

## Freudianism and Its Discontents

by William Kilpatrick

**Freudian Fraud: The Malignant Effect of Freud's Theory on American Thought and Culture**

by E. Fuller Torrey, M.D.

New York: HarperCollins;

362 pp., \$25.00



**F**reudian *Fraud* has an intriguing but difficult-to-prove thesis, namely that Freudian thought radically altered American society for the worse. An "audit of Freud's American account," says Torrey, shows more debits than credits. He believes the chief liability inherent in the Freudian system is its tendency to undermine traditional notions of responsibility.

"Don't blame me, blame my parents" has been a constant refrain in American therapy and American life ever since Freud's ideas came to these shores. As Torrey points out in a chapter on the Freudianization of criminology, it was just such a defense that was put forward in the sensational Leopold-Loeb trial of 1924. Defense lawyer Clarence Darrow simply passed the buck for the crime onto the parents of Leopold and Loeb. William Alanson White, one of the three psychiatrists who testified for the defense later called for "the discarding of the concept of responsibility" for criminal behavior. The same theme of non-responsibility, says Torrey, can be found in current therapy fads such as the inner-child movement. He quotes John Bradshaw, one of the movement leaders, as saying, "A lot of what we consider to be normal parenting is actually abusive." In Torrey's view, however, adults have more important things to do than lick their childhood wounds.

In tracing the history of Freudian thought in American culture, Torrey succeeds in showing the presence of influential Freudians at crucial junctures and crucial places: in Greenwich Village in the teens and early 20's, on the staff of the *Partisan Review* in the 30's and 40's, in Hollywood in the 40's and 50's, among campus radicals in the 60's (via

the influence of Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, and Paul Goodman). He also traces the influence of Freud on child care (mainly through the writings of Benjamin Spock) and on criminology (the chief carrier in this case being Karl Menninger). He attempts, in addition, to tie the ups and downs of Freudianism to larger historical forces. The fortunes of the Freudian faith took a tumble with the ascendancy of genetic theories in the 20's, then rose again in the 30's when those same theories became identified with Nazism. The Nazi period also saw a significant transfer of European psychoanalysts to America, and this, Torrey suggests, is the main reason Freudian theory took its strongest root in this country.

Torrey's discussions of "race, immigration and the nature-nurture debate" and of "the sexual politics of Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead" are among the most interesting in the book. We learn about anthropologist Franz Boas's battle with the "Anglo elite," the role of the Depression in forcing newly poor Americans to question the genetic theory of poverty, and the great success of Boas's protégés, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, in bringing victory to the nature side of the nature-nurture controversy. Torrey makes a convincing case that both Mead and Benedict allowed their work to be influenced by personal sexual agendas and that both were shoddy researchers. Benedict had no first-hand knowledge of two of the three cultures she compared in *Patterns of Culture*, and Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* seems to have been based on gross disinformation.

These excursions into anthropology are so interesting that one almost forgets to ask a basic question: where does Freud fit in? Although Torrey establishes the existence of a strong Freudian influence on Boas, Mead, and Benedict, he fails to convince that their work is mainly an effect of Freudianism. One could, for example, argue that the influence of Rousseau on the American anthropologists was just as powerful as the influence of Freud.

The main problem with Torrey's analysis is that, in order to make his case, he often reduces Freudianism to one main idea: the determinative nature of early childhood experiences. If Freudianism

is taken to mean that and nothing else, then his case holds up. But his thesis is somewhat less tenable when we consider the wide-ranging and complex nature of Freud's thought. For example, much of what Freud had to say about civilization and repression is at the opposite pole from Margaret Mead's views on the same subjects. Some of Torrey's complaints seem more appropriately directed at popularizers of Freud than at Freud himself.

Nevertheless, Torrey, whose earlier book on the psychiatric incarceration of Ezra Pound is highly regarded, deserves to be taken seriously. *Freudian Fraud* raises important and provocative questions about the influence of psychoanalytic theory on American culture. While one can disagree with Torrey about the degree and scope of that influence, it is difficult to deny that in the course of this century—which Torrey calls the "Freudian century"—we have exchanged a good deal of practical wisdom about the conduct of life for a good deal of highly speculative notions that have only served to make our lives more complicated than they need to be.

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## Acts of Life

by James W. Tuttleton

**The Correspondence of Henry James and Henry Adams: 1877-1914**

Edited by George Monteiro

Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press; 107 pp., \$20.00



**T**he nearly lifelong friendship of Henry Adams and Henry James, both now accepted as writers of towering stature, was one of the most engaging yet contrary relationships in our literary history. And to experience it—in the correspondence that George Monteiro

has now splendidly edited—is to come to know what Adams called the “type bourgeois-bostonien.” In old age Adams had nothing but disdain for the achievements of this type—himself, James, William Wetmore Story, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Sumner, Bronson Alcott, and James Russell Lowell. All of us, he told James in 1903, “were in actual fact only one mind and nature; the individual was a facet of Boston. We knew each other to the last nervous centre, and feared each other’s knowledge.” What they knew, Adams thought, was that Harvard and Unitarianism had kept them shallow; and out of this Boston matrix had arisen their profound ignorance, their introspective self-distrust, and the nervous self-consciousness that vitiated them all.



Of course, Henry James did everything possible to avoid being thought a bourgeois Bostonian, as his satirical novel *The Bostonians* (1886) makes plain. To Adams, the expatriate James was impersonating, in his straitened way, the bearing of an English earl; yet he produced a library of brilliant fiction that beggars most other Boston literary accomplishments—Adams’s excepted.

James had known Adams’s wife, Clover Hooper, before he knew Adams, and after their marriage, whenever he visited Washington or they London, he settled in at their hearth for what was perhaps the best conversation in town. Clover thought James made too free with their hospitality. She told her father in 1880 that “Mr. James . . . comes in every day at dusk & sits by our fire but is a frivolous being dining out nightly. Tomorrow being an off night he has invited himself to dine with us.” Invariably they argued about the merits of life in America versus Europe. The Adamses, James told Sir John Clark, “don’t pretend to conceal (as why should they?) their preference of America to Europe, and they rather rub it in to me, as they think it a wholesome discipline for my demoralized spirit.” Yet

their aversion to Europe, he thought, was invidious: “One excellent reason for their liking Washington better than London is that they are, vulgarly speaking, ‘someone’ here, and that they are nothing in your complicated kingdom.”

Yet James was enchanted with “Clover Adamses.” Clover was bright, witty, and irreverent; she seemed to James “the incarnation” of his native land. Compared to Englishwomen, she was “a perfect Voltaire in petticoats.” She liked James but made it plain to the novelist that he was spending too much time in Europe. And she said about *The Portrait of a Lady* that, while there were nice things in it, she preferred the “big bow-wow style.” She told her father that “It’s not that [James] ‘bites off more than he can chew,’ . . . but he chaws more than he bites off.”

Henry Adams’s literary accomplishments, in his several histories, the novels *Democracy* (1880), *Esther* (1884), and *The Education* (1907), put the two writers on an equal footing. But how different they were! While James found Adams’s “monotonous disappointed pessimism” difficult to take, Adams (descended from a line of Presidents) was what James confessed he would like to be: “a man of wealth and leisure, able to satisfy all his curiosities, while I am a penniless toiler.” As James toiled along, creating lords and ladies in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), and other works, the brooding Adams thought James was pretending “to belong to a world which is as extinct as Queen Elizabeth” and “already as fossil as the buffalo.”

The suicide of Clover Adams in 1885 devastated them both. But, paradoxically, as the years passed, their solitude drew James and Adams closer together—especially as, over the years, their mutual friends died off. In 1913 Adams wrote to Elizabeth Cameron that “At about three in the morning I wobble all over the supposed universe. A little indigestion starts whole flocks of strange images, and then I wonder what Henry James is thinking about, as he is my last standard of comparison.”

A basis for comparing these two writers of genius, who felt neglected in old age, is suggested by Adams’s response to James’s autobiography, *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), published when both were in their 70’s. Adams told Mrs. Cameron that “Poor Henry James thinks it all real, I believe, and actually

still lives in that dreamy, stuffy Newport and Cambridge, with papa James and Charles Norton—and me! Yet why? It is a terrible dream, but not so weird as this here which is quite loony.” He must have expostulated to James in a similar vein in a letter no longer extant. James answered him on March 21, 1914, with, in my view, a magisterial statement of why he and perhaps every other artist creates. James acknowledged the “unmitigated blackness” of Adams’s state of mind: “Of course we are lone survivors, of course the past that was our lives is at the bottom of an abyss—if the abyss has any bottom; of course too there’s no use talking unless one particularly wants to.” But, James went on to say, “I still find my consciousness interesting,” and he urged Adams to cultivate the same within himself:

You see I still, in presence of life (or of what you deny to be such), have reactions—as many as possible—& the book I sent you is a proof of them. It’s because I am that queer monster the artist, an obstinate finality, an inexhaustible sensibility. Hence the reactions—appearances, memories, many things go on playing upon it with consequences that I note & “enjoy” (grim word!) noting. It all takes doing—& I do. I believe I shall do yet again—it is still an act of life.

James, then, wouldn’t hear of Adams’s throwing in the towel. He had the generosity and acuity to remind Adams that, despite his avowed nihilism, he continued to perform these acts of life himself—in his distinctive letters, essays, and books.

Unfortunately, many of their brilliant and cantankerous letters have not survived. James destroyed most of the correspondence he received in a huge bonfire late in life (people valued privacy then); and Adams destroyed Clover’s letters shortly after her death. But these mere 36 letters—29 by James, seven by Adams—are still suggestive testaments of genius, and editor Monteiro has superbly introduced and annotated them so that the whole relationship is nicely condensed in this tender and acerbic but very valuable little collection.

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## Second Childhoods

by Brad Linaweaver

### Dark Verses & Light

by Thomas M. Disch

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; 144 pp., \$26.00

### Neighboring Lives

by Thomas M. Disch

Charles Naylor

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; 368 pp., \$13.95

### The M.D.: A Horror Story

by Thomas M. Disch

New York: Alfred A. Knopf; 384 pp., \$22.00



From its beginnings, science fiction (bastard offspring of fantasy) has exerted a vulgar appeal. Some of its proponents have never shied away from this and, if anything, have celebrated the intelligent child's outlook, as witness the career of Ray Bradbury. The majority of science-fiction writers have grown into an awkward adolescence in which conquering the universe provides an uneasy substitute for sexual identity and the avoidance of bankruptcy—a constant theme of Barry Malzberg. But there remain a surly few who refuse to settle for anything less than full maturity, that sterile condition where senility must ultimately replace the sense of wonder. Such apostasy has been the theme of Thomas M. Disch for some time: his goal is not to leave but to reform the genre.

*Dark Verses & Light* is a poetry collection that carries an endorsement by Thomas Fleming, who identifies Disch's writing as "irreverent with a satire that is savage in its restraint." *Neighboring Lives* is a novel about 19th-century writers, intellectuals, and artists back when it meant something to live in Chelsea. *The M.D.* is a horror novel drawing on much fantasy, a little science fiction, and the kitchen sink (or in this case, the scrub basin) to reach the reading audience that really matters: the fans of Stephen King, whose endorsement graces the back cover. Of the three, the most successful happens also to be the most commercial: *The M.D.* Interestingly, it runs afoul of the Disch theory of

maturity as expounded in his 1991 article for the *Atlantic*, "Big Ideas and Dead-End Thrills." In this piece, Disch takes T. S. Eliot's unremarkable discovery of "a pre-adolescent mentality" in the works of Edgar Allan Poe and proceeds to criticize the embarrassingly breathless style of the horror and science-fiction stories that owe so much to youthful influence. The trouble with Disch as a critic is that he sabotages the foundations of his subject. Science fiction, fantasy, and horror are about excess. The weakness Eliot identified in Poe is actually the genre's essence: abandonment to the "wonders of nature and of mechanics and of the supernatural."

In *The M.D.*, Disch is at his best when describing the childhood experiences of his main character and villain, one William Michaels. After Sister Symphorosa torments little Billy for believing in Santa Claus, the unrepentant child is visited by jolly old Santa; the visitor is actually the god Mercury, lending a certain credence to the bigoted nun's outburst against celebrating pagan gods. He gives Billy a caducean symbol of the medical profession, the twin serpents traditionally associated with the ancient god, cobbled together from a twin-pointed stick and a dead sparrow.

As one might expect from a longtime practitioner of the craft of science fiction, Disch takes an engineer's approach to the subject of magic and curses. The

brutal equation of cause and effect means that his magic wand can cure illness as well as inflict it; but the first is paid for by the second. Before the career of the M. D. is over, he has cured AIDS but replaced it with an even worse plague, the airborne ARVIDS. The advantage to him personally is wealth and power. (The world only knows the good he does.) But even as Michaels ascends to his throne, the god Mercury is planning ahead. Even the M. D. is mortal.

The strongest portions of this book are the most elemental and immature, in which the simple thrill of discovery in black magic is conveyed. The best dialogue is between the god and young Billy. These childhood scenes have the same evocative power found in Bradbury; it is as if a gulf separates Disch the critic from Disch the writer. It was the critic who bullied Bradbury in the *New York Times* for not being grown up enough; by contrast, Russell Kirk has praised Bradbury's moral imagination (in *Enemies of the Permanent Things*) in language that equally well describes *The M.D.*

The two sides of Disch twine more closely in *Dark Verses & Light*. Blessedly Disch is not above rhyming and scanning as demonstrated in his lead poem, "The Snake in the Manger: A Christmas Legend," a product of the author's lighter side that is also shown in *The Brave Little Toaster*. Here the idea is that the various animals might have

## Exiles and Fugitives

The Letters of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, Allen Tate, and Caroline Gordon

Edited by John M. Dunaway

"Caroline Gordon, Allen Tate, and Jacques and Raïssa Maritain were people on whom little, if anything, was ever lost. They wrote to each other not only of art and philosophy but of their common faith and of the pain and joys of their lives. . . . Thus the correspondence, splendidly edited by John Dunaway, develops a small human comedy played out by four of the most gifted people of our time."—Walter Sullivan

"This correspondence of twenty years between two couples who met in Princeton and New York reflects two movements which are still of historical interest today: the Catholic Revival in France of the 1920s and 1930s; and the fugitive-agrarian southern renaissance in America. . . . By collecting these letters, by annotating them, and translating the French letters, John Dunaway has done a great service for those readers interested in the relationship between belief and literature."—Wallace Fowlie

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