THE LIMITS OF FEROCITY

SEXUAL AGGRESSION AND MODERN LITERARY REBELLION

DANIEL FUCHS

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IN MEMORY OF MY WIFE, CARA,

HUMANIST, FRIEND, LOVER,

AND MY SISTER FRAN,

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST AND

LIFELONG BUDDY, WHO OPENED

MY TEENAGE LITERARY EYES

TO THE THEORETICAL SUBTLETY

OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

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INTRODUCTION

The turn in American consciousness from the period after the Second World War to the late 1960s and 1970s is vividly reflected in the literature of sexual aggression. It is reflected as well in the ascendency and decline of Freud. This interdisciplinary study is an analysis of these related cultural phenomena. During this period the Marquis de Sade, D. H. Lawrence, Georges Bataille, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer emerged as exemplars of significant aggression. Freud represents the humanist counterargument to this literature of ferocity. A number of theorists, both American and European, respond to Freud in favor of liberating violence. These theorists include Wilhelm Reich (post-Freudian), Norman O. Brown (meta-Freudian), and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (anti-Freudian). I am skeptical of this violence and want to show the limits of ferocity. By *limits* I mean powers as well as limitations. By *ferocity* I mean a loathing of middle-class culture—or, as the case may be, society itself—so intense that it can only be satisfied by the undoing of that culture. The undoing is artistic or ideational rather than political, though most of the writers in both sections of this study have some past connection to political revolution, usually through Marx and through Mao. So one of the key resonances of *ferocity* is, one may say, being rebellious or revolutionary by temperament. This study is, then, a critique of the revolutionary mentality as it manifests itself in literary and related intellectual texts: its utopianism, its violence, its assault on the liberal moderation that, ironically, much of the currently developing political world is trying in its own way to imitate. A viable middle class is a social condition that this developing world aspires to. For the writers of ferocity, *middle* is a dirty word (or they ignore the middle and consider only extremes), like the expression *common sense*. For them, these words only conceal the brutal truth, the shackles of a bourgeois culture that can be undone only by rebellion, which is exemplified in its first and purest form in literature and ideas. This is a large subject; the aspect of

ferocity I am concerned to illuminate is the moment when social, political, or metaphysical aggression expresses itself as the fiction of sexual aggression. In examining the literature of ferocity, I seek to offer a counterbalance to the mentality of excess and to preserve the contours of a civilization based on civility.

This study is a chapter in the literary criticism of modernism—that is, modernism in its broad sense, the proliferation of artistic and intellectual consciousness from about the 1870s to the 1970s. So my experimental, avant-garde writers are Henry Miller and Georges Bataille, not T. S. Eliot and James Joyce. This book is not about the modernism of the religion of art, the idealism of the word issuing into the monumental aesthetic icon, or the godlike artistic impersonality. Its one fictional representative from the period of high modernism, D. H. Lawrence, has often been considered a modernist against modernism. Further, Miller self-consciously writes what is ostensibly an anti-literature in the backwash of high modernism. So does Bataille, in the sense that his pornography is a repudiation of Flaubertian aesthetic realism, or indeed any realism. And Mailer bursts onto the scene with a novel of dogged naturalism. Anarchic, aggressive, the writers of ferocity concern themselves more with sex than with art, giving us a modernism of the body where classic modernism is more likely to be a modernism of the mind. Where the body is prominent in classic modernism it is likely to be representative of a larger meaning, a symbolic pattern. When the mind is prominent in the fiction of ferocity, the focus is very likely to be on the body. Both modernisms are motivated by a sense of crisis, stemming from a realization that the major problem is civilization itself.

It is not possible, in my view, to perceive this subject in anything like its true depth without including European influences and illustrations. Economic globalization may be a recent phenomenon, but literary globalization has been going on for a long time. It is called comparative literature. It may seem paradoxical, but some aspects of American literary culture can be best explored by going beyond it. In addition, some of the works under consideration were not written in the period being defined but are instrumental to its definition. It is well to recall that part of the definition of the period concerns the pornography trials of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Tropic of Cancer*, and *Naked Lunch*, a triumph over censorship. The trials were a cultural as well as a legal triumph, since a major part of literary expression experienced a new freedom. Legal immunity, of course, does not grant immunity to what in the case of novelists is the higher judgment of literary criticism.

That wary humanist, Saul Bellow's professor Moses Herzog, speaks of

transcendence downward, a form of romantic rebellion in which "the inspired condition" or transcendence "is thought to be attainable only in the negative and is pursued in philosophy and literature as well as in sexual experience, or with the aid of narcotics, or in 'philosophical' 'gratuitous' crime and similar paths of horror."[1] Herzog is identifying the literature of ferocity, a cultural situation that has its literary roots in Sade—for example, the excremental vision, the apocalyptic orgasm.

Though the rest of this study is concerned with twentieth-century authors (Freud's early work was published in the last decade of the nineteenth century), Sade is the indispensable antecedent. All of the novelists considered have commented on Sade in some form. Two of them, Miller and Mailer, were thinking of writing books on Sade; a third, Bataille, wrote three essays on Sade and alludes to him in other works as well. So, although Sade essentially antedates the assault on middle-class culture, this avatar of sexual rebellion is the beginning of the tradition I am trying to define. A certain kind of tradition nourishes a certain kind of individual talent. As erotic blasphemer, Sade intended to strike a blow against the pillars of the ancien régime. As a libertine, however, he was a pillar of the ancien régime. Often classified with the *philosophes*, in his pursuit of a negative transcendence this exponent of the cult of energy can also be viewed as a pre-Romantic, even as a founder of the avant-garde. Though an eighteenth-century writer, Sade reaches his critical apogee in the period we focus on, mainly in France but in the United States as well.

In *Beyond Culture*, Lionel Trilling has written about the "adversarial" quality of modern high culture, which defines itself in opposition to "the specious good" (Wallace Fowlie's phrase, from his book on Rimbaud) that middle-class life represents.[2] This is a distinction that transcends our assent to the realm of everyday custom, says Trilling, in a problematic caveat. For how much assent can we give to this realm without actually believing in it? Trilling, in any case, is ambivalent about both of the aforementioned categories. In explaining this ambivalence, he invokes Hegel's distinction (in *The Phenomenology of Mind*) between the "honest consciousness" and the "disintegrated consciousness," between rational decency and noble baseness. Hegel, in my view, sees decency too easily as simple, placid, middle-class, and disintegration too readily as daring, viable, artistic. Paradoxically, it appears to Hegel, the deepest, most complex qualities of mind, most notably those that are produced by art and concerned with this production, involve baseness—a negative, unsavory, even violent quality, which may emerge as what I call

ferocity. Though the disintegration is of norms, it is also of the self, disintegrated in the creative destruction of those norms. Trilling cites the hero of Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* as an early prime, chaste instance, noting that the critics of this early romantic novel suggested that childish things should give way to maturity. Maturity is a serious concept in the period of American life we are considering, though it is most often used contemptuously by cultural radicals, who consider it a synonym for conformity. The novelists of ferocity do not think much of it. Much better the adult as wild child. These novelists have little to say about children as such. An exception, Mailer's child seductress in *Barbary Shore*, proves the rule.

Nor do they think much of psychoanalysis. Freud is the dark genius of honest consciousness—of rational decency and general civility—and therefore a prime target for most writers of ferocity and the rebel theoreticians of psychoanalysis. As Trilling notes, "the bias of psychoanalysis, so far from being Dionysian, is wholly in the service of the Apollonian principle, seeking to strengthen the 'honest soul' in the selfhood which is characterized by purposiveness and a clear-eyed recognition of limits."[3] That is, finally, Trilling's bias as well. It is also the bias of this book, which is why I consider the assault on Freud relevant to the fiction of ferocity. In attacking, if not destroying, the idea of limit, this fiction pronounces clear limits of its own. Of course, the attack is done differently by each author, and sometimes differently within the development of an author's career, so that what this study gives the reader is a variety of ferocious experiences, constituting a tradition or subtradition. It is a tradition in which the self, ideally, goes beyond all bounds, a self that seeks erotic transcendence. When bounds dramatically emerge to complicate the narrative, great literature may be written, as is the case with Lawrence. But, on the other hand, the frustrated quest for primitive redemption can issue into a tedious or pernicious violence. There is a conformity of rebellion just as there is a conformity of middle-class life. This study explores the possibility that, as the expression goes, the cure may be worse than the disease. It argues that modern literary culture has overvalued the tradition of extremity that the fiction of ferocity incarnates, and it suggests a reconsideration of the honest consciousness that artist-rebels consider square. My hope is that this book may help to bridge the gap—often, but not always justified—between literary culture and middle-class realities.

I have focused on a select number of writers and thinkers. Anyone might think of others. My concern is to describe an arc. Relating so directly yet so differently to Freud over a period of time, the figures I have chosen seem to me

to do this most clearly and, by and large, most significantly. I have deliberately chosen writers who are household words (Bataille is the exception, although his top-drawer pornography, considered here, was well known to the cognoscenti during this period), at least if one considers one particular room of the household.

Topographically speaking, there are two main sections to the study. The first is theoretical, dealing with Freud's ideas and how they are viewed by other thinkers. This section begins with two chapters on Freud: "Freud and the Postwar Temper" and "Freud and Others [including Foucault] on Aggression." The next chapters, in varying degrees critical of Freud, delineate the thought of Reich, Brown, and Deleuze and Guattari. This part of the book is prolegomenal, serving as a cultural backdrop and analogue to the main part of it, which is a literary critique of the fiction of sexual aggression. The first part describes the cultural assault on the Freudian superego and the humanistic sense of limits that goes with it. Freud, who thought much about aggression, sexual and otherwise, becomes an object of utopian transformation. The second and main part of the book is composed of essays on the major fiction and relevant nonfictional prose of the writers of ferocity. Some of these writers have been considered together before, most notably in Kate Millett's broadly anti-patriarchal *Sexual Politics*, where Freud, Miller, and Mailer are all on the same side.[4] None has been considered collectively from the point of view elaborated in this book. In addition to the chapters on these novelists, there are a number of interchapters, where I consider what they write about another writer in this group (for example, Miller on Lawrence). Finally, there is a conclusion, a discussion of Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, Ellis's *American Psycho*, and Rieff's *Fellow Teachers*, which extends the polarities of the rest of the book.

The first section of this study seeks to delineate Freud's ideas and the movement away from them. Freud's ego-id-superego paradigm is an affront to the self that concedes no limit to the id. His radical imperfectability, his tragic vision, stands in opposition to the revolutionary utopian element. Bersani, a deconstructionist, speaks for the limitless as in the "limitless" narcissism of infancy. For this liberationist, sexuality is intolerable to the structured self. He especially rejects the "policeman" of Freud's *The Ego and the Id*, which, Bersani holds, tends to reduce psychoanalysis to ego psychology. Bersani is attuned to ferocity; Freud is not. Foucault and his followers reject Freud's insistence on genital primacy, his positing of a virtual sexual normalcy. Foucault holds that sadomasochism is illustrative of the desexualiation of pleasure—that is, the degenitalization of pleasure. So, though Foucault admired Freud for opening

up "the possibility of a dialogue with unreason"—not only with the unconscious, but with what Foucault calls "the serene world of mental illness"—he regrets that Freud became a medical personage, a judge who punishes and rewards, and that cure became a conformist disaster. Sade is Foucault's example of the "natural." The Oedipus complex is a straitjacket. Foucault wants a "non-disciplinary eroticism," a sadomasochism without pain.[5]

Reich dissents from the Freudian view that civilization is worth the price of repression. He will not recognize the Freudian sense of limits. All superego should be abolished—except his. For Reich, civilization is a prison and nature is a paradise. A Freudo-Marxist, Reich derives much of this sense of imprisonment from capitalist social corruption. A utopian, he violently proclaims nonviolence. A psychoanalyst, he believes apocalypse must begin on the couch. This will result in Dionysian release. The authoritarian grip of the Oedipus complex will be shattered by the sexual revolution. Like Lawrence, he argues that Freud does not see the purity of the instincts. That is why Freud is a mere compromiser, particularly in the way that he constructs the ego as mediator between superego and id. For all this, Reich does not want to get back to the pregenital.

Brown does. He wants the polymorphous perverse, a regression to primary narcissism, an undifferentiated ego and id. He sees civilization as a dead loss, a product of sublimation. He thinks Freud is too involved in the ego project to value the Dionysian highly. Diminishing the Dionysian makes for the mixture of sensuality we get in Sade and Hitler. Dionysus freed gives us Blake and Nietzsche. For ecstasy, for Bacchic frenzy, we need derangement. The Orphic Brown wants transgression, so that we can establish "the natural limits of intelligence."[6] Even insanity leads to liberation.

Deleuze and Guattari are proclaimed enemies of the Oedipus complex because it internalizes limit. It places a limit on the illimitable. There is no Oedipal unconscious. Not that they want the id; the id never existed. Neither did the unconscious. It is a bourgeois-capitalist fantasy, like the Oedipus complex. There is no moral reality but a "schizophrenic" (or schizo) indeterminacy characterized by fragments, flows, desires. Deleuze and Guattari utopianize experience without pain. Their schizophrenia is not an illness but a process. The schizo's fragmented life of multiple personalities undergoes a transformation into the exemplary desiring machine, which works only when it breaks down. Like Bersani, they are deconstructionists. Their schizo is a deconstructed subject—there is no ego, there is no individual. The breakdown of boundaries, limits, characters, and genres that we see in Burroughs and in

postmodernism generally is a literary analogue. What emerges is a psychic anarchy.

The second section of this book looks at the literature of ferocity. Sade is its originator. Antinomian, he transvalued values before Nietzsche, who read him. Modeling his characters on what he calls "Nature," he is an avatar of the cult of energy and the morality of impulse. The energy is aggressive and uninhibited, an energy of destruction. In his assault on superego, he embodies the imagination as libertine. It exceeds all limits, dissipates all conditions. In the extremity of his posture, Sade anticipates modern, not just Romantic, criminality. Crime is a form of genius, a transformer of worlds. There is nothing that his master characters are not permitted. Cruelty is a positive energy, since it is the only thing that civilization has not yet corrupted—a virtue, not a vice. Sade's characters, then, are doubly (and contradictorily) cruel, by civilization and by nature. Among other things, his imagination is a justification of his own proclivities. It is also the origin of sexual modernism.

Though Lawrence repudiated what he saw as the endless, minuscule psychologizing of modern literature, he is very much the modernist in his embattled extremity and salvationary primitivism. His major surrogate, Birkin in *Women in Love*, rebels against a society he finds loathsome but also against the idea of society as such—much of the time. There is, as well, something in Birkin that rebels against the nature of things, even sex, for example. But sex is needed to support the individuality in togetherness that must characterize the man and woman relation. He thereby transcends the Sadean solipsism, in which the object is a matter of indifference. Lawrence has no illusions about sex being easy. It is a psycho-metaphysical experience often within a sadomasochistic context. Its enactment may lead to a qualified wholeness or to disintegration. His darkened world celebrates a difficult beauty. Mistrustful of Freudian motive, Lawrence rescues for his preferred lovers a final purity.

Bataille too is explicitly anti-Freudian, critical of the sublimations and repressions that inhibit. He is a disciple of Sade. He is one of those who speaks of "the Divine Marquis"—that is, a figure whose passion transcends the world of social values. Bataille is an eroticist *maudit*; eroticism exists only in the violent, angry gesture. Like Barthes, he distinguishes between *plaisir*, the usual affectionate sexual pleasure, and *jouissance*, the shocking, ego-disrupting sexuality that reflects a violent conflict with culture and nature. Despoiling woman's beauty is the essence of eroticism. Anthropologically, Bataille sees the need for *potlatch*, the need for expenditure to the point of ruin. Marxist surplus is a utilitarian reduction, since our deepest need is for con-

spicuous outlays that exhaust as they ennoble us. Limit, project, deferred gratification, the myth of the moral life—these give the lie to the agony of living. Nothing is useful; everything is waste. Only transgression is real. We are near the solipsistic world of Sade. Only convulsive laughter will save us from solipsism, Bataille holds. *Story of the Eye* is a perfect expression of these views as it concerns youth, *Madame Edwarda* as it concerns middle age. The first is episodic, racy, juvenile; the second metaphysical, lyrical, and hysterical.

Miller wrote his most important work in Paris and was much influenced by French literature. Rimbaud, about whom he wrote a book, is the first of his French culture heroes. With Rimbaud, he agrees that we must be absolutely modern, that chimeras are out of date, that we must renounce all that civilization has stood for. We must, in other words, resist the world of cowardly compromise and limitations known as society. Like Rimbaud, Miller resists "maturity." He announces at the beginning of *Tropic of Cancer* that his liberation as a writer came when he cast literature aside, and that his desire is to record "all that which is omitted in books."[7] Obscenity, then, may be ultimate honesty. Miller is the master of nihilistic sexual comedy. Lawrence's cosmic energy gives way to immediate gratification. He admittedly wants to go back to "a superinfantile realm," a resurgence of id at all costs.[8] His egomania is inseparable from a contempt for superego.

Mailer's sexual radicalism evolves from a dissolving political radicalism. In *The Naked and the Dead*, he denies the politics of civility, the reality of a liberal center. But since it is a naturalistic novel (at least in part), sexual aggression in this book is not yet self-conscious. In *The Deer Park* it is, one might say to a fault. In Marion Faye, Mailer gives us his first portrait of the hipster, whose Romantic satanism—Mailer quotes Sade (without acknowledgment) —strikes the apocalyptic note familiar to the literature of ferocity. Hollywood, like the army, gives us what Mailer considers American totalitarianism. The nihilism of hip, as Mailer conceives it, goes back to Sade, with every social restraint removed—even murder, as we see in "The White Negro." Like Sade, Lawrence, and Miller, Mailer moves to a negative transcendence. Rojack in *An American Dream* is a later version of the hipster, a man who follows his impulses no matter how destructive they may be. D. J.—the "I" of *Why Are We in Vietnam?*—is a reader of Sade by the age of fifteen and a follower of Burroughs. He is illustrative of Mailer's view that through obscenity a man can discriminate between himself and society. Mailer's journalism succeeds to a considerable degree because of its dramatization of a new, liberal persona. But fiction releases the sexual demons when, after a long absence, he

comes back to it in *Ancient Evenings*. In this world without superego, Mailer leaves no phallus unadored, no incest uninhibited. Mailer's Egypt is a place sated and diminished by its own fulfillments. Ferocity, contingent to some degree on outrage, has lost its place.

This study's conclusion shows that the culture of extremity creates a bifurcation in the general culture. Burroughs and Ellis illustrate strains of the postmodern expression of contemporaneity, the sociology of Rieff a traditionalist counterargument. In *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs gives us a Sadean work, an antinomian explosion of fantasy that has appropriately been described as the literature of delirium. For Burroughs, civilization and destruction are equivalent. The id, then, must subvert the ego, since all civilized forms are sadistic. One of Kermode's "neo-modernists," whom we now call postmodernist, he is anti-language (words being the primary form of repression), anti-art, anti-ethics, anti-form. Like Miller, he is a Deleuze and Guattari schizo. His moral nihilism extends to characters who have no inner life. Sadomasochism is the truest relation.

Ellis presents radical sexual aggression not as rebellion but as a logical consequence of conformity. Charisma has been translated to the material world *faute de mieux*—there is no inner world. In the new blank fiction, commodities have taken over. In Ellis, only sadism and the sartorial are obsessively real. Realism becomes a form of surrealism. Disillusion with civilization is his credo and his rationale. But where the negative credo of Hemingway's Frederick Henry or Lawrence's Connie Chatterley reflects a complex irony deeply felt, Ellis's Bateman gives us an anesthetized heart. Modernism rises above capitalism; postmodernism inhabits the air it breathes. Heroic isolation, the elegiac tone, the monument have all morphed into phantasmagoria, parody, pop culture, aesthetic fragmentation. Sometimes the fragmentation is the very principle of composition, as in Burroughs's cut-up "method." Ellis uses a cut-up method applied to bodies. For him, the precincts of high seriousness are no longer inhabited.

But they are very much so by Rieff, a cultural critic who sits in angry lamentation at the spectacle. His *Fellow Teachers* addresses the problem of moral exhaustion, or, as it may be, vacuity raised by the tradition of ferocity, as well as modernism and postmodernism generally. Just as many formal aspects of postmodernism originate in modernism, where they take on a different emphasis, so do many of its moral weaknesses. Rieff laments the loss of authority, how the Nietzschean transvaluation of values has become in its recent American expression a valuation of all sexuality. To praise the infantile,

to glorify the polymorphous perverse and immediate gratification, is to praise criminality. We know that everything is not permitted. High culture, which must be restored, is an establishment of limits. Rieff wishes to rescue pleasure from itself. "In superego," he holds, "we see the ghost of sacred order."[9] Some may regard Rieff's view as an extremity that extremity produced and may feel closer to writers who mediate between eroticism and morality, but his cry in the wilderness is necessary.

At issue in this period, as in high modernism, is the viability of civilization. Is it worth the price? The novelists of ferocity, like the psychoanalytic Left, say in essence that it is not—at least, not in any present or foreseeable form. Civilization *is* the problem. It must die to be resurrected. Hence the positive value, the creativity, of destruction. But there are those who are, as Bellow has put it, on the side of civilization. Freud is preeminent among them. W. H. Auden, in his powerful poem entitled "In Memory of Sigmund Freud," speaks of "Eros builder of cities," suggesting that the price we pay for civilization is worth it. Since its inception, I have thought of this study as the cultural alter ego of my book on Bellow,[10] a moderating cultural figure, a humanist. He shows an attenuated respect for custom, a partial appropriation of tradition. American literary and psychoanalytic culture of the postwar period can well be understood in terms of this cultural agon. This study expresses a skepticism about creative destruction, subjecting ferocity to a humanistic critique.

1

FREUD AND THE POSTWAR TEMPER

"He saw Americans one and all as victims of an anal-sadistic retentiveness hostile to pleasure but conducive at the same time to the most aggressive conduct in business and politics. This was why American existence was marked by 'haste.' That, too, was why the nonutilitarian aspects of life, whether innocent hobbies or the higher reaches of culture, were unavailable to Americans . . . worst of all America was enslaved to that favorite product of anal adults, money. For Freud, the United States was in a word, 'Dollaria,' " an acerbic pun that equates a symbolic (and real) currency with a common medical disorder. So writes the American historian and Freudian Peter Gay,[1] outlining the aggression that in time made an American reading public ready for the counter-aggression described in this study. Freud did not realize that at the very time he was thinking these adverse thoughts, American writers and bohemians of the 1920s agreed with him and were making use of his psychoanalysis to support a rebellious hedonism. If this cultural appropriation of Freud often lacked depth —it was sometimes nothing more than an extension of a nineteenth-century mind cure—it nonetheless served to reestablish a more serious attitude toward inner experience. In fact, as the historian Eli Zaretsky informs us in *Secrets of the Soul*, "by World War I the United States had the largest number of analysts in the world" (fifty-three), even if they were all medical doctors and "technique driven . . . with little interest in psychoanalytic theory."[2] Freud's books sold poorly in the United States until the 1930s, when Americans made more serious evaluations of his work. Freud had been more concerned about the American medical resistance to lay analysis. Writing to Sandor Ferenczi in 1929, he considered this "the last mask of resistance against psychoanalysis and the most dangerous of all."[3] Some of this concern as well may have been misplaced. Zaretsky informs us that there were 2,295 psychiatrists in the United States by 1940, and 4,700 by 1948. Much of their work was clinical (as was most of the newly established profession of clinical psychology), but much of this was a

sort of Carl Rogers counseling and psychotherapy rather than classical Freudian analysis. Because of this and because of the increasing dogmatism of the entrenched Freudians, Freud would have had some difficulty in recognizing his profession. In any case, psychoanalysis, as well as psychiatry and clinical psychology, was mostly in the service of war veterans. Zaretsky tells us that in 1945, 60 percent of veterans who were patients were confined for psychiatric reasons, 50 percent of disability pensions were psychiatric, and by the mid-1950s half of the hospital beds in the country were occupied by mental patients. By 1976 there were 27,000 psychiatrists, dominated to a significant extent by the 400 psychoanalysts who had established a practice before the end of the 1940s. Some of the analysts were Freudian, and some emphasized the social and interpersonal. A troubled inner life had become a widespread American characteristic. Maturity was the coin of this realm.

America has taken Freud more seriously than he ever took America, and in a more sophisticated way than he ever imagined. History helped. Along with the sharp decline in radical hopes that began just before the Second World War, the war itself helped bring an end to innocence that was conducive to the absorption of anti-Utopian Freudian realities. Americans in the 1920s may have expressed a more obvious enthusiasm for Freud's ideas, motivated by the bohemian fantasy of sexual liberation, but in the late 1940s and 1950s, despite the period's tendency to conformity, Americans were more appreciative of what Freud really meant. If this elevation of Freud had its downside in a retreat from personal responsibility on the part of parent-blaming analysands and their analysts, and from political responsibility on the part of conformists who were too quick to convert legitimate criticism into neurosis, it had its notable upside in a self-awareness and an ethic of honesty, a clear-eyed truth telling, that was, in terms of psychodynamic motive, firmly established in American experience. And even if the beneficiaries of Freudian analysis were the unhappy few, the influence of Freudianism extended far beyond the couch into the great world itself. Freud mattered, partly because he did not make great claims. He sought only partial cure. As he put it, with memorable tartness, from the start: "Much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness."[4]

Freud's stoic disposition found fertile ground in the anti-millenarianism, the revisionist liberalism, of the postwar period. Not that the aftermath of the Second World War equaled the disillusionment that followed the First World War. In the 1920s, there was a sense of civilization's collapse. The Second World War, on the other hand, a "good" war in the European theater at least,

gave a sense that evil had been vanquished. Still, the very epitome of this evil (the Holocaust), combined with the unique expression of explosiveness of even the good guys (the atomic bomb), was cause for reflection about the aggressive nature of man. It was not long before the popular joy at the war's being over gave way to a more sober assessment of human possibility. Freud's complex pessimism proved not to be alien to a country whose optimism he had trouble taking seriously. One recalls the anecdote of the American lady who protested, "My dreams are altruistic!" Maybe not.

Many Americans accepted the reality of man's radical imperfectability and were ready for, as some put it, Freud's tragic vision. The neo-Freudians (like Karen Horney and Erich Fromm), with their optimistic cultural determinism, and Harry Stack Sullivan, with his vague interpersonal relations—both denying Freud's sexual aetiology of the neurosis—were subject to scrutiny in the hard, economic light of Freud, which saw that the price for selfhood was invariably paid. In response, the dynamics of biological limitation was seen by the cultural critic Lionel Trilling to be the irreducible advantage against the tyranny of culture.

This turn paralleled the critique of Emersonian personalism or part of it—what the literary critic Quentin Anderson called "the imperial self," that self which knows no limits to its power or authority, in its rhapsodic quest for what Tocqueville called "infinite perfectibility."[5] In its place stood the tough structural dramatics of Freud's ego, id, and superego. In this sense, the postwar era represented America's coming of middle age. Writers of tragic dimension—such as Eliot and Faulkner—were central, though rebels like the Beats were soon to assert a neo-Romantic version of the imperial self.

While the hedonistic 1920s enlisted psychoanalysis in the war against Puritanism, by which it usually meant middle-class Victorianism amounting to Babbittry, the 1950s took Puritanism, by which it meant Christianity, quite seriously. Perry Miller's work, groundbreaking in itself, was a symbol of a larger religious viability. Freud's tough-mindedness lent itself to comparison with religious thought. Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, notes that before Freud, "prevailing philosophies of Enlightenment had practically eliminated pessimistic conclusions about the inevitability of egoistic corruption in all forms of human creativity which had been preserved in the Christian doctrine of original sin."[6] Niebuhr sees that, really, "Freud had no interest in original sin" but that he rejects a rational optimism. This endears him to the theologian, a former Marxist turned anti-Utopian known for, among other things, his rejection of what he calls soft Utopias, those envisioning progress without

conflict (a simplified version of the Enlightenment), and hard Utopias, those in which an idealized future justifies present cruelty (deriving from Marxism). Niebuhr shared with Freud a tragic sense of life. For both, proximate change may be effected but there is no perfectability. Problems remain, finally, unsolvable. This is the nature of things.

Niebuhr admires Freud's psychodynamic structural paradigm because it "shattered the simple mind/body dualism"[7] of Western philosophy, including the work of Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Descartes, and Kant (for example, Kant's version of the intelligible and sensible self). In this dualism, the mind controls the impulses of nature. In Niebuhr's view, Freud rightly invalidates the Kantian idea of godlike reason, the reason that imposes duty on inclination. And in Freud, as in Niebuhr, there is no nature to go back to; that is, there is no salvationary nature. In Freud, nature is always roilingly there, struggling with conscience—or, in Freudian terms, the id is always struggling with the superego, with the ego as mediator. There is no split between reason and emotion, but rather a dynamic dualism of rational and irrational emotion.

So far so good, for Niebuhr. But, he must conclude, Freud's "mistake" was to equate the self too simply with its "natural impulses and necessities." For this theologian, Freud cannot do "full justice to the transcendent freedom of the spirit of which the self is capable." Niebuhr thinks that "the primary problem" of Freud's "determinism is that he finds the causative factors in a too narrow rage of subconscious motives."[8] The word *subconscious* is a giveaway, implying as it does the subordination of libidinal to rational or spiritual motive, something that the Freudian *unconscious* does not do. But Niebuhr is essentially simpatico with Freud, especially when he regards Freud's ideas as a plausible secular equivalent to original sin. He explicitly notes that Freud's realism is "regarded by many as a welcome scientific substitute for the prematurely discredited traditional doctrine of original sin" (272). Regretting that neither myth nor dogma has much relevance in today's progressive world, that Christian religious thought today is viewed as morbid in defining every form of self-concern as sinful, Niebuhr finds that Freud fills the darkness gap. But he considers Freud's realism to be defective in not seeing a self-regard originating beyond the id, and in corrupting the freedom of a "coherent and organized" ego (274). Niebuhr allows for some self-transcendence (and does not see that Freud does as well, for example in sublimation), while he rejects, like Freud, the self-deification or Promethean illusion of the imperial self. Niebuhr thinks that Freudian impulses do exist but are "subject to historical elaboration" (275). There is no reason to assume, then, that the

Oedipus complex is nature rather than culture. It is characteristic of the conservative turn of the 1950s that the Protestant theologian finds in Freud something of a kindred spirit. Both represent what was called moral realism.

The sociologist and cultural critic Philip Rieff, perhaps Freud's best expositor, describes skeptically Freud's somewhat surprising significance in the turn to religion of the 1950s: "Whatever is serious in the current revival of religion is evocatively, if not substantively, Augustinian in temper . . . it proclaims the wretchedness of the human condition and rather muffles the voice of God." He adds that "for this sort of religiosity Freud performs a delicate service. His atheism being dismissed as a personal aberration, Freud's psychology has been pressed into service, mainly as independent testimony to the religious 'depth' for those no longer persuaded of its existence by theological rhetorics."[9] Freud is thereby also made to support those who recoil from the optimism of liberal religion, to affirm "the habitual pronouncement of the pious: we are all miserable sinners," as he says in *Totem and Taboo* (*SE* 13:72). Freud's description, they understood, is ironic. So is a master of psychological need put to attenuated uses; so is a rationalist put to the uses of faith.

Freud does not tell us much about original sin, but he does speak for a sense of limit. Rieff rightly says that "despite his criticisms, Freud was not unsympathetic to the old moralities. As a man of culture, he could admire the repressions. But, as a man of science, he had learned from case after case that 'what the world calls its code of morals demands more sacrifices than it is worth.' "[10] (This man of culture was a paterfamilias who lived by the clock, paid all his bills punctiliously, and kept working into his eighties, though he was hampered for years by cancer.) In this sense, his invention, psychoanalysis, is or was a bargain. For, as Rieff says, "his therapy of honesty came modestly priced in a culture where all prices are too high" (323).

One must agree to limitations of instinct, but not too much. In the common parlance of the 1950s, one should be "well adjusted," an expression that Freud never used. The language comes from therapy, but the submerged technological metaphor suggests a tiny, functioning cog in a great industrial wheel, with Charlie Chaplin frantically tightening loosened psychological nuts, as in *Modern Times*. It suggests Freud Americanized. In reaction, there was a song popular among college students, "I Don't Want to Be Well Adjusted," and some idealistic young people did odd things, like choosing the life of ideas—academic life—despite its genteel poverty, to mention only one mild, middle-class form of rebellion in the land of Dollaria. Freud was ambivalent toward repressive culture and so were we. Like Freud, we were "its major critic and yet

defender of its necessity."[11] Whether this is considered the higher ambivalence or just being mixed up, it was never a matter of—to quote the 1930s folk song—"Whose side are you on?" That question, once stirring, now seemed simplistic. Rather, as most of the New York intellectuals now understood, it was a question of self-definition in the face of society. Zaretsky is surely right in saying that it is a mistake to read the history of the period as "bad rationalizers versus good heretics" or "play off the conformist 50s against the rebellious 60s," arguing that even the ego psychologists appealed to charismatic sources of sexuality, individuality, and the personal unconscious; that charisma and rationalization were always intertwined; and that there was a continuity between 1950s domesticity and 1960s liberation—namely, "new possibilities for personal life."[12]

Some did not make this argument; indeed, some repudiated it, like the Beats and, more grandly, Norman Mailer, who keys into the tradition of rebellion described in this book. Here is the conundrum. "If," as Rieff puts it, "every limit can be seen as a limitation of personality, the question with which we may confront every opportunity is: after all, why not? While Freud never committed himself, the antinomian implications are there . . . those who have interpreted Freud as advocating, for reasons of health, sexual freedom—promiscuity rather than the strain of fidelity, adultery rather than neurosis—have caught the hint, if not the intent, of his psychoanalysis."[13] This is a fine distinction indeed. But it separates cultural figures as different as Norman O. Brown and Lionel Trilling, Herbert Marcuse and Philip Rieff, the first member of each pair catching the hint and the second the intent, the first in synch with the late 1960s, the second repelled by them.

Trilling points to the paradox that limit brings the greatest freedom. In *Freud and the Crisis of Our Culture*, he gives credence to Freud's description of himself as "a conservative, a conserving mind."[14] By that Freud meant that the work of ego building, that dike against the restless ocean of id, is essential to the shaping of culture. If culture makes man, man makes culture. But if culture saves man, it also imprisons him. This is the democratic version of the tragic flaw. In thrusting himself into the labor of culture, man falls because of his very strengths—a case of, in the vernacular, "doing better and feeling worse." Since the Romantics, the self has been more powerful and vulnerable because, as Trilling puts it, "in the degree that society was personalized by the concept of culture, the individual was seen to be far more deeply implicated in society than ever before." One can, therefore, speak of the style of the culture, its unexpressed, unconscious assumptions. But if man is seen to be conditioned by culture, Trilling points out, one "can more easily envisage a benefi-

cent manipulation of his condition" (47). This part of the equation gives us, among other possibilities, the neo-Freudian view. Freud's emphasis on his structural paradigm is, in this view, considered "reactionary." Trilling considers the Freudian dynamics liberating, precisely because of the limits it sets on culture in setting limits for the self. In forging ego, Freud's structural paradigm "proposes to us that culture is not all powerful. It suggests that there is a residue of human quality beyond the reach of cultural control, [which] elemental as it may be, serves to bring culture itself under criticism and keeps it from being absolute" (48). One need not be Socrates or Giordano Bruno to illustrate this point. There is no modern writer, Trilling holds, who "has not expressed the bitterness of his discontent with civilization, who has not said that the self made greater legitimate demands than any culture could hope to satisfy. This intense conviction of the existence of the self apart from culture is, as culture well knows, its noblest and most generous achievement" (58). These stirring, paradoxical accents define the heroism of essentialist struggle.

They also define the temper of Freudian humanism. Trilling rightly pronounces Freud "one of the very greatest of humanist minds" (15). He holds that "the complex accuracy of Freud's view of culture may best be spoken of in terms of his affinity with the tradition of literary humanism." For literature, as for Freud, "the test of culture is always the individual self, not the other way around" (33). Freud would have gratefully accepted the mantle of humanism. Ernest Jones, who knew him well, tells us that "he never felt at home in the medical profession . . . he did not seem to himself to be a regular member of it."[15] And Peter Gay quotes from Freud's letter to Paul Federn in which he states: "As long as I live, I shall balk at having psychoanalysis swallowed by medicine."[16] Jones knew that Freud was most interested in "the unraveling of cultural and historical problems,"[17] despite having done some excellent medical research early in his career. Jones informs us: "He might have become a creative writer, perhaps not a poet but a novelist—in fact he said so himself more than once." This may prove only that Freud had an active fantasy life, but Jones seems right to aver that "it was in this wider bearing of his work that he was primarily interested." As Jones notes, Freud wrote Arthur Schnitzler, the celebrated Viennese dramatist and novelist, that "he felt his [Schnitzler's] mind to be more akin to his own than anyone else's he had come across" (432). (Schnitzler, a physician-turned-writer with an eye for pathology, is known for a sophisticated, tender cynicism commonly called Viennese. Freud was faithful[18] and strait-laced according to most accounts. So this remark may give one pause.) There is, too, Freud's special admiration for Shakespeare, his

reading of the classics, his Goethe Prize for literature, and his well-known statement that he learned more from the drama and the novel than from academic psychology. Jones speculates that Freud might have been a philosopher. It is relevant to recall that when Freud was in school, the humanities were considered the best preparation for the study of science. Renaissance concepts of education were still prevalent. Nor was the psychoanalysis that Freud developed a hard science, subject to experimental physical laws. In the postscript to *An Autobiographical Study*, Freud speaks of "a lifelong *détour* through the natural sciences, medicine and psychotherapy . . . to the cultural problems which had fascinated me long before, when I was a youth scarcely old enough for thinking." Freud thinks of this with good-natured irony as a "regressive development" in that he knows that he is first and foremost a psychoanalyst: "No personal experiences of mine are of any interest in comparison to my relations with that science" (*SE* 20:71–72).

Freud is far from being the traditional humanist. For him, there is no Platonic right reason. In fact, the rational self or ego must struggle with moral reason or the superego in the process of self-definition. Moreover, the discovery of the determining unconscious denies the primacy of reason or intellect. This circumspect rationalist understood perhaps too well the respect that the rational must pay to the irrational. Still, science was rational, as was society to some degree. But society could not be rational enough. A certainty was gone, if it ever really existed. For Freud, unlike a more typical humanist such as Matthew Arnold, culture could not have the moral certitude that religion once possessed (if only in an illusory way). In these ways, Freud helped to steer the postwar divergence from traditional humanism, while supporting a humanism characterized by anxiety and amenable to therapeutic consolations. The Oedipal paradigm dramatized in a distanced storm-and-stress way the essential humanistic quality, the sense of becoming, even if in its biologically determined character it minimized the most dramatic quality deriving from this sense, the pull of moral indeterminacy. More liberal humanists would not do so.

The postwar period in literature (say 1945 to 1965) has been described, sometimes pejoratively, as an age of criticism. We are concerned here with its literary and psychological manifestations. It was an age of criticism, not only in the sense that there were direct Freudian critiques of literature, but also, and more important, in that the age demanded interpretation. It believed in meaning; it believed that the truth about literature could and must be rationally articulated. The zeitgeist married literary criticism and psychology. The age was for, not against, interpretation, in Susan Sontag's resonant expres-

sion.[19] Meaning was the bridge between reason and the unconscious. Like Freud, the postwar age saw the imagination as a symptom of the unconscious. In the minds of some analysts, then, literary criticism was more compelling than fiction or drama—and certainly more than narcissistic poetry, with what they considered to be its regressive sucking of consonants and vowels—in a sense similar to the one in which psychoanalysis was more compelling than being neurotic. Thus criticism could be seen to be not merely necessary to the illumination of artistic motive but also superior to it. Both literary criticism and psychoanalysis were, ideally, attuned to the analysis of language and symbol, though this did not mean that the best literary criticism was Freudian in itself. Meaning *meant* because a humanistic or psychoanalytic truth existed. The thrill of illumination could actually transcend what was to be illuminated, which was fantasy or neurosis or a combination of the two. The shards of dark history and bright hope were treasures to these archaeologists of the intelligible self. Psychoanalysis, in its interpretive power, was the science of humanists. Poor Freud! To this day he is a scientist of sorts more admired by humanists than by scientists. The literary and psychoanalytic cultures have always been linked by a fascination with what is now called, pejoratively, "the anecdotal," the uniqueness of individual experience, something beyond data to make known.

These are some of the reasons why the postwar period is one, unlike the immediate present, in which art is more central than politics to the consciousness of the intelligentsia. The history of the first half of the twentieth century was often chaotic to the point of being unreal. As modernists know, this chaos put the onus of reality on private life. The middle of the century was capable of being, in a mass society, a particularly individuated interregnum. High culture came as close as it could to replacing the authority once held by religion, the cure of souls. Yet it could not possibly achieve the Arnoldian hope of doing so.

If art was central to informed consciousness it could not be simply a byproduct of neurosis. If art was, as Freud thought, an instance of the ego's being taken over by the unconscious, this was a game in which the ego colluded. Freud sees art in its civilizing function even when he denigrates it somewhat. He says, in *The Future of an Illusion*, that "art offers substitute gratifications for the oldest cultural renunciations, still the ones most deeply felt, and for that reason it serves as nothing else to reconcile men to the sacrifices made on behalf of culture" (*SE* 21:14). Freud's ambivalence about artistic genius—in one sense infantile, in another sense awesome, beyond the

purview of psychoanalysis—is well known. In the end, art serves a moderating Freudian function. As the art critic Jack Spector says, "just as a successful composition would . . . stay on a humane middle ground between abstraction and excessive emotionalism, so the healthy ego would function as a synthesizer of divergent and swarming energies."[20] So, for example, though the surrealists liked Freud, Freud did not like the surrealists. Of surrealism he writes in a letter to Stefan Zweig in 1938, "the concept of art resists an extension beyond the point where the quantitative proportion between the unconscious maternal and preconscious elaboration is not kept within a certain limit" (*SE* 21:141–42). The ego, as Spector suggests, seemed to blend the neoclassic (order and beauty) and the romantic (originality and uninhibited expression). This balanced quality says something about the postwar period in literature and psychoanalysis as well. The more extreme eruptions of the unconscious, including sexual eruptions—the literature of ferocity—were often viewed from a skeptical perspective.

Part of Freud's appeal in the postwar era was his focus on myth, Oedipus being the most obvious example. His archaeological interest brought a number of archetypes to life. In his review of Joyce's *Ulysses*, T. S. Eliot said that mythical method organized the chaos of contemporary experience.[21] Freud was part of that contemporaneity. The postwar period could easily accommodate what could in a cultural sense enhance its religiosity. Freud's appropriation of Moses is a case in point. It emphasizes the integration of unconscious and humanistic motives, a meeting of aggression and limit. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud reenacts the Oedipal drama of *Totem and Taboo*, where the killing of the primal father by the primal horde eventuates in the return of the repressed through the miracle of guilt. Conscience thereby establishes culture. The end result for the ancient Jews is the worship of God, the father of fathers, and the cherishing of the Ten Commandments, including "thou shalt not murder." This is morality as an imaginative achievement.

A more impressive encounter with Moses, and almost equally original, is Freud's essay on Michelangelo's Moses. It is no exaggeration to say that Freud was obsessed with this statue. His description of his feelings in approaching the statue is an indication, it seems, of his identification with it. Again contrary to the biblical account, Freud thinks that Michelangelo's formidable hero will not destroy the tablets but will refrain from doing so. This figure of potential aggression subdues himself to the imperatives of limit. In so doing, he authenticates the authority of humanism. This is the general significance of

Freud's use of myth. And it is another instance of why the reading of Freud was characteristic of postwar intellectual life in America.

In his focus on the constant rhythms of experience; on the eternal recurrence, psychoanalytic style; and on the struggle between libido and aggression, Freud expressed an essentialist sense of things. Rieff says: "The popularity of psychoanalysis, in an age suffering vertigo from the acceleration of historical events, may be partly ascribed to Freud's rehabilitation of the constant nature underlying history."[22] Freud's truth lent an impetus to what liberal revisionist intellectuals called the end of ideology. Marx had subordinated nature to history, a skewed version of history at that. There was not an end to ideology in the sense of political and social outlooks, of course, but in the sense of exclusionary Marxist rigidity. Civility or civil politics is the alternative to ideology, implying individual political and moral agency and the subsequent consensus. This is not a simple process. For the postwar liberal, the awareness of complexity is the sign of wisdom. Like Freud, the liberal recognizes that every virtue must be paid for and that virtue is bound up with vice. Like Freud, the liberal believes that the ethic of civility will bring about a hoped-for self-sufficiency in a time of disillusionment. Utopia is not the place, even if it is nice to think about. Yes, there is civilization, but there are also its discontents. Rieff notes that "Freud had none of the enthusiasm that characterizes the antinomian temper . . . Sexuality for him is a force that permanently prevents any utopian transforming of the social order. Freud had no hope of transforming civilization. On the contrary, the great utopian possibility—insofar as he had any—is whether repressive civilization can permanently tame the instincts" (28). Freud's Utopia, in short, was anti-Utopian. Freud's revolutionary was a neurotic, pounding papa. Freud was a revolutionary only in the sense that he told the truth.

Freud's politics, like that of the postwar period generally, was of the center. And it was consonant with the time in that it was a subjective politics far more than an objective one. It focused on the individual far more than the collective, more on the private than the public. As Rieff says, Freud was too aware of the corrosive aspects of community to take political solidarity very seriously. In this respect, psychoanalysis was in the political vanguard, so to speak, of an apolitical era. Politics has for a long time been less real—less authentic—than the private life, especially in the postwar years. Whether it was because modernism had deeply discredited public language; because, after Armageddon, there was a recessional impulse toward the illusion of normalcy defined as

peaceful privacy; or because the traditional American distrust of politicians had gained an unusual impetus from the coincidence of these developments, the general indifference to public life had a life of its own. Of course, there were still momentous public events. The negative ones—McCarthy, the Rosenbergs—were consequences of tensions implicit in the uneasy wartime alliance with the Soviet Union. The positive ones—economic recovery, the GI Bill, the democratization of elites, the beginnings of the civil rights movement, the publication of the standard edition of Freud—focused largely on individual redefinition. The civil rights movement, to be sure, involved the public issue of race, but it began with a single woman feeling a certain way about giving up her seat to someone else because of her color. Like the 1954 decision on segregated schools, it was decided on the basis of injury to self-esteem. Yet these were inevitably political events.

In any case, a related and significant cultural shift had been in the making for some time. It is well described by the political scientist Jeffrey Abramson: "As against an older republican tradition which identified freedom with public space, communal solidarity, and the activity of citizenship, freedom in modern society is most often envisioned as the personal achievement of individuals in private space—a matter of abolishing external constraints on the expression of one's inner or authentic self . . . In the older, republican vision of freedom, political liberation was basic to personal liberation, because it was the community itself—and the public loyalties and virtues it spawned—that gave the self its character as well as its aims and purposes in life. By contrast, among ourselves it is the act of dispossessing the self of community, of tradition and religion and family, that is commonly seen as therapeutic and liberating."[23] Freud's complex conception of the self shows that this desired dispossession is an ideal tendency, particularly with regard to family. It also shows that therapy is a stoic form of liberation.

Freud spoke to an anxious but not an alienated self. For, as Abramson says, he can be seen, paradoxically, "as contributing to a more communitarian vision of liberation and well-being. He does this by setting out in [an] unsurpassed manner the limits to the competing, atomized understanding of liberation."[24] Writing in the 1970s, Abramson sees with special clarity that "Freud foresaw and criticized the modern appeal of an ethic of self-assertion and spontaneity, an ethic that has its roots in Nietzsche but parades today under the banners of the permissive society and sexual liberation. Against any such easy understanding of liberty as license for naturalness and self-expression, Freud explored the internal contradictions of erotic life" (2). There is some

question, though, about whether Freud foresaw the extent of sexual permissiveness or if he did not, from his Victorian perspective, exaggerate the repressiveness of society. But, as Rieff notes, "it was an accommodation to social authority that he envisaged not its abolition."[25] Abramson and Rieff give us an accurate picture of Freud as a liberal who accepts some repression. His solution too is liberal. Rieff points out that his "very aim, to educate the ruling ego, is a sure mark of Freud's classical liberalism. By enfranchising the uneducable populace of sexuality, Freud seeks to bring it into responsible relations with the ruling power. To the liberal political tradition, with its belief that the 'two nations' could be brought together, Freud offered a supporting parallel in psychological and moral theory, for he desired, as far as possible, to bring the instinctual unconscious into the rational community" (345). In other words, through analysis, or just growing up, Freud hoped for a mediating moral agency in the face of determining factors. This conservative liberalism, this resolution, was one of the conspicuous possibilities of the postwar period. If the culture of psychoanalysis intensified the American indifference to practical politics, its doing so was political in its own way.

2

FREUD AND OTHERS ON AGGRESSION

The concept of aggression evolved in Freud's palimpsest mind. Freud is always a dualist; he always sees psychology in terms of dynamic struggle. But the terms of the struggle change. For two decades, instinctual conflict meant the struggle between erotic and self-preservative instincts. The essay "On Narcissism" (1914) breaks this dualism in focusing on self-love. Conflict is now seen between two forms of sexual instinct. A year later, in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" (1915), he went beyond the sexual to say that the ego contained what he came to call an aggressive instinct. Manifested as a drive for mastery, it was, in part, self-preservative. For the first time aggression is equated with health, though war is soon seen to be a perversion of developmentally necessary aggression. So the new opposition was between the sexual and aggressive drives, one which mainstream psychoanalytic theory stayed with for a long time and still finds durable, to the extent that it still deals with drive theory. This change was clarified in Freud's *The Ego and the Id*, in which aggressive trends are, as Edward Bibring says, "no longer primary attributes of the ego instincts" but "independent instincts of aggression and destruction" existing side by side with the ego instincts.[1] Freud no longer sees ego instincts as independent entities but as derived partly from libidinal and partly from aggressive instincts, from eros and death,[2] which he later called primal instincts. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud meditates on the outward effects of the death instinct.

The ego psychologists Heinz Hartmann, Ernst Kris, and Rudolph Loewenstein focus on the structural theory advanced in *The Ego and the Id*, emphasizing that the ego has no drives of its own.[3] Drives are the motor force of the id, but unlike the instinct, the drive cannot reach its goal without the ego's intervention. The ego is a learning process, and the gratification of drives is guaranteed by learning. The ego psychologists consider that they clarify rather than modify Freud, eliminating contradictions rather than supplying redefinitions.

Aggression has to be distinguished from the drive to mastery. Some kinds of mastery are correlated to the ego. Some types of mastery are manifestations of aggression, which means that aggressive impulses may be seen as manifestations of an innate destructive drive. Freud had elaborated on the life and death instincts in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he said that there are ego and object instincts that were not libidinal. Later, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, he writes: "I can no longer understand how we can have overlooked the ubiquity of non-erotic aggressivity and destructiveness" (*SE* 21: 120). Freud here considers this inclination to aggression "the greatest impediment to civilization" (*SE* 21:122). Those who dismiss Freud's dualism of eros and death instincts tend to dismiss the existence of a primary drive toward aggression as well. Ego psychology does not, though it leaves proof of a death instinct to biology; that is, it never affirms it.

Albert Solnit puts the basically Freudian ego psychology view clearly: "Aggression and libido coexist and are viewed in terms of ego's relationship to id. When this coexistence is characterized by what is termed fusion, aggression can be influenced and channeled into constructive expressions; where it is defused, as in aggressive states, aggression becomes destructive and hinders developmental advances." Of course, fusion depends on "a satisfactory relationship to the love object, i.e., libidinal ties promote the availability of aggressive-drive energies so they can be modified and subject to the dominant role of the ego."[4] At its most sustaining, Hartmann's adaptational ego psychology married aggression to assertiveness and what it called self-actualization. In any case, aggression may be seen as destructive or as constructive. Freud said that the man who first flung an epithet instead of a spear at his enemy was the true founder of civilization. Two cheers for civilization and aggression.

How about three cheers for aggression? Opposed to ego psychology accommodation is the Freud scholar and deconstructionist literary critic Leo Bersani. In *The Freudian Body*, he maintains that the aggressive instinct derives from the death instinct, and in this he is closer to some of Freud's insights, those that have generally not been accepted. To Bersani, aggressiveness evokes the oceanic feeling described in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, traceable to what Freud calls the "limitless narcissism" (*SE:* 21,72) of infancy. Bersani is attracted to the limitless. He seems to forget that Freud is talking about the indirect influence of infancy. And although Freud points to the bonds between love and hate, libido and aggression, he does not say, as Bersani does, that destructiveness "is identical with love."[5] Rather, as Philip Rieff has it, Freud holds that "the law of 'primal ambivalence' . . . provides

every strong hate with a counterpart of love, and hobbles every act of aggression with a subsequent burden of guilt."[6] Ambivalence inserts, then, into the social contract, "a reassertion of the will of the father against the rebellious impulses of a chastened sonship" (223). But Bersani is interested neither in the social contract nor in guilt. For him, the process of maturation is "biologically dysfunctional."[7] Indeed, sexuality "is intolerable to the structured self" (38), so Freud's psychology is rigid rather than flexible. Bersani thinks that masochism, for example, is not grounded in "parental vicissitudes" but in an ontology of sexuality itself. That is, sexuality "could be thought of as a tautology for masochism" (39). Sexuality, after all, is not an exchange between individuals but "a condition of broken negotiations with the world" (40), a choice for extinction rather than survival. For Bersani, masochism is both relieved and fulfilled by death. Life is a sort of snuff film. Forget reproduction, forget the unification of the sexes, forget nirvana in its aspect of tension reduction. Forget Freud?

Deconstruction runs the risk of doing just that. Bersani thinks it "naive to take what might be called the official Freud literally, to assume he is saying what, for the most part, he obviously thought he was saying" (1–2). In other words, Freud did not understand his own ideas. Bersani wants "to celebrate a kind of failure in Freud's thought." To do so he advances the deconstructionist gestalt: "the psychoanalytic authenticity of Freud's work *depends* on a process of theoretical collapse" (3). While it is true that Freud was often engaged in the process of refining his concepts, it is not true to say, as Bersani does, that he was engaged in the process of subverting his principal arguments. In psychoanalysis Freud shows how the unconscious subverts the conscious, but there is always something beyond the subversion. Bersani exaggerates Freud the theoretician at the expense of Freud the empiricist. He cites Beckett's Molloy as an exemplar in the battle against "thought," which "far from providing a guarantee of being in this radically non-Cartesian world, is the excrement of being" (11). But he invokes the shit standard too quickly, for the thrust of Freud's system is non-Cartesian. For Bersani, Freud's failure resides in his putative timidity to live by the radicality of *Three Essays*. Instead he became the moral policeman of *The Ego and the Id*, "relentlessly pursu[ing] the project of domesticating and rationalizing the sexual in a historical narrative and a psychic structure" (102). In thus repressing the eroticized psychoanalytic text, Freud invited the reduction of psychoanalysis to ego psychology.

Freud does say that even with complete sexual liberation, something he considers only hypothetically, the indestructible destructiveness of human

beings would still be with us. But Freud, unlike Bersani, derives no satisfaction from this. Freud is thinking at this point in *Civilization and Its Discontents* of the corrosive effects of the superego, which he considers tragically. The central conundrum of civilization and the cause of our discontent is the guilt it imposes on the ego for its Oedipal aggression, even when this aggression is renounced. The superego is not, as Bersani says it is, "merely a cultural metaphor for the psychic fulfillment in each of us of a narcissistically thrilling wish to destroy the world."[8] Nor is "necessity" in Freud "at least implicitly, an *apology for violence*" (24). Bersani is attuned to ferocity; Freud is not.

Bersani and Norman O. Brown are drawn to the nirvana principle as an expression of the limitless. As an expression of the death instinct it, too, abolishes the ego, dissipates the pull of self-preservation and self-assertion. It smiles at the civilizing principle of Apollonian restraint and proportion. Rieff argues that pleasure to Freud "was just the sense of transition from an excess to a deficiency of mental energy. It was a decline in the tension of life, involving a regret as great in its way as the one involved in pain. It followed, then, that death might be the greatest pleasure."[9] So much for transfiguration through destruction. Freud's positing of a nirvana principle causes Rieff to say: "There is something Oriental in the Freudian ethic." He sees that, for Freud, "only one way lies open to escape the dissatisfactions inherent in every satisfaction, and that is to grow equable." With none of the Buddhist supreme liberation and bliss, there is neither the sense of perpetual bondage that the desires have imposed, nor its attendant asceticism. It is nonetheless puzzling to reflect on the evolution of ideas in a thinker so attuned to the determined and subsequently so drawn to the unconditioned. It may, however, be the perfectly logical or, rather, psychological sequence, like taking a week off to do nothing after a year of working in the mines. Still, the expression on the face of the Buddha experiencing nirvana in, say, the Ajanta Caves of India, is nothing like the expression of the later Freud. And the long-term New York analysand may appear more like a desensitized tooth than a reclining Buddha. The Western appropriation of ancient Far Eastern motifs is generally problematic, even in Freud. For ancient Buddhists, nirvana was a principle of belief. For Freud, it is the ultimate relief. A psychoanalyst once told me that the profession has never been the same since the introduction of Valium. And now there is Prozac.

The death instinct may be, as Rieff says, "the greatest pleasure." Rieff follows the path that others have taken when he goes on to suggest that the pleasure principle might be "more justly named the principle of pleasure-pain, for, conversely, pain was the transition from a feeling of deficiency to

one of excess. Pleasure registers the decrease of pain, a temporary relief from the intensities of living."[10] But for Bersani and Brown it is not merely a question of relief but one of transcendence. Rieff is more true to Freud's intent; Bersani and Brown are saving Freud from himself.

Freud himself considered the death instinct speculative. It may have had a personal basis. Ernest Jones observes that Freud was preoccupied with death, "the dread of it and the wish for it."[11] Max Schur, Freud's physician and another biographer, confirms this.[12] Freud states in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that "everything living dies for internal reasons—becomes inorganic once again." Hence, "the aim of all life is death" (*SE* 18:39). Jones argues that Freud's idea that the fundamental aim of all the instincts is to revert to an earlier state, a regression, can receive no support from biology, that Freud confuses *telos* with finis. Jones remains skeptical about Freud's crossing from the mental to the inorganic.

Another telling argument from the mental to the inorganic is made by Otto Fenichel. He holds that the death instinct does not meet Freud's definition of instinct: the demand made by the body on the mind—that is, excitement and relaxation. Freud says that the erotic is to assimilation (creation) what death is to dissimulation (objective destruction). But the parallel is specious since "instinct aims at eliminating the somatic charge which we designate as the source of the instinct; but the death instinct does not aim to eliminate dissimulation."[13] So the eros-death juxtaposition does not work. For Fenichel, the death instinct is really not an instinct at all but a principle, the nirvana principle: it "permits a view of all psychological processes and all life processes in general." Fenichel does not completely deny the existence of a death instinct, only its symmetrical opposition to eros. Moreover, Fenichel holds, it is in the sexual instincts that the Freudian longing for quiescence and the conservative nature of the instincts can best be seen.

A more recent psychodynamic psychoanalyst, Robert Stoller, is appreciative of Freud as the first major thinker about early childhood but dismissive of Freud's dualism of the eros and death instincts. Stoller points out, as have some philosophers of science, that Freud's "predilection for biologizing had him reading primeval psychological motivation (for example, life versus death instincts) into such mechanistic processes as cell function and even molecular chemistry."[14]

Whether or not the love and death instincts are primary, whatever their validity as metapsychological determinants, the validity of libidinal and aggressive drives is sufficient unto the personal day—and night. This becomes

evident in any ABC of S and M. Once we focus on these drives, Freud's analysis of sadism and masochism takes on considerable clarity. Freud becomes more cogent when we move from the cosmos to the bedroom. In the much revised *Three Essays*, Freud calls sadism and masochism "the most common and the most significant of all the perversions." He refers to "the desire to inflict pain upon the sexual object and the reverse" (*SE* 7:157).

Considering sadism, Freud says that "the roots are easy to detect in the normal," since "the sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of aggressiveness—a desire to subjugate" (ibid.). He notes that the "biological significance of it seems to lie in the need for overcoming the resistance of the object by means other than the process of wooing." There is implicit in sadism, Freud believes, the desire to tear down the civilized veil. With this, all of our novelists of ferocity would agree. Unlike these writers—in their various ways—Freud does not consider sadism honorifically. It occurs when "an aggressive component of the sexual instinct . . . has become independent and exaggerated and, by displacement, has usurped the leading position" (*SE* 7:158). Moreover, Freud distinguishes between "cases merely characterized by an active or violent attitude to the sexual object," which is the sadism of "ordinary speech," and cases "in which satisfaction is entirely conditional on the humiliation and maltreatment of the object." Strictly speaking, he notes, "it is only this last extreme instance which deserves to be described as a perversion."[15] Sade is the only one of our fiction writers to continually satisfy all criteria in his work (and to a lesser degree in his life). The other writers do so in varying degrees, with Bataille and Mailer representing something like discipleship. I am, of course, applying clinical terminology to art, which Freud considers a substitute gratification. I do not intend to treat writers as cases, or novels as case studies, but I do want to establish a connection between clinical categories and imaginative constructs.

Freud notes that perversions were first considered to be "indications of degeneration and disease," but he maintains that "most of these extensions, or at any rate the less severe of them, are constituents which are rarely absent from the sexual life of healthy people, and are judged by them no differently from other intimate events" (*SE* 7:160). He holds that the word " 'perversion' should not be used as a term of reproach." Time seems to have done him one better. It speaks to Freud's influence, unintended though it is in this case, that the word seems to have dropped out of the language. Like *nymphomaniac*. Freud did believe that "normal" people can, "under the domination of the most unruly of all the instincts" be sick in sex, as in necrophilia, and that

"abnormality" in general "can invariably be shown to have a background of abnormal sexual conduct" (7:161). The crux is this: if a perversion ousts the normal sexual aim, if it is a fixation, then it is usually pathological. Freud is not a believer in the sexually normal but in the sexually normative.

Where sadism is active, masochism is passive, "the extreme instance of which," says Freud, "appears to be that in which satisfaction is conditional upon suffering physical or mental pain at the hands of the sexual object" (*SE* 7:161). Freud believes that "masochism is nothing more than an extension of sadism turned round upon the subject's own self" (7:158), and that a "sadist is always at the same time a masochist, although the active or the passive aspect of the perversion may be the more strongly developed in him and may represent his predominant sexual activity" (7:159). In *Three Essays*, Freud considers both sadism and masochism to be outcomes of the aggressive instincts. However, they are even more representative of "the opposing masculinity and femininity which are combined in bisexuality" (7:160) or of activity and passivity, a given in Freud's polymorphous perversity. Perversity in this sense is not perversion but a description of the infant's protean nature.

Freud's ideas on sadomasochism are considerably deepened in the landmark essay "A Child is Being Beaten." Here he focuses on the aetiology of aggression, leaning heavily on the Oedipus complex. Freud reasons that "a sense of guilt is invariably the factor that transforms sadism into masochism," though this is not "the whole content of masochism . . . a share must also fall to the love-impulse" (*SE* 17:189). Freud is speaking of children "in whom the sadistic component was able for constitutional reasons to develop prematurely," who therefore "find it particularly easy to hark back to the pregenital, sadistic, anal organization of their sexual life" (ibid.). He says that "where the genital organization is met by repression . . . every psychical representation of the incestuous love becomes unconscious" and "there is a regressive debasement of the genital organization itself to a lower level. 'My father loves me' was meant in a genital sense; owing to the regression it is turned into 'My father is beating me' . . . This being beaten is now a convergence of the sense of guilt and sexual love. *It is not only the punishment for the forbidden sexual relation, but also the regressive substitute for that relation*, and from this latter source it derives the libidinal excitation which is from this time forward attached to it . . . Here for the first time we have the essence of masochism."

Masochism is defensive, not just instinctual. The man can play the role of the mischievous boy going to be punished. In this example, masochism is a defense against castration and object loss, which turns a threatening parent

into an accepting one. Oedipal balance is maintained, Oedipal guilt is assuaged. There is a parallel in religion where, say, a Christian may give dramatic proof of giving up forbidden sexual and aggressive tendencies, sometimes famously so—though, as Stuart Asch has remarked, it is difficult to conceive of Origen's self-castration as a defense against castration (clinically, gender identity disorder is involved).[16] Such are the vicissitudes of belief. This says something as well about the nature of God Almighty. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud points out that the superego retains the character of the father. The more powerful the Oedipus complex, the more rapidly it succumbs to repression, "the stricter will be the domination of the superego over the ego later on" (*SE* 19:34).

The strict superego in connection with the strong ego gives rise to many related phenomena which are not sadomasochistic in the clinical sense. Arnold Cooper, for example, speaks of the pain that serves a need for self-definition—that is, mastery—giving as examples the pleasurable fatigue after a day's work, the ecstasy of the athlete's exhaustion, the dogged pursuit of a distant goal, the willingness to cling to an absurd ideal, and the hero's ordeal.[17] Cooper wants to present pain in terms of its defensive and adaptive functions, without recourse to a primary drive. It seems, on this view, that any worthwhile achievement has a sadomasochistic resonance. Perhaps, but this is not to be confused with sadomasochism as a sexual problem. And many would not conflate pain in Cooper's sense with sadomasochism at all.

More to the point, Anita Phillips says that "sexual masochism offers a way through for people who push themselves too hard, who overachieve, who are never good enough."[18] She notes that it is not just a cliché that formidable public figures seek private chastisement. And one can imagine types with a surfeit of superego—the military officer, the football coach, the business executive, the clergyman—who are sadists by day and masochists by night. Of course, one can equally well imagine such types in terms of sadism around the clock, depending on which parent is the tyrant or even just "wears the pants," real or fantasized. Phillips cites St. Theresa in her rapture—agony and ecstasy in one—with her fantasies of being lifted and pulverized. St. Theresa's revelation was accompanied by a pain so great that it made her moan. Who can doubt that Bernini's statue is, in addition to its primary spiritual meaning, an expression of orgasm? An aristocrat of Bernini's day remarked, "If this is spirituality, then I have experienced it."

Phillips regards commitment to a relationship as a form of bondage on the ethical level (though one may argue that the failure to commit is a deeper