of a complex and ambitious young man in the Vienna of the day. This is an excellent introduction to a complicated subject and personality, much written about and, sadly, much misunderstood.

Yes. I am finding this book very intriguing not only about Freud's life but his thinking and soul searching.

I thought I knew enough about Freud, but this is profound, different from what I assumed, and insightful. It's a small book written with imagination. I read it quickly. One of the best books I read this year.

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