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Psychoanalysis and Modernism

John Farrell

mind's freedom in the context of dystopian governments, and explore the extent to which the individual requires communitarian structures for this freedom to be meaningful. In his essay 'May 1945', Rex Warner looked back at the 1930s and pinpointed the issues at stake:

Many, for instance, have fought against fascism in the belief that each individual has a unique value and that no State or organisation of men should be permitted to over-ride or crush what is each individual's uniqueness, his personality; yet this is a belief which, in the past, has rested on the belief in a God for whom each soul is valuable and, without the belief in God, the strange paradox, so contrary to the trend of events, that the individual is uniquely important, is, to say the least, not easy to justify.⁴³

Warner insightfully sees the religious context of past appeals to the sovereignty of human dignity and asks what moral context can take its place in the imposition of a new law. He, like the other writers discussed in this chapter, sees an important role for literature in the construction of the person as a secular idea, partly because of its unsettled exploration of what it means to be human: 'the writer, however he may serve the State, is still the tribune of the person, the critic of institutions, the agent of change.'⁴⁴

⁴³ Rex Warner, 'May 1945', in *The Cult of Power: Essays by Rex Warner* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1946), 140.

⁴⁴ Rex Warner, 'On Freedom of Expression', in *The Cult of Power*, 132.

Freudian psychoanalysis added enormously to the *élan* not only of the modern but of modernism in art. Perhaps uniquely, Sigmund Freud brought to science the style of the avant-garde, which builds authority upon its power to shock and evoke resistance. Modernist culture had many explainers and accommodated many philosophies, but psychoanalysis had a discursive fullness and intellectual sweep that none of its rivals could match. Freud became world famous with the publication of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* in 1901; with *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920 the intellectual structure of his work was essentially complete. In the two following decades most of his intellectual energy was spent on broader diagnoses of culture and civilisation. Freud's primary message was that we never leave the past behind; both in personal and in historical terms, we are haunted by it. Whatever progress we appear to make is driven by the same primitive impulses that are apparent in childhood and in the childhood of humanity. We are all like Oedipus, confronting the hidden sources of personal and collective fate. T. S. Eliot described James Joyce's approach to fiction writing as a 'mythical method' aimed at 'manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity'.¹ Freud's approach was the same.

In spite of his claim to revolutionary insight, it is important to recognise that when we talk about Freud's influence on literary modernism, we are not talking about the influence of an alien element transforming the landscape into something entirely new. We are talking about a rival version of a familiar psychology proposed in more scientific terms. Freud frequently acknowledged that his discoveries had already been made by the poets; psychoanalysis merely deepened and crystallised many of the central

¹ T. S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919–1926*, ed. Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 478.

elements of Romantic and modernist literary culture. At the same time, its all-explaining, reductive vocabulary put pressure on the thinking and writing of the major modernists. It threatened to expose the merely personal and shameful motives, the private complexes and illness, that underlay the process of artistic creation. Freud offered artists a two-edged sword. One edge was the validation of the deep sources of artistic inspiration and insight; the other was the exposure of the private psychology of the artist and the reduction of the artist's apparent individuality to universal drives, the evolutionary residue of past human experiences. The most prominent artists of the 1920s, confronting the arrival of psychoanalysis as adults, were strikingly hostile to it, including Pound, Lawrence and Joyce, the latter labelling psychoanalysis 'nothing more and nothing less than blackmail'.² The younger generation that included Aldous Huxley and W. H. Auden grew up with psychoanalysis as an established orthodoxy whose insights had to be grappled with. For them, the Wordsworthian insight that modern life is diseased and unnatural, already deepened by modernists like Conrad and Eliot, was given a firmer basis by psychoanalysis even as it appeared to be confirmed by the irrational slaughter of the First World War and the rise of fascism.

To clarify the relationship between psychoanalysis and modernism, I will describe the elements they shared, suggest some of their differences and look briefly at how three authors, Lawrence, Huxley and Auden, responded to it.

The Unconscious

Though the unconscious is often taken to be a distinctively Freudian notion, unconscious knowledge was a signature element of pre-modern philosophy and was especially prominent in Platonic and neo-Platonic traditions. Descartes' association of knowledge with 'clear and distinct ideas' and Locke's image of the mind as a *tabula rasa* pointedly ruled out unconscious knowledge, but by the late eighteenth century the unconscious was once more a live idea. Kant's philosophy of mind, which Freud endorsed,³ provided unconscious mental structures and depths, and Romantic genius was a closely related notion. Romantic dream-visions

and Symbolist epiphanies depend upon sources of suggestiveness and talismanic resonance that are beyond conscious or rational accounting. So, with his stress on the unconscious, Freud was validating and putting his stamp on an already existing trend of modern culture.

Freud's conception of the unconscious, however, stands out from his predecessors' for its distinctly gothic element. The unconscious is not an ideal realm we are struggling to regain but an area of the mind we are hiding from ourselves because of its shocking character. The unconscious wishes that appear in our dreams, he tells us,

are first and foremost manifestations of an unbridled and ruthless egoism [. . .] The ego, freed from all ethical bonds, also finds itself at one with all the demands of sexual desire, even those which have long been condemned by our aesthetic upbringing and those which contradict all the requirements of moral restraint. The desire for pleasure – the 'libido', as we call it – chooses its objects without inhibition, and by preference, indeed, the forbidden ones: not only other men's wives, but above all incestuous objects, objects sanctified by the common agreement of mankind, a man's mother and sister, a woman's father and brother [. . .] Lusts provoke dreams. Hatred, too, rages without restraint. Wishes for revenge and death directed against those who are nearest and dearest in waking life, against the dreamer's parents, brothers and sisters, husband or wife, and his own children are nothing unusual. These censored wishes appear to rise up out of a positive Hell.⁴

This was the underworld that Freud prided himself upon exploring. For a post-Enlightenment culture that had long given up on rituals like exorcism and its modern variants such as Mesmerism, here was a shaman who promised, through an erotically charged conversation, to help human beings confront and recognise their demons and dispel their power. Freud's narratives of internal investigation end, like Conan Doyle's, with a resolution of the mystery and also with a redirection of the libido in healthier directions. But for many modernist writers, Freud's Eros and the unconscious were powers not to be deflated but conjured up, put to use or even surrendered to. Lawrence's 'dark gods' demand such a surrender; in another way, the Surrealists sought to unleash the unconscious by yielding to its freedom from logic. Freud thus brought modernist literary culture into dynamic contact with what had been a historically occluded source of energy.

² Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 538.

³ Sigmund Freud, 'The Unconscious', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1953–74), vol. 14: *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metaphysics and Other Works (1914–16)* (1958), 171.

⁴ Freud, *Standard Edition*, ed. and trans. Strachey, vol. 15: *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis (parts 1 and 2)* (1963), 142–3.

The Psychoanalytic Romance

Plato's Eros, the model for Freud's, led upward to the realm of truth, whereas Freud's led inexorably downward, toward dream, fantasy and myth – the underworld, as he liked to say, where only analysts dared to tread. Under Freud's influence the domain of symbolic meaning was greatly expanded – not only to traditional vehicles of prophecy like dreams, but to jokes, slips of the tongue, indeed behaviour of all kinds, including illness and insanity. Thanks to psychoanalysis, things that had no meaning became unexpectedly meaningful, and things that had meanings acquired many more. Words were no longer limited to the senses that came into play in the context of utterance. Any association might flower outward or seep downward, forming subterranean connections. The realistic structure of a dream-narrative became merely the surface of a mythic underworld, and symbolic interpretation took the form of an adventure tale displaying its exploration and conquest. The fundamental structure of the psychoanalytic narrative is the quest-romance. Freud told Wilhelm Fliess that he designed *The Interpretation of Dreams* with this narrative strategy in mind, as an 'imaginary walk' (*Spazierungsfantasie*), beginning with 'the dark wood of the authorities (who cannot see the trees [referring to the opening summary of the literature on dreams]); then comes the 'cavernous defile' of Freud's specimen dream – his opening example of dream interpretation – finally leading to 'the high ground and the open prospect'.⁵ Here again Freud is modernist; the romance is one of the key structural resources of modernist, as it was of Romantic, literature. It is at the heart of *Lord Jim*, *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land* and other Eliot poems, *To the Lighthouse*, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Auden's early poetry and plays, and many of Kafka's stories. And of course it is equally dominant in the popular literature repudiated by modernism. In all of these forms the journey was a search for truth. Again it is clear that Freud's influence depends upon what he shares with creative writers rather than upon original discoveries.

The frequently made connection between Freud and Sherlock Holmes is telling because the Freudian quest for interpretive truth does dissolve the surface of the narrative and defuse its further interest just like a Sherlock Holmes solution. Both Freud and Holmes seek to translate the details of

the surface narrative without remainder into their own terms, whereas modernist practitioners of the interpretive romance seek to keep the mystery in play. In a sense, then, Freud exemplifies the kind of popularity that modernists strove to avoid, and this underlies some of their resistance to Freudian themes. Neither the character Ulysses nor the plot of Homer's *Odyssey* can be considered simply the solution to the case of Leopold Bloom (a sphinx with many more than one riddle), and the themes and relations hidden in Joyce's novel enrich its texture and deepen its implications rather than deflate them. The broken chords of *The Waste Land* resonate and echo without resolution. The typical modernist quest is asymptotic, whereas Freud's investigations never fail to reach a conclusion any more than Holmes's do. Based upon a single missing word from a quotation from Virgil delivered by a passenger in a railway carriage, Freud claims to read the man's mind and diagnose his most hidden fears in a way that seems uncanny.⁶ Applied to works of art and to the lives of artists, though, the effect can be deflating and mechanical. It is unpleasantly simplifying when Freud tells us that what he considers the three greatest works of literature – *Oedipus the King*, *Hamlet* and *The Brothers Karamazov* – all owe their power to the parricide motif, as if the depiction of a father-murder were enough to make a supremely compelling work of art.⁷ Freud was aware of the danger. In his general statements about the interpretation of dreams and other mental objects, he does his best to avoid the appearance of reductiveness. Well aware of its aesthetic drawbacks, he is careful to observe a limit in the interpretation of any dream, the point where there is a 'tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unraveled . . .'. He calls this 'the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown', where it is 'bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought'.⁸ Freud knew that psychoanalysis owes a great deal of its charm to the finally indefinite and unsearchable quality of the unconscious, and this was the charm that modernist authors sought to claim for themselves, while avoiding its reductive clarity.

⁶ Freud, *Standard Edition*, ed. and trans. Strachey, vol. 6: *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) (1960), chapter 2. It now seems likely that Freud invented this scenario and that the traveller who was worried about his lover's period was Freud himself. See Frederick Crews, *Freud: The Making of an Illusion* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017), chapter 32.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Dostoevsky and Parricide', in *Standard Edition*, ed. and trans. Strachey, vol. 21: *The Future of an Illusion; Civilisation and its Discontents; and Other Works (1927–31)* (1961), 188.

⁸ Freud, *Standard Edition*, ed. and trans. Strachey, vol. 4: *The Interpretation of Dreams (first part)* (1900) (1953), 525.

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psycho-Analysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes: 1887–1902*, trans. Eric Mosbacher and James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1954), 290 (letter of August 6, 1899).

The Sense of the Past

Just as Dante adopted the medieval method of allegorising the Bible to write his own polysemic allegorical narratives, so Freud and his fellow modernists could turn the mythic method to use in telling their own stories. Indeed, Freud's method of free association offered a more technical version of the detached self-observation that had already yielded impressive literary results for Dostoevsky, Strindberg, Knut Hamsun and others, including Joyce's protégé Italo Svevo, whose novel *The Confessions of Zeno* gave literary form to obsessive but uncomprehending self-description under the guise of psychoanalysis. But Freud's method of interpreting the psyche does not lead in the direction of 'stream of consciousness' as it was practiced by later modernist writers. It was a form of analysis that took the elements of the story piece by piece and traced them separately to unconscious motives. The order of the materials to be analysed – dream, parapraxis or delusion – makes no difference. Dreams have no syntax, and the order of their elements is irrelevant to their meaning.

The narrative coherence discovered by Freudian investigation, then, lies entirely in the past, and it is the governing assumption of psychoanalysis, as it was of most nineteenth-century philosophical psychology, that the personal past and the 'racial' past, or past of humankind, are of like character and origin; encounters with the depths of the individual psyche put us in contact not only with an individual's past but with historically primitive experience as well. Freud's later, speculative works contain a scattered but detailed bio-history of human development, a story involving the lingering effects of the father-murder in the primal horde, the return of the father in the guise of a paternal God, as accomplished by the 'first epic poet', and the transition to modern psychology brought about by the great scientists, men like Copernicus, Darwin and Freud himself.⁹ Freud's psycho-historical thinking is best captured in connection with his essay on the 'Two Principles of Mental Functioning', in which he sets the Pleasure Principle – the anti-intellectual Eros that obscures reality with dream and imagines the world it desires – against the Reality Principle which exacts sacrifices from the Pleasure Principle, allowing the mind to function in the world as it really is. Each of us, in the process of maturation, must cope with the renunciation of Eros exacted by the Reality Principle,

and in doing so we recapitulate the progress of the species as it rises from the primitive religion of the father to the culture of the scientist. Those who cannot make the renunciations demanded by Enlightenment science must either preserve their mental health by indulging in the retrograde satisfactions of religion or develop their own private equivalent of a religion – in other words, succumb to mental illness. Mental illness, for Freud, is a sign of a person's inability to make the psychological concessions demanded by modernity. Whereas many interpreters of Freud have focused on the theme of sexual repression as the root of modern neurosis, it was the renunciation of religion that Freud placed at the centre of the modern malaise. Religion, he asserts, is the 'most powerful protection against neurosis'.¹⁰

Freud's narrative of our bio-historical development from the primal horde up to his time of writing is a triumphalist one. Science has conquered and dispelled human narcissism and megalomania, and, for all those of us who are able to cope with its findings, it has set human life on a realistic basis at last. From a historical and scientific perspective Freud regards this as an entirely positive development, but from a psychological standpoint he believes the results are mixed. It is not only that taking up the disillusioned scientific perspective towards ourselves exacts great costs in terms of repression, it is also that the enlightenment which comes of psychoanalysis can free us only a little from primitive psychology. The drives that we find at the bottom of the human character – lust and aggression, incest and parricide – can be disguised but not eliminated, and the parade of appearances that confront us in social life is composed almost entirely of disguise. In spite of science, including psychoanalysis, we are very thinly civilised. The past is a horror, and the notion that we have left it behind is largely an illusion. Freud's heroic quest for knowledge ends with self-undermining irony and disillusionment.

The First World War amplified the contemporary sense of horror about human nature and the prospects for civilisation, adding persuasiveness to Freud's psychological and historical diagnoses just as it created an international audience for Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918). In response to the war, Freud's own views became even darker. In 1920 he added his theory of the 'death instinct', an aggressive principle equal in importance with the libido, and while this late theoretical innovation found little traction even among his fellow psychoanalysts, Freud's late

⁹ I have reconstructed Freud's narrative of human bio-history in *Freud's Paranoid Quest: Psychoanalysis and Modern Suspicion* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), chapter 1.

¹⁰ Freud, *Standard Edition*, ed. and trans. Strachey, vol. 18: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works (1920–22)* (1955), 142.

pessimism made its impact in works like *The Future of an Illusion* (1928) and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). This growing sense of sickness, spiritual and sexual desiccation, horror, and disenchantment already echoes through the chambers of *The Waste Land*, which despite its obscure and fragmentary form manages to convey a very coherent and persuasive desperation about the modern situation and its deep grounding in the human condition. Eliot exploits the evocativeness – what Freud would call the ‘uncanny’ attraction – of ancient beliefs and primitive rituals, broken shamanistic formulas, empty fragments which retain their power for the imagination alone.

Freud added authority to the modernist recovery of myth and the despair that often accompanied it. With regard to *The Waste Land* (1922), however, what is noticeable is how closely Eliot skirts Freud’s Oedipal terrain without entering it, preferring to rely upon British sources of the primitive. As his notes to *The Waste Land* attest, it is not to psychoanalysis but to British anthropology and anthropologically informed literary criticism – to James Frazer and Jessie L. Weston – that Eliot resorts for his mythic resources. British fiction provided another key note; the original epigraph to *The Waste Land* was to be the last words of Kurtz in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* – ‘The horror! The horror!’¹¹ – where Conrad makes the same connection between the progress of the individual human character and the progress of civilisation that we see in Freud. In the story of Kurtz we see the same megalomaniacal regression to the primitive that Freud discovers in the neurotic and the paranoid, a regression both personal and historical to which we are all susceptible. The fact that the character who undergoes this regression is one of the Enlightenment’s most eloquent defenders, a ‘universal genius’ to whose making ‘all Europe’ had contributed, makes his regression all the more dramatic and significant.¹² Conrad and Eliot are just as eager as Freud to show how tenuous is the achievement of civilisation even in the most enlightened and modern people. It is not an easy question as to whether we should interpret Eliot’s preference for British versions of cultural retrogression as expressing the American’s desire to cement his British identity, whether in Eliot’s view the furniture of psychoanalysis had already become a reductive set of clichés, or whether it was a sign of Eliot’s contempt for

Freud’s broader outlook which would emerge later in the 1920s, when he would describe Freud’s view of religion as ‘shrewd and yet stupid’.¹³

The Biographical Imperative

For Freud, of course, the struggles dramatised in myth and ritual were located specifically at the family level, and this gave his thinking added resonance for a generation of artists whose artistic and intellectual commitments tended to set them in conflict with their parents. From the standpoint of Freudian psycho-historicism, the breach with the past is not easy; like Conrad’s Kurtz, each of us experiences a constant struggle against the regressive impulses of the pleasure principle, the temptations of personal megalomania and collective delusion that animate primitive culture. The allure of the past is always beckoning. To accommodate ourselves to the psychological regime of modernity, we must give in to society’s demands for renunciation and restraint. In a sense we must lose the Oedipal struggle – the wish to take over the role of the father – and learn to accept that loss in order to become psychologically modern. Freud is recognisably modernist in seeing the struggle to find oneself in the modern world as a struggle with one’s parents, but his sympathies are ultimately with the parents – the representatives of the real world and the reality principle. This is compatible with larger elements of Freud’s outlook. He was uncomfortable with modern technology and unsympathetic to radical experiments in art. He thought of the Surrealists, who had taken him as their ‘patron saint’, as ‘fools’.¹⁴ The satiric note is typical. In spite of the terrors lurking in the unconscious mind, it would be misleading to say that it was only the Conradian tone of modernism that Freud’s writings tended to amplify. Except for his late anticipations of the future in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, which have a tragic cast to them quite typical of the 1930s, Freud’s characteristic stance as a thinker is ironic and satiric.¹⁵ He views all of the ethical, religious, philosophical and artistic ideals of the past, and any sense of altruism that could be based on them, as subterfuges for egotistical self-aggrandisement or substitutes for carnal hunger.¹⁶ He provided his

¹¹ Eliot dropped the epigraph on the advice of Ezra Pound, ‘a fact which he later regretted’ according to Valerie Eliot. See *The Poems of T. S. Eliot: Collected and Uncollected Poems*, ed. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, 1 vol. to date (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), vol. 1, 591.

¹² Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Ross C. Murfin (3rd edn; Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 2011), 88 and 65.

¹³ See, for instance, ‘Freud’s Illusions’, Eliot’s review of *The Future of An Illusion*, whose nonchalant, insulting and condescending tone is shocking in contrast with the literary reverence for Freud current at this time (in *The Criterion: A Literary Review* 8 (1928), 350–3).

¹⁴ Letter to Stephan Zweig, 20 July 1938, in Sigmund Freud, *Briefe 1873–1939*, ed. Ernst L. Freud (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer-Verlag, 1960), 441.

¹⁵ See my *Freud’s Paranoid Quest*, chapter 5.

¹⁶ Freud, *Standard Edition*, ed. and trans. Strachey, vol. 13: *Totem and Taboo and Other Works* (1955), 73–4.

fellow modernists, therefore, with a powerful weapon for unmasking the social conventions, religious ideals and political forces that sustained the bourgeois world. Narcissism and raw bodily need are everywhere in Freud's image of human behaviour, and while we are aware of the many subterfuges and theatrical gestures that hide our daily weaknesses and points of vulnerability, Freud insists throughout his work that even our positive and apparently noble feelings are artefacts of disguise and self-delusion. To take one example among many of Freud's satiric diagnoses, the smile on the face of Leonardo's *La Gioconda* represents the artist's unconscious fantasies of fellatio, themselves a substitute for the lost pleasure of the mother's breast. After making this observation Freud goes on to claim that 'from that time onward, madonnas and aristocratic ladies' in Italian paintings would bear the humble smile of Leonardo's peasant mother which reminded him of his own infantile pleasures.¹⁷

Freud's literary taste inclined strongly toward the humorous and especially toward satire upon human nature, and when analysing his own dreams he was eager to expose the humorous foibles of his own professional identity. His dreams turn out largely to be expressions of unconscious megalomania embedded in far-flung systems of excuse and accusation regarding his relations with his patients and his colleagues.¹⁸ The most basic principle of psychoanalytic moralism is that we are constantly posing to be something we are not, constantly disguising our true, base, egotistical motives from each other and from ourselves. It is the job of our ego to keep the superego – the sense of shame and guilt implanted in us by our parents – from recognising how we are constantly indulging our aggressive and libidinal desires in indirect and symbolic forms.

Of all the great modernists, it is Joyce who resonates most closely with Freud's peculiar form of irony toward the pretensions of idealism, as we can see in the uproarious way Leopold Bloom's sexual selves are exposed in the Nighttown episode of *Ulysses*. The phantasmagoria of the mind freed from its usual inhibitions and self-consciousness was already one of the great discoveries of post-Renaissance literature, brought to a high point in the storm scenes of *King Lear*, in parts of *Don Quixote* and in the Walpurgisnacht of Goethe's *Faust*. Joyce gives this spectacle a peculiarly Shandean character facilitated by Freud's sexual hermeneutics. Bloom's humane form of tolerance and humour, though less cynical and suspicious

than Freud's, is based on an acceptance of the corporeality and fragility of life in a way that is deeply in synch with the spirit of psychoanalysis.

Of course the humorous treatment of Bloom is also tinged with melancholy. I have discussed the Freudian conception of the unconscious as a vehicle of humour and the recovery of ancient imaginative sources, but it is important to remember that recovery presupposes loss. Like Platonic and Romantic separation myths, the Oedipal drama provides each of us with a history of pathos – the inevitably frustrated desire and pain of separation within the family – and we find effective equivalents of this structure among the major works of modernism. Frank Budgen tells us that Joyce chose Ulysses as the model for his hero Bloom because, unlike some of the greatest literary characters – Hamlet, for example, or Faust – Ulysses participates in all the key human relationships – father, son, husband, lover, leader of his crew and king of his people.¹⁹ But Joyce's Ulysses fulfils all of these relationships in the negative. His son is dead, his father a suicide, his Penelope unfaithful and his affairs unconsummated; he is the butt of humour among his friends, and no king of his people but a Jew in Ireland. He is thus a hero entirely under the sign of loss, a figure of passivity and therefore an apt vehicle of internalisation. Eliot's Tiresias reaps a similar harvest of losses and pain.

D. H. Lawrence

I have not yet mentioned the key topic of sex, which Freud highlighted as a serious subject for modern culture. The modernists continued one of the central projects of literature since the eighteenth century, which was the exploration of bourgeois sexual relations – the quest for personal happiness in the sphere of sex in a new, more individualistic and more egalitarian regime. British modernists pursued this theme under a sense of crisis. It appears as a bitter motif in *The Waste Land* and is richly explored by Yeats, Joyce, Ford, Forster, Woolf and many others. And it is, of course, a central concern of Lawrence, who viewed it in terms of a civilisation in decline.

For Freud, sex is largely the need for orgasms, the reduction of 'tissue tension', and love is a substitute for that, ranking alongside mere art, a 'mild narcosis'.²⁰ His famous case histories, now often taught alongside

¹⁷ Freud, *Standard Edition*, ed. and trans. Strachey, vol. 11: *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Leonardo da Vinci, and Other Works (1910)* (1957), 114.

¹⁸ Freud, *Standard Edition*, ed. and trans. Strachey, vol. 4, 215 and 119–20.

¹⁹ Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses and Other Writings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972; originally published by Grayson and Grayson Ltd., 1934), 16.

²⁰ Freud, *Standard Edition*, ed. and trans. Strachey, vol. 21, 81.

modernist works of fiction, suggest that he had little concern with or understanding of men's or women's interpersonal emotions.²¹ For him, the unhappiness they experience in their current lives turns out to be embarrassingly grounded in their relations with their parents, who have installed in them bizarre mechanical responses they cannot suppress. Sexual life is largely a struggle with one's parental imagoes and the attendant Oedipal complexes.

Throughout D. H. Lawrence's career, readers and reviewers took him to be working in the vein of psychoanalysis. John Middleton Murry called him 'the first man in Europe truly to realise the scope of the problems of which psycho-analysis has touched the fringe'.²² Lawrence, though, took Freud in a radically new direction. He was among the first of many who understood the psychoanalytic theory of sexual repression as calling for a repudiation of civilisation and its debilitating effects. At the same time he resented the satirical trend of Freudian thinking and its way of reducing the mind of the individual to the abstractions of science, to which Lawrence was generally hostile. There is no reason to believe he made a close study of psychoanalysis, but he did make a visceral response to it in two salvoes of the early twenties – *The Psychology of the Unconscious* (1921) and *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1922). From the beginning of his career, Lawrence was annoyed by having Freudian readers treat the drama of mother and son in *Sons and Lovers* (1913) as betraying his own incestuous mother-fixation. This theory, he wrote to Katherine Mansfield, is 'the mill-stone of mill-stones around all of our necks'.²³ Lawrence's eventual answer to Freud is a strange and utterly idiosyncratic vitalist theory combining his own intuitions about nature, child-rearing, sex and many other topics together with theosophical speculations, pre-Socratic philosophy and Hindu neurology (as popularised by James Pryse). Lawrence revels in the flagrancy and strangeness of his diagnostic vocabulary, with its multiple nerve centres and planes of consciousness, positive and negative polarities, energies flowing from solar plexuses and lumbar ganglia. Responding to the derisive reviews of *Fantasia*, he concedes that he is an 'amateur of

amateurs', but he insists that 'there is a science which proceeds in terms of life and is established on data of living experience and sure intuition' – an alternative to modern science which is a 'science of the dead world'.²⁴ 'The term *unconscious*', Lawrence insists, 'is only another word for life'.²⁵ The vocabulary he borrows from his Hindu, pre-Socratic and other teachers is meant only to be a vehicle for drawing out the meaning from his own experience – especially the 'pure and passionate experience' embodied in his novels and poems.²⁶ Freud would have endorsed Lawrence's humorous term for his own militantly optimistic theorising – 'pollyanalytics'.²⁷

Obviously Lawrence was right that Freudian thinking was naturally opposed to his own and represented a kind of intellectual enemy. Freud himself explained that the 'innermost secret' of creative writers, their '*ars poetica*', is to disguise the private and egoistic motives of their fantasies so that they can become enjoyable to others. The whole point of the psychoanalytic approach to art is to undermine that *ars poetica* by recovering the personal motifs it conceals.²⁸ Both Lawrence's and Freud's vocabularies now look floridly eccentric in the way they allow their devotees to articulate and mythologise personal feelings and construct personal narratives of character development against the background of larger cultural forces. At the distance of almost a century, the difference in scientific professionalism between Freud's speculative works like *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and Lawrence's *Fantasia of the Unconscious* looks very small. Already in the 1960s, Freud and Lawrence appear on an equal footing in a prominent later example of psycho-mythologising, the *Anti-Oedipus* of Deleuze and Guattari, where Lawrence's 'pollyanalytic' riposte to Freud's mechanistic reductionism is granted considerable authority.²⁹

As the passage of time reduces the difference in authority between Freud and Lawrence, Lawrence's speculations at least retain the value of their role in the creation of his absorbing and memorable fiction. And in spite of the grand cultural theorising that forms the background for Lawrence's work, he was nevertheless able to pursue his exploration of individual sexual relations with impressive honesty and even a kind of empirical rigour that Freud's pessimism and penchant for abstract decodings did not allow.

²¹ The case history of the woman he called 'Dora' (actually Ida Bauer) is particularly striking in this regard. See Sigmund Freud, 'Fragments of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria', in *Standard Edition*, ed. and trans. Strachey, vol. 7: *A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality, and Other Works (1901–05)* (1953).

²² D. H. Lawrence, 'Review of *Fantasia of the Unconscious*', in *D. H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R. P. Draper (New York: Routledge, 1970; originally published in *Algemeen Handelsblad* (31 March 1923), *Derde blad*, 9), 86.

²³ *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. James T. Boulton and Andrew Robertson, 8 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–2003), vol. 3: *October 1916–June 1921* (1985), 150.

²⁴ D. H. Lawrence, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious and Fantasia of the Unconscious*, ed. Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 62.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 38. ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 65. ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', in *Standard Edition*, ed. and trans. Strachey, vol. 9: *Jensen's 'Gradiva' and Other Works (1906–08)* (1959), 153.

²⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking, 1977), 5, 49–50, and *passim*.

The brave frankness between Lady Chatterley and her lover is convincingly at one with Lawrence's belief that there is nothing which cannot be said without shame if it is spoken in the right spirit. Lawrence was looking for a form of honesty that is not based upon mere therapeutic technique but which recognises the legitimacy of human sexuality and its contribution to our happiness.

Aldous Huxley and *Brave New World*

D. H. Lawrence's mother-love and father-hatred, considered as symptoms of neurosis, should have been a problem for psychoanalysis rather than a diagnosis because they were entirely conscious. He had written a great novel about them. That Lawrence was haunted by the diagnosis illustrates how much of the power of psychoanalysis depended on the watering down of its distinctive concepts. Yet for all of his hostility to Freud, Lawrence was unable to shake the Oedipal theory. When John Middleton Murry, shortly after Lawrence's death, published *Son of Woman* (1931), his biography of Lawrence, emphasising the fatal effect of Lawrence's mother's love, the 'vital injury' to his 'physico-spiritual nature' that marked him, he didn't need to cite Freudian theory as a justification.³⁰ There was enough of the Oedipal account in Lawrence's own speculations of the twenties for Murry to draw on.³¹ Aldous Huxley, Lawrence's closest friend at the end of his life, denounced Murry's book as irrelevant to Lawrence the artist and as a 'curious essay in destructive hagiography',³² but he too wound up characterising Lawrence's genius in terms borrowed from psychoanalysis: Lawrence was different from the rest of us in that he 'could never forget, as most of us almost continuously forget, the dark presence of the otherness that lies beyond the boundaries of man's conscious mind'.³³

What was true for Lawrence was even truer for Huxley – the problem with psychoanalysis was not that it was false but that it was being put to ill use in the undermining of art and the individual. This is one of the key notes of *Brave New World*, which can veritably be described as a Freudian dystopia. Just as Ford provides the model for the test tube production of

human beings perfectly adapted to their functions in Huxley's World State, so Freud is the theorist of its psychology.

Our Ford – or Our Freud, as, for some inscrutable reason, he chose to call himself whenever he spoke of psychological matters – Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life. The world was full of fathers – was therefore full of misery; full of mothers – therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts – full of madness and suicide.³⁴

The World State of *Brave New World* is based upon the systematic elimination of repression. The delays of gratification that allow emotions to build up are unknown. All human desires are systematically gratified including the sexual ones, since 'every one belongs to every one else', a proverb drilled into the collective subconscious by 'hypnopaedia'.³⁵ Libertinism is total, but the connection with liberty in the moral sense has been broken, promiscuity being compulsory while attachment is forbidden. Where perfect gratification is not possible, various therapeutic substitutes are supplied and the ubiquitous drug *soma* assuages any residual discomforts. Without chastity there is none of the passion and neurosis that lead to political instability.³⁶ Nobility and heroism are no longer needed, being signs of political efficiency.³⁷ This is taking Freud's theory that love and attachment depend on repression to one of its logical conclusions. Disciplined sex is the correlate of efficient labour – as Ford, so Freud.

The World State is clearly an unpalatable, indeed a revolting order of things, but Huxley never confronts the question of whether that is because it is imposed by coercion and deception or whether it is because such routinised gratification is problematic in itself. The regime's chief critic, John 'the Savage', who was raised by his own mother outside the terrain of the World State, insists that ordinary human unhappiness is better than the narcotic collective happiness provided by the state, but Huxley presents him as a laughable neurotic sexually crippled by his Oedipal frustrations and his need to idealise women. Presented with the eminently available and 'pneumatic [voluptuous]' Lenina, he is unable to couple with her, 'obscurely terrified lest she cease to be something he could feel himself unworthy of'.³⁸ Huxley has not managed to think beyond Freud's belief that happiness is incompatible with the higher ideals of civilisation.

³⁰ John Middleton Murry, *Son of Woman: The Story of D. H. Lawrence* (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931), 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

³² Aldous Huxley, 'D. H. Lawrence', in *The Olive Tree and Other Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936), 201.

³³ *Ibid.*, 203.

³⁴ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World and Brave New World Revisited* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 44.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 46. ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 212. ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 213. ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

W. H. Auden

Unlike the major modernists of the twenties, Auden grew up with psychoanalysis, and unlike Huxley he identified strongly with its diagnostic perspective. It was a central component of his imagination and worldview. From the time he was young he enjoyed impressing people with the ingenuity of his Freudian interpretations.³⁹ In his early twenties, hoping to 'improve' his inferiority complex and 'develop heterosexual traits', he underwent a brief, unhelpful analysis,⁴⁰ and all his life he played the game of interpreting people's characters, including his lovers', according to the parental roles they played. Auden shared Lawrence's reservations about Freud's pessimism and his willingness to reduce artistic motives to selfish ones. His working model of the psyche was a synthesis of Freud and an eclectic range of other theorists, including William Blake and Lawrence himself. But while Lawrence offered what he thought was an alternative to Freud and had his doubts about 'analysis' of any kind, Auden saw himself as revising and exploring the psychoanalytic perspective in the search for social and personal health. From early on his central subject was 'England, this country of ours where nobody is well'.⁴¹ For Auden, psychological complexes were not merely a cause of suffering. They were fundamentally creative. Physical suffering, by contrast, could be a sign of moral failings. A 'liar's quinsy' was caused by his moral fault. About Freud's death from throat cancer, Auden asked Stephen Spender, 'Who'd have thought he was a liar?'⁴² Like Freud and Lawrence, Auden was often working with strange, seemingly magical forms of causality.

As Spender points out, Auden's 'basic story' was 'Symptom and Cure',⁴³ and his early work was laden with psychological symbolism. Auden's version of the therapeutic story, though, is profoundly moral. His early poetry renders the dislocated quests of desperate heroes facing undefined enemies – situations so mysterious that they seem to be representations of inner psychological states. Auden believed from the beginning that our life is driven by impersonal forces that live us more than we live them: 'What

we call I, the little conscious ego, is an instrument of power outside itself.'⁴⁴ In his version of 'The Wanderer' ('Doom is dark and deeper than any sea-dingle'), the protagonist's obligation to 'leave his house' and take on the quest simply 'falls' upon him.⁴⁵ The compulsive, home-sick quest ends on a happy note – 'lucky with day approaching, with leaning dawn'. But the more typical Auden result is self-destructive failure, as for the 'Lady weeping at the crossroads' whose magical instructions end with the command to 'plunge' the penknife into her 'false heart'.⁴⁶ Still, Auden in the early thirties could hope – and indeed pray – for a 'change of heart', a basic alteration of the collective psyche that would halt the diseased momentum of fascism and capitalism.

The story of Auden in the later thirties is his struggle to expand his psychological parables to embrace the political crisis of fascism. In 'Spain', his attempt to enlist his contemporaries in the fight against Franco, we see him finding an unsuspected correlation between the moral shortcomings of everyday life and the dramatic actions on the peninsula:

On that arid square, that fragment nipped off from hot
Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe;
On that tableland scored by rivers,
Our thoughts have bodies; the menacing shapes of our fever
Are precise and alive. For the fears which made us respond
To the medicine ad, and the brochure of winter cruises
Have become invading battalions;
And our faces, the institute-face, the chain-store, the ruin
Are projecting their greed as the firing squad and the bomb.
Madrid is the heart. Our moments of tenderness blossom
As the ambulance and the sandbag;
Our hours of friendship into a people's army.⁴⁷

Here again we see Auden experimenting with a strange, magical causality, psychology on a mass scale. The invention of such quasi-symbolic causalities and occult logics is at the heart of Auden's intelligence and artistic power. But by the end of the 1930s his confidence in such explanations was waning. The death of W. B. Yeats evoked a famous renunciation of the power of Yeats's art and his own – 'Poetry makes nothing happen.' With

³⁹ Richard Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London: Heinemann, 1995), 24.

⁴⁰ Letter to John B. Auden, July 1927, quoted by Katherine Bucknell in W. H. Auden, *'In Solitude for Company': W. H. Auden After 1940: Unpublished Prose and Recent Criticism*, ed. Katherine Bucknell and Nicholas Jenkins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 140.

⁴¹ W. H. Auden, *The Orators* (1932), in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927–1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 1977), 62.

⁴² Humphrey Carpenter, *W. H. Auden: A Biography* (Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin, 1981), 92.

⁴³ Stephen Spender, 'W. H. Auden and His Poetry', in *Auden: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Monroe K. Spears (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 28.

⁴⁴ W. H. Auden, 'Romantic or Free?' in *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Prose 1939–1948*, ed. Edward Mendelson, 6 vols. to date (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997–), vol. 2 (2002), 71.

⁴⁵ W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage, 1979), 18–19.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 95–6. ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 53–4.

the outbreak of war we find Auden, in 'September 1st, 1939', citing the 'Accurate scholarship' of the Freudian sort which can explain the rise of Hitler – 'What huge imago made/ A psychopathic god' – only to replace it with a moralising explanation more like a nursery rhyme:

I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.⁴⁸

It will not be long before Auden foregoes his activist poetry and his psychoanalytic moralism in favour of the Christian existentialism of Kierkegaard, psychoanalysis now falling among 'those things which astrologers [...] and advertising agents believe'.⁴⁹ If Freud provided many modernists with aesthetic access to foregone cultural materials and logics, it was Auden who made the attempt to think and argue using these magical resources, and it is telling that their failure led him back to religion. In a sense he made the cycle complete. The role of shaman, borrowed by poetry from religion, captured by Freud for science but reclaimed for poetry by Auden, was finally renounced after 1940 in favour of the poet's private commitment to faith.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 86.

⁴⁹ W. H. Auden, 'Vocation and Society (Lecture, January 1943)', in *In Solitude for Company*, ed. Bucknell and Jenkins, 22.