



# Freud: From Youthful Dream to Mid-Life Crisis

*Peter M. Newton*

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Using revelations gained from recently published correspondence, this provocative biography sheds new light on current debates about Sigmund Freud's theories. The book demonstrates how giving up the seduction theory--that all neurosis results from the molestation of small children by their fathers--swept Freud into a mid-life crisis out of which he eventually fought his way through to the discovery of psychoanalysis. Examining the newly released, highly personal letters between Freud and his boyhood friend, Eduard Silberstein, along with the letters of his 20s to his fiancée, Martha Bernays, and those to the confidant during his mid-life transition, Wilhelm Fliess, this volume provides valuable insight into Freud's development--both as a man and as a thinker. Peter M. Newton captures the drama of Freud's first love and heartbreak, the defiant and complicated ambitions of Freud's later adolescence, and the historic creative accomplishment and personal reward of his mid-life transition.

Applying a theory of lives to this great, complex story, Newton charts the evolution of Freud's thought through a continuing sequence of developmental periods and tasks. He shows that contrary to accepted opinion, Freud dreamed of becoming not just a cloistered scientist, but a revolutionary healer as well. The author demonstrates that the two aspects of Freud's dream and of his identity--that of quiet scholar and revolutionary healer--warred for possession of Freud's soul throughout his entire life. Exploring the years of Freud's transition to middle age, the book also lays to rest Jeffrey Masson's widely trumpeted accusation that Freud gave up his seduction theory out of political expediency. From a close study of Freud's letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Newton shows that it was not a desire to placate the medical establishment, but the accumulating weight of Freud's own clinical experience, that dashed the seduction theory.

He then examines in-depth the mid-life crisis Freud suffered as a result of giving up the seduction theory. Without the theory, Freud felt he had no way to realize either the scientific or the clinical aspect of his dream. Newton's developmental approach to adulthood centers his account on questions such as: How, at the age of 41, if the dream to which Freud had devoted the first 20 years of his adult life was shattered, could he guide the next 20? How could he salvage, from the wreckage of his youth, the elements of a life worth living as a middle-aged man? And if he was neither a first-rate scientist nor an expert doctor, who was he?

A breakthrough study of developmental crisis and triumph, this volume will be welcomed by anyone who wishes to better understand one of the world's most important and influential thinkers. *Freud: From Youthful Dream to Mid-Life Crisis* also serves as a valuable text for undergraduate and graduate courses in human development, adult development, psychopathology, and personality, as well as courses on Freud and on developments in psychoanalytic institutes.

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