

Standard Edition of the Complete Works of

# Sigmund Freud

Freud, S. (1910). [SEK163a1]A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love I). The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XI (1910): Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works, 163-176

## A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love I)

*Sigmund Freud*

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- 163 -]Editor's Note to "A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love I)"

*James Strachey*

[SEK163a3](a)GERMAN EDITIONS:

[SEK163a4]1910 Beiträge Zur Psychologie Des Liebeslebens I Über Einen Besonderen Typus Der Objektwahl Beim Manne *Jb. psychoan. psychopath. Forsch.*, 2 (2),389-97. ('Beiträge zur Psychologie des Liebeslebens' I.)

[SEK163a5]1918 Beiträge Zur Psychologie Des Liebeslebens I Über Einen Besonderen Typus Der Objektwahl Beim Manne *S.K.S.N.*, 4, 200-12. (2nd ed. 1922.)

[SEK163a6]1924 Beiträge Zur Psychologie Des Liebeslebens I Über Einen Besonderen Typus Der Objektwahl Beim Manne *G.S.*, 5, 186-97.

[SEK163a7]1924 Beiträge Zur Psychologie Des Liebeslebens I Über Einen Besonderen Typus Der Objektwahl Beim Manne In Beiträge zur Psychologie des Liebeslebens, Leipzig, Vienna and Zurich: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag. (Pp. 3-14.)

[SEK163a8]1931 Beiträge Zur Psychologie Des Liebeslebens I Über Einen Besonderen Typus Der Objektwahl Beim Manne *Sexualtheorie und Traumlehre*, 69-80.

[SEK163a9]**1943 Beiträge Zur Psychologie Des Liebeslebens I Über Einen Besonderen Typus Der Objektwahl Beim Manne *G.W.*, 8, 66-77.**

[SEK163a10](b) ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

[SEK163a11]Contributions to the Psychology of Love: A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men 1925 *C.P.*, 4, 192-202. (Tr. Joan Riviere.)

[SEK163a12]The present translation is a new one by Alan Tyson.

[SEK163a13]This and the two following papers, though they were written and published over a period of some years, were brought together by Freud in the fourth series of his shorter papers (*S.K.S.N.*, 4, 1918) under the collective title printed above. We learn from Ernest Jones (1955, 333) that Freud had announced his intention of writing some such work at a meeting of the Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society on November 28, 1906. The gist of the present paper was given before the same society on May 19, 1909, and discussed a week later. But it was not actually written until the early summer of the following year.

## Section Citation

Freud, S. (1910). [SEK163a2]Editor's Note to "A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men (Contributions to the Psychology of Love I)". *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XI (1910): Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works*, 163-176

### [SEK163a14]A Special Type of Choice of Object made by Men

[SEK163a15]UP till now we have left it to the creative writer to depict for us the 'necessary conditions for loving' which govern people's choice of an object, and the way in which they bring the demands of their imagination into harmony with reality. The writer can indeed draw on certain qualities which fit him to carry out such a task: above all, on a sensitivity that enables him to perceive the hidden impulses in the minds of other people, and the courage to let his own unconscious speak. But there is one circumstance which lessens the evidential value of what he has to say. Writers are under the necessity to produce intellectual and aesthetic pleasure, as well as certain emotional effects. For this reason they cannot reproduce the stuff of reality unchanged, but must isolate portions of it, remove disturbing associations, tone down the whole and fill in what is missing. These are the privileges of what is known as 'poetic licence'. Moreover they can show only slight interest in the origin and development of the mental states which they portray in their completed form. In consequence it becomes inevitable that science should concern herself with the same materials whose treatment by artists has given enjoyment to mankind for thousands of years, though her touch must be clumsier and the yield of pleasure less. These observations will, it may be hoped, serve to justify us in extending a strictly scientific treatment to the field of human love. Science is, after all, the most complete renunciation of the pleasure principle of which our mental activity is capable.

[SEK163a16]In the course of psycho-analytic treatment there are ample opportunities for collecting impressions of the way in which neurotics behave in love; while at the same time we can recall having observed or heard of similar behaviour in people of average health or even in those with outstanding qualities. When the material happens to be favourable and thus leads to

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 8, Page 66

- 165 -

[SEK163a17]an accumulation of such impressions, distinct types emerge more clearly. I will begin here with a description of one such type of object-choice—which occurs in men—since it is characterized by a number of 'necessary conditions for loving' whose combination is unintelligible, and indeed bewildering, and since it admits of a simple explanation on psycho-analytic lines.

1. [SEK163a18]The first of these preconditions for loving can be described as positively specific: wherever it is found, the presence of the other characteristics of this type may be looked for. It may be termed the precondition that there should be 'an injured third party'; it stipulates that the person in question shall never choose as his love-object a woman who is disengaged—that is, an unmarried girl or an unattached married woman—but only one to whom another man can claim right of possession as her husband, fiancé or friend. In some cases this precondition proves so cogent that a woman can be ignored, or even rejected, so long as she does not belong to any man, but becomes the object of passionate feelings immediately she comes into one of these relationships with another man.
2. [SEK163a19]The second precondition is perhaps a less constant one, but it is no less striking. It has to be found in conjunction with the first for the type to be realized, whereas the first precondition seems very often to occur independently as well. This second precondition is to the effect that a woman who is chaste and whose reputation is irreproachable never exercises an attraction that might raise her to the status of a love-object, but only a woman who is in some way or other of bad repute sexually, whose fidelity and reliability are open to some doubt. This latter characteristic may vary within substantial limits, from the faint breath of scandal attaching to a married woman who is not averse to a flirtation up to the openly promiscuous way of life of a *cocotte* or of an adept in the art of love; but the men who

belong to our type will not be satisfied without something of the kind. This second necessary condition may be termed, rather crudely, 'love for a prostitute'.

[SEK163a20]While the first precondition provides an opportunity for gratifying impulses of rivalry and hostility directed at the man from whom the loved woman is wrested, the second one, that of the woman's being like a prostitute, is connected with the

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 8, Page 67

- 166 -

[SEK163a21]experiencing of *jealousy*, which appears to be a necessity for lovers of this type. It is only when they are able to be jealous that their passion reaches its height and the woman acquires her full value, and they never fail to seize on an occasion that allows them to experience these most powerful emotions. What is strange is that it is not the lawful possessor of the loved one who becomes the target of this jealousy, but strangers, making their appearance for the first time, in relation to whom the loved one can be brought under suspicion. In glaring instances the lover shows no wish for exclusive possession of the woman and seems to be perfectly comfortable in the triangular situation. One of my patients, who had been made to suffer terribly by his lady's escapades, had no objection to her getting married, and did all he could to bring it about; in the years that followed he never showed a trace of jealousy towards her husband. Another typical patient had, it is true, been very jealous of the husband in his first love affair, and had forced the lady to stop having marital relations; but in his numerous subsequent affairs he behaved like the other members of this type and no longer regarded the lawful husband as an interference.

[SEK163a22]So much for the conditions required in the love-object. The following points describe the lover's behaviour towards the object he has chosen.

3. [SEK163a23]In normal love the woman's value is measured by her sexual integrity, and is reduced by any approach to the characteristic of being like a prostitute.<sup>1</sup> Hence the fact that women with this characteristic are considered by men of our type to be *love-objects of the highest value* seems to be a striking departure from the normal. Their love-relationships with these women are carried on with the highest expenditure of mental energy, to the exclusion of all other interests; they are felt as the only people whom it is possible to love, and the demand for fidelity which the lover makes upon himself is repeated again and again, however often it may be broken in reality. These features of the love-relationships which I am here describing show their

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 8, Page 68

<sup>1</sup> [SEK163a24][The German '*Dirne*', here and in several other passages in this paper, is not well rendered by 'prostitute', which in English lays too much stress on the monetary side of the relation. 'Harlot' would give the sense better, if the word had not to-day acquired an antiquated and even Biblical colouring.]

- 167 -

[SEK163a25]*compulsive* nature very clearly, though that is something which is found up to a certain degree whenever anyone falls in love. But the fidelity and intensity that mark the attachment must not lead one to expect that a single love-relationship of this kind will make up the whole erotic life of the person in question or occur only once in it. On the contrary, passionate attachments of this sort are repeated with the same peculiarities—each an exact replica of the others—again and again in the lives of men of this type; in fact, owing to external events such as changes of residence and environment, the love-objects may replace one another so frequently that a *long series of them is formed*.

4. [SEK163a26]What is most startling of all to the observer in lovers of this type is the urge they show to '*rescue*' the woman they love. The man is convinced that she is in need of him, that without him she

would lose all moral control and rapidly sink to a lamentable level. He rescues her, therefore, by not giving her up. In some individual cases the idea of having to rescue her can be justified by reference to her sexual unreliability and the dangers of her social position: but it is no less conspicuous where there is no such basis in reality. One man of the type I am describing, who knew how to win his ladies by clever methods of seduction and subtle arguments, spared no efforts in the subsequent course of these affairs to keep the woman he was for the time being in love with on the path of 'virtue' by presenting her with tracts of his own composition.

[SEK163a27]If we survey the different features of the picture presented here—the conditions imposed on the man that Ms loved one should not be unattached and should be like a prostitute, the high value he sets on her, his need for feeling jealousy, his fidelity, which is nevertheless compatible with being broken down into a long series of instances, and the urge to rescue the woman—it will seem scarcely probable that they should all be derived from a single source. Yet psycho-analytic exploration into the life-histories of men of this type has no difficulty in showing that there is such a single source. The object-choice which is so strangely conditioned, and this very singular way of behaving in love, have the same psychical origin as we find in the loves of normal people. They are derived from the infantile

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 8, Page 69

- 168 -

[SEK163a28]fixation of tender feelings on the mother, and represent one of the consequences of that fixation. In normal love only a few characteristics survive which reveal unmistakably the maternal prototype of the object-choice, as, for instance, the preference shown by young men for maturer women; the detachment of libido from the mother has been effected relatively swiftly. In our type, on the other hand, the libido has remained attached to the mother for so long, even after the onset of puberty, that the maternal characteristics remain stamped on the love-objects that are chosen later, and all these turn into easily recognizable mother-surrogates. The comparison with the way in which the skull of a newly born child is shaped<sup>1</sup> springs to mind at this point: after a protracted labour it always takes the form of a cast of the narrow part of the mother's pelvis.

[SEK163a29]We have now to show the plausibility of our assertion that the characteristic features of our type—its conditions for loving and its behaviour in love—do in fact arise from the psychical constellation connected with the mother. This would seem to be easiest where the first precondition is concerned—the condition that the woman should not be unattached, or that there should be an injured third party. It is at once clear that for the child who is growing up in the family circle the fact of the mother belonging to the father becomes an inseparable part of the mother's essence, and that the injured third party is none other than the father himself. The trait of overvaluing the loved one, and regarding her as unique and irreplaceable, can be seen to fall just as naturally into the context of the child's experience, for no one possesses more than one mother, and the relation to her is based on an event that is not open to any doubt and cannot be repeated.

[SEK163a30]If we are to understand the love-objects chosen by our type as being above all mother-surrogates, then the formation of a series of them, which seems so flatly to contradict the condition of being faithful to one, can now also be understood. We have learnt from psycho-analysis in other examples that the notion of something irreplaceable, when it is active in the unconscious, frequently appears as broken up into an endless series: endless for the reason that every surrogate nevertheless fails to provide the desired satisfaction. This is the explanation of the insatiable

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 8, Page 70

<sup>1</sup> [SEK163a31][In the editions before 1924 this read 'deformed'.]

- 169 -

[SEK163a32]urge to ask questions shown by children at a certain age: they have one single question to ask, but it never crosses their lips.<sup>1</sup> It explains, too, the garrulity of some people affected by neurosis; they are under the pressure of a secret which is burning to be disclosed but which, despite all temptation, they never reveal.

[SEK163a33]On the other hand the second precondition for loving—the condition that the object chosen should be like a prostitute—seems energetically to oppose a derivation from the mother-complex. The adult's conscious thought likes to regard his mother as a person of unimpeachable moral purity; and there are few ideas which he finds so offensive when they come from others, or feels as so tormenting when they spring from his own mind, as one which calls this aspect of his mother in question. This very relation of the sharpest contrast between 'mother' and 'prostitute' will however encourage us to enquire into the history of the development of these two complexes and the unconscious relation between them, since we long ago discovered that what, in the conscious, is found split into a pair of opposites often occurs in the unconscious as a unity.<sup>2</sup> Investigation then leads us back to the time in a boy's life at which he first gains a more or less complete knowledge of the sexual relations between adults, somewhere about the years of prepuberty. Brutal pieces of information, which are undisguisedly intended to arouse contempt and rebelliousness, now acquaint him with the secret of sexual life and destroy the authority of adults, which appears incompatible with the revelation of their sexual activities. The aspect of these disclosures which affects the newly initiated child most strongly is the way in which they apply to his own parents. This application is often flatly rejected by him, in some such words as these: 'Your parents and other people may do something like that with one another, but my parents can't possibly do it.'<sup>3</sup>

[SEK163a34]As an almost invariable corollary to this sexual enlightenment,

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 8, Page 72

1 [SEK163a35][This point is also made by Freud in his essay on Leonardo da Vinci(1910c), above, p. 78.]

2 [SEK163a36][This fact had already been hinted at in Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), *Standard Ed.*, 4, 318, and explicitly mentioned in Chapter VI of his book on jokes (1905c). See also above, p. 155 ff.]

3 [SEK163a37][Cf. the last paragraph of Freud's paper on the sexual theories of children (1908c).]

- 170 -

[SEK163a38]the boy at the same time gains a knowledge of the existence of certain women who practise sexual intercourse as a means of livelihood, and who are for this reason held in general contempt. The boy himself is necessarily far from feeling this contempt: as soon as he learns that he too can be initiated by these unfortunates into sexual life, which till then he accepted as being reserved exclusively for 'grown-ups', he regards them only with a mixture of longing and horror. When after this he can no longer maintain the doubt which makes his parents an exception to the universal and odious norms of sexual activity, he tells himself with cynical logic that the difference between his mother and a whore is not after all so very great, since basically they do the same thing. The enlightening information he has received has in fact awakened the memory-traces of the impressions and wishes of his early infancy, and these have led to a reactivation in him of certain mental impulses. He begins to desire his mother herself in the sense with which he has recently become acquainted, and to hate his father anew as a rival who stands in the way of this wish; he comes, as we say, under the dominance of the Oedipus complex.<sup>1</sup> He does not forgive his mother for having granted the favour of sexual intercourse not to himself but to his father, and he regards it as an act of unfaithfulness. If these impulses do not quickly pass, there is no outlet for them other than to run their course in phantasies which have as their subject his mother's sexual activities under the most diverse circumstances; and the consequent tension leads particularly readily to his finding relief in masturbation. As a result of the constant combined operation of the two driving forces, desire and thirst for revenge, phantasies of his mother's unfaithfulness are by far the most preferred; the lover with whom she commits her act of infidelity almost always exhibits the features of the boy's own ego, or more accurately, of his own idealized personality, grown up and so raised to a level with his father. What I have elsewhere<sup>2</sup>

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 8, Page 73

<sup>1</sup> [SEK163a39][This appears to be Freud's first published use of the actual term. The concept had, of course, long been familiar to him (cf. *Standard Ed.*, 4, 263n.), and he had already spoken of the 'nuclear complex', e.g. in the paper referred to in the last footnote and in his 'Five Lectures', 1910a, above, p. 47.]

<sup>2</sup> [SEK163a40]In [a discussion included in] Rank's *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (1909) [Freud (1909c)].

- 171 -

[SEK163a41]described as the 'family romance' comprises the manifold ramifications of this imaginative activity and the way in which they are interwoven with various egoistic interests of this period of life.

[SEK163a42]Now that we have gained an insight into this piece of mental development we can no longer regard it as contradictory and incomprehensible that the precondition of the loved one's being like a prostitute should derive directly from the mother-complex. The type of male love which we have described bears the traces of this evolution and is simple to understand as a fixation on the phantasies formed by the boy in puberty—phantasies which have later after all found a way out into real life. There is no difficulty in assuming that the masturbation assiduously practised in the years of puberty has played its part in the fixation of the phantasies.

[SEK163a43]To these phantasies which have succeeded in dominating the man's love in real life, the urge to *rescue* the loved one seems to bear merely a loose and superficial relation, and one that is fully accounted for by conscious reasons. By her propensity to be fickle and unfaithful the loved one brings herself into dangerous situations, and thus it is understandable that the lover should be at pains to protect her from these dangers by watching over her virtue and counteracting her bad inclinations. However, the study of people's screen-memories, phantasies and nocturnal dreams shows that we have here a particularly felicitous 'rationalization' of an unconscious motive, a process which may be compared to a successful secondary revision of a dream. In actual fact the '*rescue-motif*' has a meaning and history of its own, and is an independent derivative of the mother-complex, or more accurately, of the parental complex. When a child hears that he *owes his life* to his parents, or that his mother *gave him life*, his feelings of tenderness unite with impulses which strive at power and independence, and they generate the wish to return this gift to the parents and to repay them with one of equal value. It is as though the boy's defiance were to make him say: 'I want nothing from my father; I will give him back all I have cost him.' He then forms the phantasy of *rescuing his father from danger and saving his life*; in this way he puts his account square with him. This phantasy is commonly enough displaced on to the emperor, king or some other great

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 8, Page 74

[SEK163a44]man; after being thus distorted it becomes admissible to consciousness, and may even be made use of by creative writers. In its application to a boy's father it is the defiant meaning in the idea of rescuing which is by far the most important; where his mother is concerned it is usually its tender meaning. The mother gave the child life, and it is not easy to find a substitute of equal value for this unique gift. With a slight change of meaning, such as is easily effected in the unconscious and is comparable to the way in which in consciousness concepts shade into one another, rescuing his mother takes on the significance of giving her a child or making a child for her—needless to say, one like himself. This is not too remote from the original sense of rescuing, and the change in meaning is not an arbitrary one. His mother gave him a life—his own life—and in exchange he gives her another life, that of a child which has the greatest resemblance to himself. The son shows his gratitude by wishing to have by his mother a son who is like himself: in other words, in the rescue-phantasy he is completely identifying himself with his father. All his instincts, those of tenderness, gratitude, lustfulness, defiance and independence, find satisfaction in the single wish *to be his own father*. Even the element of danger has not been lost in the change of meaning; for the act of birth itself is the danger from which he was saved by his mother's efforts. Birth is both the first of all dangers to life and the prototype of all the later ones that cause us to feel anxiety, and the experience of birth has probably left behind in us the expression of affect which we call anxiety. Macduff of the Scottish legend, who was not born of his mother but ripped from her womb, was for that reason unacquainted with anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 8, Page 75

1 [SEK163a45][Macbeth, V, 7. This is Freud's first extended allusion to the relation between birth and anxiety. He had already referred to the question in a footnote added in the previous year (1909) to Chapter VI (E) of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), *Standard Ed.*, 5, 400-1, and had mentioned it in a discussion at the Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society on November 17, 1909 (Jones, 1955,494). He dealt with it again at some length near the beginning of Lecture XXV of the *Introductory Lectures* (1916-17). But his longest discussion of it will, of course, be found in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926d), especially in Chapters II, VIII and XI, A (b), where his former opinions are largely revised. At the beginning of his psychological studies Freud had connected the symptoms of anxiety not with the experience of birth, but with the accompaniments of copulation. Cf. the penultimate paragraph of Section III of his first paper on anxiety neurosis (1895b) and a passage near the end of the probably even earlier Draft E in the Fliess correspondence (Freud, 1950a).]

- 173 -

[SEK163a46]Artemidorus, the dream-interpreter of antiquity, was certainly right in maintaining that the meaning of a dream depends on who the dreamer happens to be.<sup>1</sup> Under the laws governing the expression of unconscious thoughts, the meaning of rescuing may vary, depending on whether the author of the phantasy is a man or a woman. It can equally mean (in a man) making a child, i.e. causing it to be born, or (in a woman) giving birth oneself to a child. These various meanings of rescuing in dreams and phantasies can be recognized particularly clearly when they are found in connection with water. A man rescuing a woman from the water in a dream means that he makes her a mother, which in the light of the preceding discussion amounts to making her his own mother. A woman rescuing someone else (a child) from the water acknowledges herself in this way as the mother who bore him, like Pharaoh's daughter in the legend of Moses (Rank, 1909). At times there is also a tender meaning contained in rescue-phantasies directed towards the father. In such cases they aim at expressing the subject's wish to have his father as a son—that is, to have a son who is like his father.<sup>2</sup>

[SEK163a47]It is on account of all these connections between the rescue-motif and the parental complex that the urge to rescue the loved one forms an important feature of the type of loving which I have been discussing.

[SEK163a48]I do not feel that it is necessary for me to justify my method of work on this subject; as in my presentation of anal erotism [Freud (1908b)], so here too I have in the first place aimed at singling out from the observational material extreme and sharply defined types. In both cases we find a far greater number of individuals in whom only a few features of the type can be recognized, or only features which are not distinctly marked,

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 8, Page 76

1 [SEK163a49][Cf. a passage in Chapter II of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), *Standard Ed.*, 4, 98, and a footnote to it added in 1914.]

2 [SEK163a50][Dreams of rescuing are mentioned in a paragraph added in 1911 to Chapter VI (E) of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Standard Ed.*, 5, 403. A woman's rescue dream is analysed in Freud's paper on 'Dreams and Telepathy' (1922a), *Standard Ed.*, 18, 212 ff.]

- 174 -

[SEK163a51]and it is obvious that a proper appreciation of these types will not be possible until the whole context to which they belong has been explored.<sup>1</sup>

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[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 8, Page 77

1 [SEK163a52][In a paper (1920a) written many years after the present one, Freud demonstrated the occurrence of precisely the same type of object-choice in a homosexual girl, *Standard Ed.*, 18, 160 f.]

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