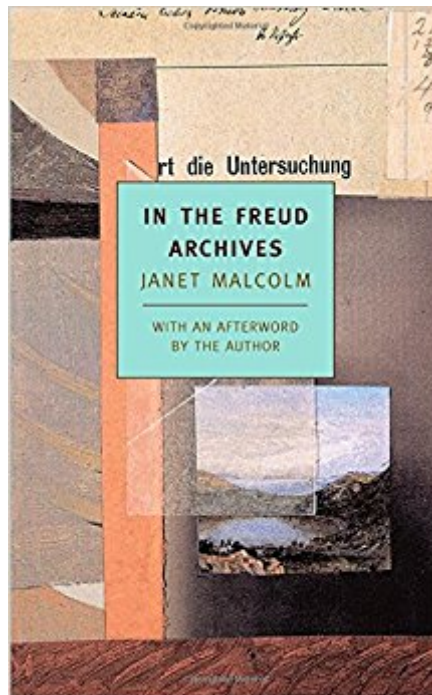




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In The Freud Archives (New York Review Books Classics)



Synopsis

Includes an afterword by the author In the Freud Archives tells the story of an unlikely encounter among three men: K. R. Eissler, the venerable doyen of psychoanalysis; Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, a flamboyant, restless forty-two-year-old Sanskrit scholar turned psychoanalyst turned virulent anti-Freudian; and Peter Swales, a mischievous thirty-five-year-old former assistant to the Rolling Stones and self-taught Freud scholar. At the center of their Oedipal drama are the Sigmund Freud Archives--founded, headed, and jealously guarded by Eissler--whose sealed treasure gleams and beckons to the community of Freud scholarship as if it were the Rhine gold. Janet Malcolm's fascinating book first appeared some twenty years ago, when it was immediately recognized as a rare and remarkable work of nonfiction. A story of infatuation and disappointment, betrayal and revenge, In the Freud Archives is essentially a comedy. But the powerful presence of Freud himself and the harsh bracing air of his ideas about unconscious life hover over the narrative and give it a tragic dimension.

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Customer Reviews

JANET MALCOLM was born in Prague. She was educated at the High School of Music and Art, in New York, and at the University of Michigan. Along with In the Freud Archives, her books include Diana and Nikon: Essays on Photography, Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Profession, The Journalist and the Murderer, The Purloined Clinic: Selected Writings, The Silent Woman: Sylvia

Plath and Ted Hughes, The Crime of Sheila McGough, and Reading Chekhov: A Critical Journey. She lives in New York with her husband, Gardner Botsford.

This is my second book by Janet Malcolm. The first, *Psychoanalysis: the impossible profession*, left me wanting more. I was not at all disappointed with this title. What Ms. Malcolm has done is create an immensely readable account of her encounter with Jeffrey Masson, a self-absorbed, very troubled man, who managed to con his way into the good graces of Kurt Eissler, the founder and caretaker of the Freud Archives, as well as Anna Freud, the great man's daughter. Janet Malcolm's writing is so absorbing that the book reads like a thriller. Essentially, Mr. Masson and one of his acquaintances, who also is involved in Freud sleuthing, both create their own castles and then use them to destroy themselves. How they do this is made crystal clear via Ms. Malcolm's book. A study in character disorder, one might say. As you will learn, this intellectual neophyte, cons his way into people's lives and then, when his true colors are revealed, sues them if they dare to complain. In fact, following the publication of this volume Mr. Masson sued the author. His suit was dismissed after ten years. Mr. Masson is no bashful fellow: He told Malcolm that after Freud, he should be recognized as "the greatest analyst who ever lived." (p.162) Elsewhere she notes that he considers his claim to fame that he exposed Freud and psychoanalysis as a fraud. Nice guy. After betraying many decent elderly people in the US, Canada and Europe, he went on to a glorious career as a hack. His current area of expertise is animal rights, vegetarianism and his deep sensitivity to human emotions. Malcolm wields her pen like a scalpel. She is truly masterful in her writing. Anyway, give it a read. You will surely return for more.

Malcolm is exquisite, book arrived in good shape

Very well written and captivating non-fiction story about the intrigues around the Sigmund Freud Archives. The character descriptions are interesting, and we are also given some insights into the history and concepts of psychoanalysis. This is done without the text becoming too theoretical. In the Freud Archives is not difficult to read. After reading the postscript I wondered a little about Janet Malcolm's use of sources. She is not exactly kind towards Masson, and maybe she betrays him by putting into text words not intended to. I don't know, there was some controversy after the first publication. Anyway, the book is great.

This small well written book is really nothing but a bit of fluffy gossip. But gossip that will delight

anyone who has found themselves caught up in the now-venerable controversy surrounding both Jeffrey Masson's book: "The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory" and the furor among Freud followers that resulted from its publication. Through personal interviews, Ms. Malcolm gives us the lowdown on the brilliant but (to say the least) quirky Mr. Masson as well as most of the other surviving characters (as of 1983) involved in Masson's brief yet productive romance with the keepers of Freud's well guarded letters and library. Perhaps the surprise here...or lack of surprise, is that those such as Masson, who attempt to push the understanding of any intellectual field beyond its comfortable boundaries will, perhaps out of necessity, find themselves snooping around its often dangerous edges. And perhaps because of the hornet's nest they may stir up, are often a bit on the edgy side themselves. Malcolm does a fine job of exposing us to Masson's truly obnoxious character, and yet raises a larger unasked question. Does eccentricity alone invalidate an individual's research and ideas, or when one dares to take on the giants, is that same eccentricity a necessity? Whatever the answer, the almost 25 year tandem printing history of these two volumes speaks to the apparent importance of the contentions regarding Freud that the voracious Masson dared to raise. And perhaps simply through daring to raise them, Masson finds his victory.

Master of storytelling in journalism.

I read this book in two days. Granted, its not that long (originally printed in two issues of The New Yorker) but it has a page-turner quality that one might not expect from an expose' of intellectuals. Front and center is Jeffrey Moussaiff Masson, a psychoanalytic wunderkind who comes out of nowhere in the early Eighties to mount a full-scale charm offensive with those who literally hold the keys to the Freud archives. Janet Malcom succeeds at telling the story of these outsized personalities while also illuminating the central flaws of Freudian theory, and these are no small flaws. When Freud abandoned the seduction theory (children are not molested by adults, they fantasize about being molested by adults!) he began to develop his grand crystal palace of the human mind. Femininists, social workers and multitudes of therapists have been been rightfully registering their dissent ever since, but it was Masson's turn in the New York Times op-ed page (the Joseph Wilson of psycho-analysis) that brought this important debate back into the light. This is a lively tour through the people and personalities who have taken it upon themselves to protect and challenge the legacy of Sigmund Freud.

A delicious read: insightful, provocative, and great fun. Malcolm is one of my cultural heroes. The afterword strikes a sour note, but one can understand why.

Janet can write! and her subjects are always fascinating. Am headed for my 4th book by her now, so must go....

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