

Men and Ideas

Manès Sperber: SIGMUND FREUD

TO THE formal logic which reassures itself by the equation: the not-understood = the incomprehensible, the logic of the dialectic, Marxist or psychoanalytical, replies: henceforth the meaning is revealed. Whoever has really understood cannot fail to agree; whoever does not agree, has not really understood; or is resisting the truth out of unconscious (or unavowable) motives. For formal logic, error is the result of an incomplete or accidentally distorted perception, or an imperfect application of the rules of sound judgment. For psycho-logic, error is a rejection of the truth, a repression, an obstinate and self-seeking denial.

The psychologist is implicated in every explanation he gives of Man. His situation before the object of his researches too often resembles that of a guardian whose prisoner has taken him captive. It is the inextricable confusion and promiscuity between subject and object which gives psychology its uncertain character and makes it now a therapeutic technique, now an art or an esoteric discipline, now a sectarian school, a philosophy of life, or a *mystique*. In the realm of physics, differences of opinion reflect differences of experimental knowledge; in interpretative psychology, they express the opposition of two consciousnesses, embodied in two psychologists. In the first case it is the laws of nature which are in question, in the second the psychologists themselves, their pasts and their passions.

The splendour of a work of art is quite compatible with the suffering of the artist, but the slavery of the psychologist to the uni-

versal human condition seems less in accordance with his liberating function. If a faith cannot save the one who preaches it, whom shall it save? But perhaps the apostle does not seek his own salvation, nor the psychologist his own equilibrium. "I am not really a man of science, not an observer, not an experimenter, and not a thinker. I am nothing but by temperament a *Conquistador*—an adventurer, if you want to translate the word—with the curiosity, the boldness and the tenacity that belongs to that type of being," Freud wrote, not without a touch of coquetry, to his friend Fliess. Nietzsche too would have been flattered by the title of conquistador, like Stendhal, or the predecessor of them all, La Rochefoucauld. Their *terra incognita*, conquered by discovery, was man, the most secret animal and the one most skilled in the defence of what he hides from himself. He must be stripped bare — "*entlarven*," Nietzsche says—unmasked. It is understandable that the author of *Human, All Too Human* should end by proclaiming that the will to power was the most imperative of virtues, indispensable for the realisation of the Superman. The conquering consciousness is the goal of all those who wish to dominate men's minds, and through them perhaps everything else.

BUT if the will to power explains a great deal, it is even more in need of explanation itself, like every excessive desire. The man who fears that he is an object for everyone else, experiences the need to degrade everyone else into an object for himself. It is

only at this price, he feels, that he can become what he is: himself. Thus we find, at the basis of the will to power, the humiliation of being human and the further humiliation of not being what one wishes to appear. Humiliation, more than any other suffering or passion, leads to extremism. It suffices for destruction; but it must be surmounted before that creative energy can be liberated which de-activates the will to power and disavows it as a lost illusion. Only then can the great goal be discovered: to understand.

The adage: *si duo idem faciunt, non est idem*, and its inverted form: it is possible for two different acts to be identical, mark the point of departure for all depth psychology; the certainty that there are two forms of psychic being: true being and appearance. The latter is a function of the former and makes up a part of reality in the same degree that a lie is a characteristic expression of the person who resorts to it, and is, in general, more revealing than a truth. The pose, the mask, the borrowing gesture, fleeting as they may be, reveal what a man wishes to seem and by antithesis what he does not wish to be, therefore what he really is.

Now, appearance reflects being as the shadow reflects the body: the latter "casts" the shadow, but only in relation to the light which it is intercepting. The individual can only express himself in his relationships; outside of them, he is but a mute, incommunicable essence. Psychologists move from the shadow to the body and then to the light, in order to discover the relationships in which the personality is concretised, among them, notably, its relationship to itself, the form and the results of its introspection, the language, the signs, and the symbols which it employs in the single-voiced dialogues by which the I affirms its identity and its continuity. (In schizophrenia, the *voices* render this dialogue impossible, destroying the identity, and thus shattering the personality.)

When Montaigne set out to portray himself, he suspected that "*nous ne sommes que cérémonie*"—and he played a complicated game of shadows. They alone, in their multiplying flight, indicated the position and movements of a being which gives itself away in hints and reflections but refuses to allow itself to be taken a captive. The French moralists, who were the first modern psychologists, sought to transfix every characteristic attitude

through the shadows which both betray and disfigure it. Rousseau, who puts Montaigne, and in fact all those who preceded him, "at the head of those falsely sincere men who wish to deceive while speaking truly," Rousseau, who is unquestionably the falsest and most sincere of all sincere men, is aware of the double game he is playing. "By delivering myself at once to the memory of the impression received and the present feeling, I will paint the state of my soul doubly, as it was at the moment of the event and at the moment when I described it." And memory, as servile as the retroactive laws of a totalitarian state, permits this extraordinary reconstruction based on innumerable *as ifs*, on a fiction in which reality becomes a function of appearance and the past becomes retroactively transformable at any moment.

After Rousseau, men knew that the "Who am I?" had to be answered, not by the portrayal of their being, but by the history of their becoming. Hegel, more strongly influenced in his youth by Rousseau than by any other modern thinker, understood this best. His philosophy of becoming inspired Marx's sociology of becoming. In the same way, there is a thread which links the author of the *Confessions*, through Dostoevsky, Charcot, and Nietzsche, to the founders of interpretative psychology, and there exists a profound relationship between the misery of Jean-Jacques and that anguish of the psychologist which his art sometimes compensates, whereas his science can only define it.

IF WE consider only the date of his birth (May 6th, 1856), the founder of psychoanalysis belongs to the single peaceful generation Europe has produced in two hundred years: the one which was born after 1848 and before 1870, whose youth and early maturity had already passed when 1914 came. In the realm of the spirit, in the sciences as well as the arts, none of the succeeding generations was to demonstrate as much boldness as these peaceful men, whose manner of life was bourgeois enough, and often marked by a facile conformism, but so many of whose actions prepared or accomplished a revolution in traditional habits of thought, research, and creation. The extraordinary rapidity of the economic evolution of this period offered the sons of the suddenly enriched bourgeoisie a chance to adopt a pseudo-aristocratic life-

style; but it opened, to the talent and energy of the children of the petty bourgeoisie, a universe to discover and conquer.

In his origins, Freud was the son of a Jewish couple from Eastern Galicia in migration toward the West, driven by the desire to find a decent material existence at last—and even, if possible, wealth—and perhaps also by the hope of escaping from humiliation. Freiberg, in Moravia, where Amalia Nathanson, the second wife of Jacob Freud, gave birth to her eldest son, was only a halt on the road which finally led the family to Vienna. Their hopes were not realised, the elder Freud spent all his life always “hopefully expecting something to turn up.” Poverty, which the subsidies granted by his mother’s family rendered barely tolerable, haunted Sigmund’s childhood and youth. Even after he had finished his studies he still needed help; it was given him by a colleague, Dr. Joseph Breuer, his friend and guide during the decisive years. “I have known defenceless poverty and I continue to fear it constantly,” he could still write at forty-three.

The Hapsburg Empire had been declining for a long time, but in a sunset splendour. Its capital, a metropolis for a thousand years, seemed to promise everything to everyone: emancipation to the sons of peoples not so much oppressed as cheated, the rarest pleasures to the *bon vivants* of every province, and, to the ambitious, riches, reputation, and even an ascent to power. The young Freud was one of these ambitious ones according to his disciple Siegfried Bernfeld: “The childhood phantasies and the adolescent day dreams of Freud . . . do not foretell the future originator of psychoanalysis. They fit in general, a reformer, or a business executive. . . . [As a] child . . . [he] devoured Thiers’ story of Napoleon’s power and . . . identified himself with Marshal Masséna.* Twelve years old, he still thinks of himself as a candidate for cabinet rank and, as an

adolescent, he plans to become a lawyer, and to go into politics. . . .”

His aspirations were commensurate with the humiliations he suffered. Vienna, in which Freud lived from his fourth year to 1938, the year in which, at the age of eighty-two, he was forced into exile, was the most anti-Semitic of all the great cities of the world. Hatred of the Jews operated there in a thousand ways, but with a sense of the opportune which never faltered: it was weak—almost non-existent—toward the strong, and strong, even violent, toward the weak. And there was none weaker than the Jew of Eastern Europe, engaged in his desperate hunt for daily bread, for fortune, or for great careers for his children. His utter poverty provoked contempt, his ambition fear, the success of his children envy, the strangeness of his customs and the obsessive fervour of his piety an unbearable disquietude. To him the petty bourgeois transferred his resentment against the rich native Jews of the fine districts, who would themselves have preferred that a more impassable obstacle than the Danube canal separated them from that Leopoldstadt in which the new arrivals from the East disembarked. Freud was to live for seventy-eight years in a city he never loved, often hated, and always despised. He wrote: “I hate Vienna with a positively personal hatred and, just the contrary of the giant Antaeus, I draw fresh strength whenever I remove my feet from the soil of the city which is my home.”

Freud was a child of Leopoldstadt. One finds many references to his intimate life scattered throughout nearly all his writings; they are half-audible confessions; but nowhere does he let slip the secret of his Galician origin. The famous episode of his father’s humiliation by an anti-Semite, who forced him to step off the sidewalk, is badly told by Freud, because he hides the fact that this incident took place in Galicia, where his father, on the Sabbath, still wore a *streimel*, a fur headpiece really ridiculous enough to be provocative, which the Polish nobles formerly imposed on the Jews. (The incident, meaningless for the father who was its victim, was serious in the eyes of the child; thenceforth he recognised no authority in this man who had not been able to defend himself against humiliation.)

The deracination of the immigrants, and the constant influence of the foreign universe

* The preference given to Masséna is traceable to double error: Freud thought Masséna had been born on May 6th, 1756, and therefore exactly a hundred years before himself—and that he was of Jewish origin as well. This quotation as well as several others are taken from Ernest Jones’s *Sigmund Freud*. I shall also have occasion in this essay to quote from Freud’s letters to Fliess, as given in *The Origins of Psychoanalysis*.

in which the child slowly took root, made a rupture possible, if not necessary, and, it would seem, relatively easy: Freud abandoned the faith of his people. This rupture brought with it no emotional conflict: far from restraining his secular ambition, his family encouraged it, counting on great future successes, of which they were so much the more in need as his father remained decidedly incapable of succeeding. Besides, the birth of the child had been accompanied by signs which announced to the superstitious a dizzying career; he had come into the world with a thick head of hair. An old woman predicted that he would be a great man and a Viennese fortune-teller that he would be a Minister.

“NEITHER at that time [when he chose his profession], nor indeed in my later life, did I feel any particular predilection for the career of a physician,” Freud says. And elsewhere: “After forty-one years of medical activity, my self-knowledge tells me that I have never really been a doctor in the proper sense. . . . I have no knowledge of having had in my early years any craving to help suffering humanity. . . . In my youth I felt an overpowering need to understand something of the riddles of the world in which we live and perhaps even to contribute something to their solution. The most hopeful means of achieving this end seemed to be to enrol myself in the medical faculty; but even then I experimented—unsuccessfully—with zoology and chemistry, till at last, under the influence of Brücke, the greatest authority who affected me more than any other in my whole life, I settled down to physiology, though in those days it was too narrowly restricted to histology. By that time I had already passed all my medical examinations; but I took no interest in anything to do with medicine till the teacher whom I so deeply respected warned me that in view of my restricted circumstances I could not possibly take up a theoretical career. Thus I passed from the histology of the nervous system to neuropathology and then, prompted by fresh influences, I began to be concerned with the neuroses.”

These lines, which summarise the beginning of his scientific career, make it clear that the researches to which Freud devoted himself were meant, in the spirit of his

masters, to lead to the definitive elimination of psychology in favour of physiology. “No other forces act in the organism but physical and chemical forces.” This was the doctrine taught by the great physiological school of which Brücke, together with Du Bois-Reymond and Helmholtz, were the energetic representatives. This current of thought attracted the young Freud by its materialistic monism, which seemed the philosophy most apt to replace his lost religion, and also because physiology opened a horizon of extraordinary discoveries. For Freud dreamed of winning at one stroke, by a sensational discovery, fame, riches, and position. It is in his letters to Martha Bernays, his fiancée, that one can see most clearly the motives and ambitions of the future psychologist at the age of twenty-five to thirty.

Twice the physiologist seems on the point of succeeding gloriously, but does not. His second great chance comes when he begins to study the effects of cocaine. He takes it himself, and recommends it to all his friends, convinced that it can do no harm. A grave error, and one for which he was to be severely criticised. He recognised the analgesic effect of the drug, and probably also suspected its anæsthetic action, but it was a colleague whom he had kept informed of his researches, and who made use of cocaine in ophthalmological surgery, who got all the credit for discovering its medical use. A year before, at the age of twenty-seven, Freud had written to his fiancée: “I prefer to do without my ambition, make less noise in the world, and have less success rather than injure my nervous system.” He suffered, as a matter of fact, from atrocious migraine and other nervous disorders. “For the rest of my time in the hospital I will live like the *Goys*, modestly . . . without striving after discoveries or reaching to the depths.”

One of the reasons for which he was not to do so was that in Vienna even a banal university career was impossible for a Jew unless he had made incomparably greater efforts than the “*Goys*.” Another reason was the friendship and influence of Joseph Breuer, and finally, in 1885, the trip to Paris. “I believe I am changing a great deal. Charcot, who is both one of the greatest of physicians and a man whose common sense is the order of genius (*ein genial nüchterner Mensch*) simply demolishes my views and

aims. . . . When I go away from him I have no more wish to work at my own simple things. . . . Whether the seed will ever bring forth fruit I do not know; but what I certainly know is that no other human being has ever affected me in such a way."

In a lecture several months after his return to Vienna, Freud made himself the spokesman for Charcot's ideas, but most of his colleagues, and notably his chief, the formidable professor of psychiatry, Meynert, refused to consider seriously a psychogenetic etiology of hysteria. In the years that followed, Freud continued his neuropathological researches, meanwhile translating two books by Charcot and two others by Bernheim, whom he had visited at Nancy in order to study his technique of hypnosis.

Promoted to the rank of *privatdozent*, he married after an engagement which his material difficulties had notably prolonged, and finally established himself. The electrotherapy he used in the treatment of his patients disappointed him; for several years he attempted treatment by hypnotic suggestion, although he had been aware since 1882 of the cathartic method which Breuer, in treating the famous case of "Anna O," had almost involuntarily developed. As Ernest Jones justly remarks, no intuition seems to have intervened at this period in the very slow development of Freud's ideas. Later, after his self-analysis, he was carried forward as if by an irresistible stream, but meanwhile he went limping forward when he would have liked to fly. Already convinced of the psychogenesis of the maladies which occupied him, he nevertheless continued to seek a physiology of the soul, when what he needed in fact was a psychology of the body. It was also to defend himself against psychology that he turned to the sexualism which characterises his first explanations of neurotic phenomena; in spite of everything, he wished to find a purely somatic (organic and functional) cause for anxiety.

Freud was to be a revolutionary in spite of himself. Morally severe, modest and even prudish, he was to see his name attached to the sexual emancipation which the turn of the last century heralded. There is indeed good reason to think that Freud remained chaste until his marriage—he was then thirty years old—that he was a husband of exem-

plary fidelity, and that he renounced all sexual life well before old age.

Freud knew the isolation which is reserved for one who is a revolutionary in spite of himself. Surrounded by an ever-increasing family, he sank into solitude; migraines tortured him, fits of depression overcame him, often his heart threatened to fail him. Weeks of feverish work alternated with periods in which he felt himself drained of all strength, of all hope. His material situation remained precarious. It was not until he was finally appointed a professor that patients began to come in numbers. (When the Emperor's Minister finally signed this promotion, it was thanks to the intervention of a well-connected patroness, and the decisive argument was her promise to secure a painting for a State museum.)

Here is the man at forty: a greying beard made him look more than his age, sometimes made him look old, but his eyes remained young, like his face, under an adolescent head of hair. "Well, I really am forty-four now, a rather shabby old Jew," he writes Fliess. "You know how limited my pleasures are: I must not smoke heavy cigars, alcohol does not mean anything to me, I have finished with begetting children, and I am cut off from contact with people."

Seven years before, he had published, in collaboration with Breuer, the *Studies in Hysteria*. Of the printing of eight hundred copies, one hundred and eighty remained unsold thirteen years later. He had just published *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the most brilliant of his works. Yet "not a leaf has stirred to indicate that the meaning of dreams meant anything to anyone. . . . I was intoxicated with the hope that it meant a step towards freedom and prosperity. The book's reception and the silence since, have once more destroyed any budding relationship with my environment."

It was in one of his last letters to Fliess that Freud made this summing-up. For this extraordinary friendship was already undermined, soon nothing was to remain of it but bitterness. Time was to soften the bitterness, but all the years of a long life never succeeded in effacing it. Yet, shortly before the break, Freud had assured his friend that nothing could replace him, that without that "single public" Fliess represented for

him, his labours would have neither a meaning nor a goal.

The importance to Freud of his friendship with Breuer was well known, but it is only now, thanks to the publication of a collection of his letters to Fliess, that we can appreciate the depth of the friendship, of the tragic intimacy that linked him, almost passionately, for fifteen years with this Berlin physician. Apart from his dreams which he relates in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and certain events of his inner life which he only mentions to explain the dreams, nothing like these letters gave any previous hint of what led Freud to psychoanalysis.

The nose and throat specialist Wilhelm Fliess, ambitious like his Viennese friend, a brilliant and stimulating conversationalist admired by his acquaintances, seemed marked for the greatest successes physiological research could offer. A lay mystic inspired by the school of Helmholtz, he sought, even within the narrow limits of the phenomena he was professionally concerned with, the key to the "enigmas of the universe." Having discovered what he called the "nasal reflex neurosis" and the innumerable symptoms which followed in its wake and which affected other organs, notably the stomach and the female genital organs, he proceeded to arrive, by a series of ever more audacious extensions and generalisations, at two fundamental conceptions: that of bisexuality as a characteristic of all organisms, and that of a periodicity which regulated all the actions of living creatures, even their sufferings, their illnesses, and their accidents from birth to death. To the end of his life Fliess remained convinced that the key to every mystery was contained in the two numbers 23 and 28 which governed his theory of periodicity. His calculations came to resemble more and more the mystic algebra of the Middle Ages.

It was largely to Fliess, whom he met through Breuer, that Freud owed the inspiration that led him to seek the source of neurosis in sexuality, which allowed him to explain these illnesses in terms of a purely physiological mechanism. Sexualism finds in the theory of bisexuality an indispensable and quite satisfying foundation. Freud was ready also to welcome the hypothesis of periodicity, which his friend considered the keystone of his whole "cosmic" biology, but his own experience supplied no confirmation of the

theory. He was left what one might call conscience-stricken at this, and promised himself to do better. But when the rupture had reached the point of a search for avowable and therefore superficial motives, one of them was the absence of periodicity from the explanations Freud gave of hysteria.*

Another, probably decisive, reason for the quarrel was a terrible remark made by Fliess on the occasion of their last "congress": he accused Freud of finding in the cases he had analysed only what he had put there himself, and referred to him as a "*Gedankenleser*" (thought-reader) — an extremely pejorative term in the mouth of a Helmholtzian. The wound was all the more painful because Fliess must have been thinking of a phase in which Freud had gone dangerously astray precisely by projecting his own ideas on to his patients. And it was to his friend that Freud had first, honestly and courageously, admitted this setback, which threatened to put an end not only to his "expectation of eternal glory and certain riches" but to his whole career. The systematic error which led Freud astray for four years, up to the autumn of 1897, was rather more important and more meaningful than the rash generalisations of his work on cocaine. What was involved here was what Nietzsche calls the typical experience (*das typische Erlebnis*), which is made up, not of what happens to a man from the outside, but of the occurrence which is repeated, unconsciously "arranged" (Adler), each time he comes closest to his destiny. This experience recurs as long as he refuses to grasp the warning it constitutes.

For four years Freud induced his hysterical patients to tell a significant and always identical story: they had been the victims of rape committed by the father. He saw in this trauma the decisive cause of hysteria. "I believe this to be a momentous revelation, the discovery of a *caput Nili* of neuropathology," he said on May 2nd, 1896, in an address to the Society of Psychiatry and Neurology in Vienna. And he cited eighteen cases he had completely analysed. (The aged Krafft-Ebing, who presided over this meeting,

* Of the long dialogue which the correspondence between the two men constituted, one of the voices will never be heard—Fliess's letters were completely destroyed by Freud some time after the rupture.

summed up his impression in one sentence: "It is a fairy tale told by a scientist.") That Freud sought the cause of hysteria in a trauma is to be explained partly by the influence of Charcot and partly by that of the mechanistic philosophy to which he remained faithful. No doubt his ever-present desire to make an absolutely sensational discovery had a hand in it too.

In an important letter of September 21st, 1897, he announced to Fliess his realisation of his mistake. "I no longer believe in my *neurotica*," he says, before going on to list the facts, notably the absence of any real therapeutic success, which had awakened his doubts and finally brought him to the conviction of his error. He had taken the fiction produced by his patients for real experiences dredged from their memories. And yet, neither in this letter nor elsewhere, neither at this time nor later, did he lay stress on the cardinal point, namely that it was he himself who had suggested to the hysterics the stories he later took as definitive proof for his etiology. So there was a rape, but the fathers of his patients had nothing to do with it. This rape was part of a therapy in which it was the past rather than the present which succumbed to the seduction of the analyst.

TO THE reasons already mentioned for the extreme interest Freud brought to sexual phenomena, another, more personal one must be added: the will to surmount his own prudery, which was the result of the particularly severe sexual morality prevalent in his original milieu. In the beginning, therefore, what was involved was an attempt at self-emancipation, all the more courageous because its effect would be to place him in opposition to his new milieu. But whence the fiction of the rape? Certainly all neurotics present themselves as victims. Push them a little and they will demonstrate that the road that links them to their past is a *via dolorosa*. They will assent with pleasure to the idea that they have been oppressed by those they loved, and from their very births. If, in the manner of literary creation, one condenses the innumerable little facts of this oppression, whether amorous or not, what emerges—in a parable that speaks the sexual jargon—is a rape. But what drove Freud to suggest just this parable? The irresistible force of the inspiration did not decrease, for even when

Freud finally abandoned the theory of the violation of children by their father he merely reversed the same idea and found the Oedipus complex, the sexual desire which impels the child to appropriate one of the parents and kill the other. The only real, though banal, change lies elsewhere: in the distinction he was henceforth to make between the fiction and actual experience. But the number of actual experiences being practically infinite, even in the least active life, a selection must operate among the facts that "free association" brings to the surface. And this association is a good deal less free than the dream; so, after several sessions of therapeutic treatment, the clients of psychoanalysts have psychoanalytic dreams, the clients of Jungians have dreams in the mythic language of the collective unconscious, and those of Adlerians, while dreaming according to less rigid stereotypes, are no less complaisant toward their therapists. (Neurotic resistance may sometimes efface the memory of dreams, but it rarely prevents this curious adaptation.)

Once again Freud sought what he had already found, and ended by discovering it. His self-analysis, says his biographer, Ernest Jones, opened the way for him. But it was not in his own childhood that Freud found the Oedipus complex. What he found there was: the determining rôle that an old servant, as ugly as she was intelligent, had played in his life up to the age of two and a half, when she was arrested for theft and suddenly disappeared from it—a first rupture of very great importance; that he had been jealous of a brother born a year after him, who died a few months later; that his libido had been awakened toward his mother when, travelling with her, he once saw her nude (in speaking of the incident Freud employs the Latin words for mother and nude); that his father played no active rôle at all in his childhood; and finally that the son of his half-brother, a nephew who was a year older than his uncle, had been his "companion in crime" for the first two years of his life, before the family left Freiberg. "My nephew and younger brother determined not only the neurotic side of all my friendships, but also their depth." Elsewhere Freud recognised that he had always needed an intimate friend and an enemy to hate, the two sometimes being combined in one person.

In reading his letters it is easy enough to

glimpse those factors in the past from which he tended to free himself, but what stands out most clearly, and in the most intimate passages, is his purposiveness, the image of the personality he wished to be, of the ambition which drove and tortured him. As soon as he is sure of being loved by the woman who was to be his wife, he confronts her with ultimatums each time he feels his power over her threatened. She must break with friends, with a brother. And when she plans to return to Vienna in order to lessen the financial burden on her mother, her furious fiancé reproaches her with being able to think of her mother when she should think only of him. "In that case," he writes, "you are my enemy. . . . If you do not surmount this obstacle we will break things off. If you do not love me enough to give up your family you deserve to lose me, to destroy my life. . . ."

The girl yielded adroitly. But the others, so many of his friends and collaborators, did not yield, and he treated them as enemies. His life was marked off by violent ruptures. Freud's self-analysis changed nothing, in spite of what Jones says. The latter provides the proof of this himself; for example, when he tells how Freud reproached Jung (in 1912) for not citing his name often enough, and how he reacted to the Swiss doctor's resistance by fainting. This obsession with priority expresses itself in an astonishing fashion in the confidences he makes to Fliess. "Möbius is the best mind among the neurologists; fortunately he is not on the track of sexuality. . . . I picked up a recent book of Janet's on hysteria and *idées fixes* with a beating heart, and laid it down again with my pulse returned to normal. He has no inkling of the clue." In the misunderstandings and conflicts which later provoked the secession of many of his famous disciples, Freud too often refused to admit someone else's priority with an idea. One of the incidents which preceded the end of his friendship with Fliess foreshadowed the conflicts to come: in 1900, during the meeting which was to be the last "congress" of the two friends, Freud told Fliess about his latest great discovery, bisexuality, and refused to admit that his friend had given him the idea, though Fliess had in fact advanced it to him several times in the last three years. It took the psychologist a week to realise that he had been the victim

of an amnesia all the more strange because he had already, in his letters to Fliess, often spoken of bisexuality.

WHAT Freud discovered in his self-analysis was not, therefore, the Oedipus complex. It was, on the one hand, the persistent presence of the past which creates a tendency to reproduce certain childhood relationships—a discovery not at all new, but which Freud was the first to give its proper place in a framework of explanation; and, on the other hand, the possibility of exploring the dream as the most authentic expression of the whole man, of his conscious as well as his unconscious life. Although oneirocriticism is a very ancient practice, *The Interpretation of Dreams* must be recognised as an epochal work, one of the most original and fertile of contributions to modern psychology. Freud did not become acquainted with the many works devoted to the dream until after he had formed his own theory—here he really had no need of forerunners.*

All the elements of artistic creation are present in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. One constantly feels the presence of the author, even when it is not his own dreams that is the subject. The double nature of psychology, which is at once a science and a philosophic art, becomes palpable. All interpretation reveals itself as a structuring of *données* scattered in time and space, as an arrangement which by tendentious selection and

* His friends as well as his enemies have, on the other hand, too easily ignored what he owed, in nearly all the other elements of psychoanalysis, to both predecessors and contemporaries, notably to Herbart, the author of a large number of the fundamental concepts Freud made use of (among others, those of the pleasure-principle and repression); to E. von Hartmann, and still more to Griesinger, who from 1867 on gave greater importance to the unconscious in his psychiatry than to the content of consciousness itself; even to Meynert, with his theory of two Egos and of inhibition; to Breuer, Charcot, Forel, Lips, Fliess, and Janet, among others, and later to Bleuler, Jung, and Adler. If Freud was at first ignored and ridiculously underestimated by his colleagues, he was overestimated by those who, knowing psychology only through his writings, considered him the primary source and author of all its conquests.

condensation permits a fusion of the discovered meaning and the imagined one.

Although Freud wished to prove that dreams always have a wish-fulfilling function, he did not ask them to demonstrate the permanence of the Oedipus complex or the incestuous wish. Yet one trait is common to all these dreams, his own as well as those of his patients; they express an inexorable jealousy, accompanied by an absolute will to eliminate the rival, and a resentment which forgives nothing. Even ambition, which is so frequent in Freud's dreams, is never defined solely in terms of a goal, but much more often as a function of the envy inspired by a more fortunate rival, and, in general, all those who seem to be successful. Indeed, in the immense casuistry of orthodox psychoanalysis the incestuous fixation rarely expresses itself in terms of a real attachment, but almost always as a more or less murderous impulse toward the always-present third member of the triangle. This can be easily explained: the neurotic is as incapable of love as he is of renouncing the love he expects from others. In his emotional book-keeping, what he received is reckoned according to the measure of a god, what he himself offers according to the measure of a beggar, who, in giving very little, has given all. The lesson that emerges from all the dreams interpreted by Freud is that man is the obstacle to man. If one cannot eliminate his neighbour by transforming him into a loving slave, one should kill him. Let him who does not love me die! Let him die who is loved by the one who should love me!

Freud was no more Oedipus in his dreams than in his childhood memories; he was Joseph, and he knew it—Joseph, the son of Jacob's second wife, for a long time the youngest son and his father's favourite; the dreamer who saw his brothers bowing before him, the sun, the moon, and the stars (his father, his mother, and their children) paying court to him; Joseph, who climbed to power in a strange country thanks to his power to interpret dreams; Joseph the chaste, exposed to seduction, who did not marry before thirty; Joseph who had been mortally threatened by the envy and jealousy of his brothers. Freud consciously identified himself with Joseph, yet wished to find the fundamental parable of man in the Oedipus

legend, thus reducing the struggle between the generations, the sexes, the classes, even man's struggle against fate, to incestuous desire, and the revolt against oppressive authority to parricidal jealousy.

Oedipus would never have killed his father if the latter had not broken the bonds of vital solidarity between the generations. And Laius, who desired nothing so much as to have a son, condemned him to death precisely because he had been warned of the fate the gods had ordained for him. The tragedy is therefore a *tragedy of consciousness* in which each action *helps fate* to accomplish itself instead of averting it. The moral of the Sophoclean tragedy is that only moderation protects man from the gods. Every breach of human solidarity plays into the hands of the intriguing and vengeful gods. "Do not kill, for your victim may be your father, or your brother!" Every excess sets loose an infinite chain of more and more terrible excesses. No man is really a stranger, no god is really a friend.

It is obvious that the actions of Oedipus owe absolutely nothing to the complex named after him. On the other hand there is a profound affinity between the legends of Joseph and Oedipus. Both are, at the outset, the victims of an expulsion. Both reach the heights of power in a strange land, saving their new country; and their family, despite an original breach of solidarity. Joseph recognises his brothers, he humiliates them, but without destroying them; Oedipus can recognise neither his father nor his mother, and it is because of this that he becomes guilty of his crimes. The incest here is the result not of a libidinous fixation but, on the contrary, of complete alienation, of the absence of the natural ties which would have linked Jocasta and her son if she had been willing to face her destiny instead of avoiding it by an inhuman abandonment.

The attraction that the Oedipus legend, badly and flatly interpreted, held for Freud can be explained on at least four different levels: (1) All the determinants of the legend are concealed, and must be uncovered before the events become comprehensible; (2) The sexual theme is present in the form of an unconsciously incestuous marriage; (3) The murderous violence involved takes place within the family; (4) Each step of the tragedy is crime and punishment at the same

time—there is no final expiation. And for Freud, neurosis is exactly that: frustration and satisfaction at the same time; sin and expiation, guilty desire and sense of guilt. In the circle of his actions the neurotic is as much in pursuit of the Erinyes as he is pursued.

Freud states over and over that the Oedipus complex is the cornerstone (*Kernstueck*) of his theory of neurosis. The family is the focus of the violent feelings which link or split its members. Whether the psychic energy, the libido, becomes love avid of possession or hate avid of murder, the violence of the frustrated desire becomes a desire for violence ill repressed by the action of the reality-principle. And faced with a hostile world, all the desires are summed up in a single one: the nostalgia for the lost paradise, the return to the mother's womb which one should never have left. All extreme violence feeds the nostalgia for the void.

There are good reasons for thinking that incestuous relationships are considerably more frequent than the legal records indicate. But in the casuistry of psychoanalysis, although it is centred around the incestuous wish, one never finds cases of incest. On the other hand, among those who practise incest, the feeling of guilt is neither more marked nor more serious than among pervers. The fear of being compromised in the eyes of neighbours and of being punished by the law is real, but the tragic horror is absent. Similarly the parricide is not too rare a phenomenon. He generally defends himself by the same system of self-justification that operates in any other crime of passion. One finds as many repressions and inhibitions among the incestuous and among parricides as in other neurotics. There is nothing astonishing in this, since the persistence of the fixation on a parent is generally due more to fear of the future and the psychic inability to create a new relationship rather than the strength of the attachment to the past. Whatever the power of the latter, man is fundamentally *forward-looking* and his actions take place in a framework which couples causality with purposiveness.

While he met this purposiveness at every step, Freud failed to recognise it, and that for two reasons. First because he conceived of psychology, according to the mechanistic

materialism of his first masters, as a strictly causal science of nature, like physics, *voraussetzungslos und wertungsfrei*—founded on nothing but strictly verifiable facts and outside any system of values. Then, like all men whose lives have been defined by ruptures, Freud was obsessed by an ill-absorbed past, and penetrated by the certainty that even if God was dead his threats against sinners remained real. Mechanistic determinism satisfied a moral need in him: man, the object of his own past as well as his family's, could never transform himself into the subject of his future.

PSYCHOANALYSIS therefore became a theory of man as guilty for what he does and what he desires, a theory of original sin committed anew by each generation; a mythology of the guilty conscience rather than a psychology of the unconscious. It became, beneath the disguise of a theory of psychic energy, a demonology of the instincts, which play exactly the rôle that the Jewish mystics of the Middle Ages attributed to *Yetzer harah*, the evil urge. (Only the naïve will be surprised by the ease with which religious and secular determinisms can be harmonised. The first starts from the prostration of man, the other ends with it.)

Freud set a part of the Old Testament to psychology as one would set a poem to music. The frightful jealousy of Jahveh is there, and his thirst for vengeance, as well as the guilt of mankind, but the promised great final reconciliation has been eliminated, and replaced by that curse which determines one's destiny in the tragic legends of the Greeks, and which the Christian Church has made, under the name of original sin, the basis and justification of its practical morality.

Thus Freud lent a mechanistic, "scientific" terminology to the age-old propositions of ordinary morality: that one cannot trifle with love, nor, in general, with the instincts, which, driven away, return in redoubled strength; that one pays for everything on earth; that psychic energy is transformed but never lost. He recognised only the familial and reactive man, thus neglecting man in his "sociality" as well as in his solitude; man in creative activity and face to face with death. That is why, after a world war, he explains the existence of modern armies by the libidinous fixation of the soldiers on their

commander, and the great political movements by the homosexual "component" in their adherents—which, after all, is not much more absurd than explaining the value and effect of a work of art by its author's Oedipus complex.

Later, partly abandoning the pleasure-principle, he returned to the instinct of aggression which Alfred Adler had, since 1908, opposed to the libidinous impulses. It was a question then of understanding, not the murders of which neurotics merely dream, but the real ones whose goal was the extermination of entire peoples. Toward the end of his life the founder of psychoanalysis must have suspected that the language of the family was hardly appropriate to this mass dialogue with death. He seems to have suspected also that anxiety might be something else beside the result of *coitus interruptus* or an expression of guilt. Yet in an interview with Arthur Koestler only a few months before his death, the exiled old man insisted that the crimes of the Nazis were caused by their feeling of guilt. It is almost the same conviction that the Hassidic rabbis of Galicia expounded to their communities in order to make them understand the profound meaning of the massacre of which they were about to be the victims. It is as if the long road of the son of Jacob Freud, the Jew from Buczacz, had been only a circuitous journey home. . . .

Sigmund Freud believed he had freed himself from religion because he had broken with it very early. But a break is not a liberation, it is only a release, and that, moreover, rarely total. Freud is great wherever he destroys, he is almost insignificant when he abandons the posture of opposition. He has the perspicacity of genius when he is attacking the laziness that considers everything it

does not understand as nonsense, and he is the victim of a heartbreaking blindness when, ignoring his own "schema of tendentious apperception" (Adler), he reduces the condition of man to the accidents of his instincts, the tragedies of Hamlet and Oedipus to incidents provoked by the incestuous wish, and the tale of the Emperor's new clothes to the exhibitionist impulse.

No doubt in 1885 it was high time for the psychologist to enter the bedroom. But he should not have confused it with the universe. It is true that to create a symbol one must often take the part for the whole but it is never permissible for those who wish to understand the whole to reduce it to one of its parts. Human actions, because they are actions of becoming, are irreducible, their immense variety is not an accident but their way of being, composed as they are of what man finds within himself and the new elements, real or fictive, that he adds.

The great Viennese, Karl Kraus, joked that psychoanalysis was the illness that pretended to be its own cure. He could have added: it is the same with all magic, all religion, all philosophy. And, in a general way, with all intellectual enterprises that seek a definitive and certain truth about Man.

"Man is only disguise, falsehood, and hypocrisy, both in himself and in regard to others," said Pascal—exaggerating because he was just then occupied in saving himself. But it does not much matter how one characterises man, since the true question is to know what he will become: what he will make of himself, into what structure he will order his past, that raw material which conditions but does not determine him. All his secrets, the crucial meanings he gives to his past, are summed up in the image he makes of his future.

Dylan Thomas in America

I was recently sent John Malcolm Brinnin's book, *Dylan Thomas in America*, for review, but declined, because I do not review books by living authors. Had I undertaken the task I would have been bound to condemn the book in which I recognise two positive values only, the quoted words and judgments of Dylan Thomas himself, and the narration, in the last chapter, of the circumstances which led to his death. Mr. Hilary Corke, in his notice of the book in the May *ENCOUNTER*, prophesies an endless struggle between future protagonists who will try to interpret his death in their own terms. He rightly emphasises the significance of the subject of their dispute, and the conclusion he draws that this death is a test for every artist's conscience is true indeed. Yet his own verdict is surely the least acceptable of all. To call that death a self-inflicted one by any standards, particularly by moral ones, is to accept the materials of this book as spiritual evidence, the superficial tone in which it is written as a tone of authority, and the calculated observation as a record of insight. Nothing could be more misleading. The tone of the book and its materials betray at once the hallmark of a superficial acquaintance, prime evidence that its author did not know the man.

The true tragedy of Dylan Thomas's death is that he died. Every other consideration is secondary to that. His tours of America may be regarded as a progress towards an inevitable destruction, but that view was contradicted in my experience by his healthy and vigorous appearance when he returned from them. The difference between the last tour and the earlier ones is that when he embarked on it he was already seriously ill. He knew this, and but for his financial straits it is fairly certain that he would not have gone. When it was almost too late, when he was dying, a telephone call was put through to St. Vincent's Hospital from Swansea, giving as much information as possible to assist a diagnosis; it was sent by his friend Daniel Jones, in whose house I waited for a reply. We were told that his life was in the balance. In two days he was dead.

Dylan Thomas spoke of this last tour as a necessity. It was the only one he approached with reluctance. Yet he did look forward, when

the period of intensive work in New York would be over, to working with Stravinsky. His intention was to complete the script of *Under Milk Wood*, on which he continued to make revisions, and to handle the performances in New York; and then to go on to Hollywood where he would work with Stravinsky on their projected opera. He was, when he left England, in the position of a man who had several difficult hurdles to negotiate before reaching his objective. Had he been well, he would have done this easily. As it was, he hoped that the short blackouts he had occasionally suffered during the previous months would not recur. The project of the opera filled him with enthusiasm. He had sketched out a plan of the libretto in his mind, and he had the greatest regard for Stravinsky. He knew that he ought to see a doctor, but he feared that the doctor would pronounce him unfit and cancel the trip.

The tragedy of Dylan Thomas's death is made more bitter by the banality of judgment to which it gives rise. Those who were magnetised by his power to entertain became the victims of a mutually enacted delusion. The poet, simple, unaffected, and true, was a person rarely seen by his audience. Their dramatic spotlight at once changed him into what they desired. His stories, his wisecracks they remembered, as who would not? but the surprising consistency of his judgments is one thing they never seem to have observed. In America his audiences recognised the superb reader of poetry certainly, but of the poet himself they knew nothing, or at least that is the impression left by this book. It might almost be said that he was killed by his own mask, by the grimace which his entertainment produced, by a kind of disgust at the popularity of what he was not.

To anyone who grasps this tragedy, whose final scene is horribly accelerated like a nightmare of misinterpretations on many levels, can anything be more cheap, tawdry, and irrelevant than the carefully rendered account of everything the poet ate, or didn't eat, and drank? The poet of apparently destructive force was certainly the most ethical, the most constant of companions. He did not believe there was such a thing as a comfortable conscience. Where he