

PRESIDENT KENNEDY'S ASSASSINATION: FREUDIAN COMMENTS¹

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RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS

The universal shock waves following President Kennedy's assassination are seen to duplicate the original social repercussions felt after the murder of Christ and the hypothesized murder of Moses. Freud was not the only original thinker to speculate on Moses-murder as being responsible for the ageless guilt of the Jews. To read the book of *Exodus* is to wonder how Moses, in spite of his undenied genius, could have possibly escaped an untimely and violent death in view of the ironfisted ruthlessness with which he put the many thousands of non-believers to death. Following the murders, we may see the following pattern of similar mass reaction:

1. Universal shock and profound mourning; everything stops.
2. Mass guilt; everyone eulogizes the slain leader; his virtues are magnified and his vices nullified.
3. The need to resurrect the fallen leader, to pay penance, make restitution, to make him immortal and thereby negate or deny the fatal deed; hence the use of special mourning prayers and rituals, the building of altars, temples, and the use of religious symbols like the Holy Cross. Instead of ancient altars, today we substitute the contemporary eternal flame, the hasty naming of airports, buildings, the setting up of foundations and libraries, all bearing John F. Kennedy's name.

4. The almost too quick recovery of the mourning masses back to normal. This very fast forgetting lends a certain note of hypocrisy to the initial period of intense mourning and perhaps exposes the unconscious satisfaction in the fulfillment of the original death wish towards the leader. Thus, President Johnson, just two days after the assassination, had family pictures taken at the White House. Business was as usual and the stock market quickly soared to new

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heights. Occasional anger was even worded and contempt expressed towards the fallen leader that he was so omnipotent and erring in judgment as to cast aside precautions and permit himself to be killed; (i.e., he dies like any other mortal). However, on the whole, to speak against any murdered leader is almost sacrilegious. The tendency to forget the death completely and quickly is countered by the forced remembrances of formal anniversary ceremonies and religious ritual.

DEARTH OF DREAMS AFTER ASSASSINATION

There appears to have been a surprising dearth of dreams pertaining to the assassination as reported by analysts and analysands alike, following the President's death. Eight psychoanalysts were polled informally for both analysand and personal dreams and only a handful of a total of seven dreams were remembered during the three week period following the assassination. Only two of the analysts remembered their own dreams; three of the analysts had no dreams at all to present, either of their own or of their analysands. These dreams ranged from affectless denial of the disturbing effect of the assassination to most frightening nightmares where the dreamer identified directly with the President and became himself the victim of sudden assault, mutilation, and death. It is possible that viewing the events on television for three full days following the assassination, including the actual shooting of Oswald, served as a substitute for dreaming and the release of accumulated anxiety. It may also have been simply too painful and threatening to remember dreams of the shocking events and so a temporary period of self-induced dream deprivation developed until the ego could handle the hot material.

ACUTE DREAM RESPONSES AND HOMOSEXUAL PROBLEMS

From the scanty data available, it seems that people with deep homosexual problems, both male and female, had the most disturbing dreams of all, or at least, were able to remember and report them comparatively well. Possibly they were more fully able to identify with both assassin and victim. Their impulses to kill off the hated father were the most intense, and correspondingly, their fears of being themselves killed in turn, the most acute, to the point of reaching paranoid proportions. Hence the need to emasculate themselves to varying degrees in order not to risk the irrational anxieties of kill

or be killed. If the fatal step of indulging in heterosexual activity is taken, then the penalty for the crime of symbolic incest is the fit punishment of death—the ultimate in self-destruction. This brings us to Oswald, the alleged assassin.

SPECULATIONS ON OSWALD'S UNCONSCIOUS

We will never know what went on in the mind of Oswald, but from the bits of evidence on hand we can try to come close to the target on at least some points. We know that Oswald was the youngest and probably the most indulged son and that he never knew his father. It is strange that the mother is estranged from Oswald's wife and brothers and she seems to bask in the light of the nefarious publicity which has been heaped upon her. There is a vociferously loyal defense of her son which is understandably maternal but which really says, "My son could do no wrong," and serves as a defense of herself in that she did nothing terrible in bringing up her son and making him into what he became.

One is most easily tempted to say that Oswald figuratively killed off his father—the father who let him down, as perhaps, he may have imagined Kennedy had let the nation down in some manner. But the figure of the mother looms too large to be dismissed, for it was she who was the dominating and perhaps overwhelming figure in her son's life. The speculation is therefore made that in Kennedy, Oswald saw his mother and had to rid himself finally of her. In his warped way of thinking, Oswald may have seen Kennedy as identical to his mother; in being self-centered, opportunistic, two-faced and untrustworthy. As his mother used him, so he imagined Kennedy using the nation; as his mother literally led her own son down the path of destruction, so he saw the President leading the nation perfidiously down the path to similar destruction.

Oswald's period of disturbed, disorganized behavior for the past few years shows his desperate attempts to shake his mother by renouncing his country, fleeing to Russia, and marrying a Russian woman. In the end, however, he had to return to the Motherland and to mother herself. In becoming a father, Oswald's panic perhaps became more serious; he just could not rid himself of mother and the "crimes" committed with her. The dangers confronting him became more and more real and threatening. He tried to kill General Walker but could not quite pull it off. Now he felt more desperate than ever; like the hunted beast, it was now kill or be killed. Oswald probably

stalked and killed the President, but the act did nothing to solve or alleviate his inner turmoil. The panic became greater than ever and now he made sure that he himself would be killed for his crime, by fleeing and then shooting dead another authority—a policeman.

Once apprehended, Oswald denied the killing and stubbornly maintained his innocence. This is not unlike the omnipotent wishing of the child of two to five years who straightfacedly denies a misdeed when caught red handed and who really believes that he did not do it. The emotions of such a child or of such a disturbed adult as Oswald can be so grandiose and unreal that he operates in accordance with the formula that what he wishes or wills will be so. If Oswald wished the mightiest leader in the world dead and if this became so, then certainly he could wish for his own innocence and non-implication of the deed, and surely this will be so and so believed.

The final question remains: if Oswald really wanted to kill his mother, why did he not do so? Why did he kill President Kennedy instead? To kill his mother was to commit symbolically the very act which all his energies were directed in denying; namely that he had sexually violated her in his youth, in their travels alone, or that he had committed any primal sins. To kill his mother was too much akin to penetrating her sexually and this he could not face at any cost. In denying the killing of the President he was also denying that he had ever committed any forbidden offense against his mother. President Kennedy thereby became the substitute target for the outlet of all of Oswald's pent-up fury and libido, meant really for his mother. The homosexual does similarly when he assaults a male love object or uses him sexually.

Would that Oswald had been asexual or overtly homosexual, rather than to have murdered the President. He tried desperately to be a heterosexual man and a father but here, too, his grandiosity prevented him from recognizing his limitations or exercising adequate judgment and control.