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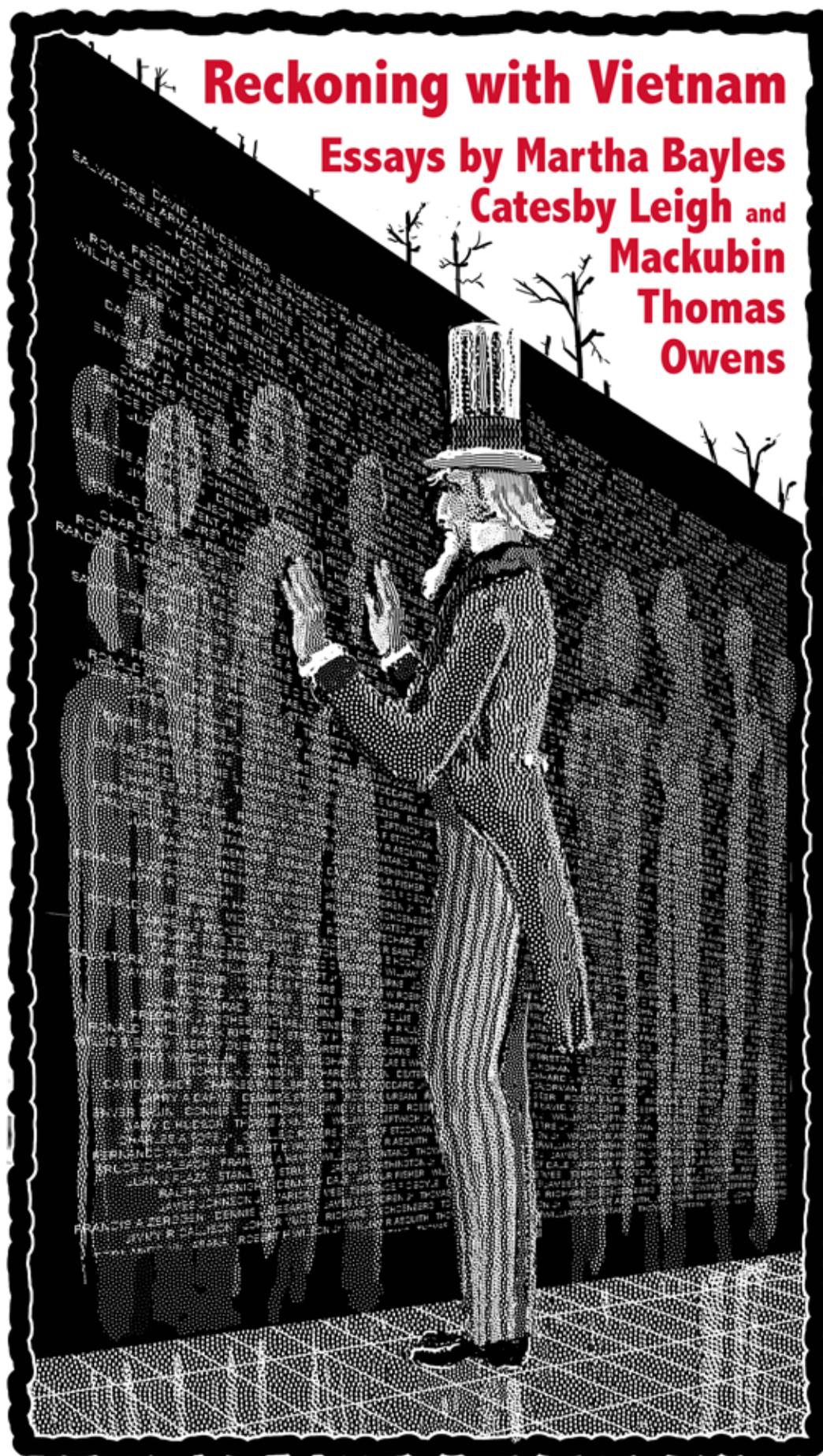
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Book Review by David P. Goldman

## THE PROPHET OF ORDINARY UNHAPPINESS

*Freud: The Making of an Illusion*, by Frederick Crews.  
Metropolitan Books, 768 pages, \$40



FREDERICK CREWS PIONEERED PSYCHO-analytic literary criticism in the 1960s. By 1980 he had concluded that Sigmund Freud was a charlatan. Now professor emeritus at Berkeley, he has devoted much of his career to debunking Freud, taking shots along the way at the whole repertoire of post-modern literary fads. In *Freud: The Making of an Illusion* he has given us a *summa contra psychoanalysis*, digesting the enormous literature refuting Freud and adding some of his own discoveries and conjectures. So overwhelming is the evidence Crews assembles of Freud's professional charlatanism and personal turpitude that the reader finishes his book baffled that this prevaricating, mercenary, self-promoting lout ever managed to put one over on the whole educated world.

Freud's reputation, to be sure, has been in tatters for a generation. Psychoanalysis is nearly extinct; the last practicing Freudian I knew died several years ago. In any word-association test the name "Freud" would elicit the response "fraud." Thanks to Crews and other researchers, the reading public is aware of Freud's malignance. Yet Freud's influence

remains—and has arguably grown. A generation ago one could speak of America as a therapeutic society. Today we resemble a gigantic asylum.

BY 1897 FREUD HAD CONCLUDED THAT all neurotics repressed memories of childhood molestation. The shameful witch trials of the 1980s that sent Kelly Michaels, the Amiraaults, and many others to prison on fabricated child molestation charges marked a new summit of Freud's influence. Tireless reporting by Dorothy Rabinowitz (reprinted in her 2003 book, *No Crueler Tyrannies*) and others publicly discredited the theory of recovered childhood memory—but not before hundreds of lives were ruined and scores of communities traumatized.

The resemblance of the '80s molestation cases to medieval witch trials was no coincidence, Crews reports:

Psychoanalysis would remain a theory about possession, not by the Devil but by bad thoughts that would take up residence in the unconscious and

compel perverse behavior. Soon Freud would drop the idea that neurotics had been molested and would assert, rather, that their own incestuous thoughts had made them sick; in so doing, he would be rending his theory more medieval in spirit. He realized that fact and embraced it. As [Freud] would write in 1923, "The demonological theory of those dark times has won in the end against all the somatic views of the period of 'exact science.' The states of possession correspond to our neuroses, for the explanation of which we once more have recourse to psychical powers."

Child-abuse hysteria has abated, but the public is still consumed by witch hunts against micro-aggressions, triggering, sexual harassment, and so forth. To remedy the dysfunctional sexual life of millennials, the abysmally low college graduation rate of minority men, and other perceived ills, whole universities have been transformed into controlled therapeutic environments, subjecting every aspect of life to inquisitorial control.



Political correctness is a generalization of Freudian theory; it presumes that the waking consciousness of women as well as ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities consists of a minefield of traumatic memories. Public policy must prevent the triggering of these minds. Public institutions, starting with universities, must be converted into the functional equivalent of psychiatric hospitals and all communications censored to minimize trauma.

**C**REWS'S LENGTHY BOOK NEVER LAGS. So depraved is Freud's villainy, so preposterous his assertions, so calamitous the human woe he left behind in his pursuit of status and money, that morbid curiosity commands the reader's attention until the end. It is an exemplary piece of polemical composition. No one who came of age in the West before the mid-1980s escaped Freud's baleful influence, and it is cathartic (pardon the word) to hear just how gullible we were.

Freud didn't heal his patients. He knew he didn't, but he didn't care:

Freud knew that his claims of healing power for psychoanalysis lacked any basis in fact. From time to time he even intimated, amid many claims to the contrary, that patients ought not to expect good results. Therapeutic success, he wrote in his "Little Hans" case history of 1909, "is not our primary aim. We endeavor rather to enable the patient to obtain a conscious grasp of his unconscious wishes." In a 1912 letter to a fellow analyst he observed, "The therapeutic point of view... is certainly not the only one for which psychoanalysis claims interest, nor is it the most important." Freud's pupil Abram Kardiner recalled his declaring, "I have no great interest in therapeutic problems.... I am much too occupied with theoretical problems all the time." Finally in 1932, when he felt himself to be generally revered, he admitted to the world that he had "never been a therapeutic enthusiast."

"Some of Freud's later patients did aver, vaguely, that they had benefited from their analyses," Crews allows. "Already by 1910, such was his shamanic aura that a stroll around the city of Leyden with Gustav Mahler was said to have permanently cured the composer of impotence. But this was faith healing, not psychoanalysis."

Freud's methods did no good. They sometimes did a great deal of harm. Especially re-

pugnant was his treatment of "Anna O." (Bertha Pappenheim) in 1880–1882, presented in Freudian apologetics as "the foundation of psychoanalytic therapy," the first supposed cathartic cure reported in Freud's *Studies on Hysteria* (1895).

Freud's coauthor Josef Breuer, who treated Pappenheim, turned the unfortunate young woman into a morphine and chloral hydrate addict. Crews concludes that "her most serious debility, as of the summer of 1882, and for five years thereafter, wasn't hysteria but the horror of attempted and failed withdrawal." Freud and Breuer claimed in *Studies on Hysteria* that Pappenheim's symptoms were "permanently removed by being given utterance in hypnosis," yet Pappenheim was committed to a sanatorium only five weeks after Breuer stopped treating her.

**T**HE PAPPENHEIM CASE WAS "THE founding deception of psychoanalysis"—the breakthrough that supposedly unlocked the psyche's secrets. The final

### The stink of deceitfulness pervaded every step of Freud's career.

chapter of *Studies on Hysteria*, Crews reports, declared that

the resistance encountered in therapy was "no doubt" the same psychical force that had generated the patient's symptom. Again the intrusion of irrelevant matter into a patient's association "never occurs." When we search for a trauma with the pressure technique, "we shall find it infallibly." The procedure "never fails;" it has "invariably achieved its aim;" and in one instance Freud's confidence in it was "brilliantly justified."

Crews contrasts these bravado assertions with Freud's correspondence with Wilhelm Fliess, his closest friend and collaborator during 1897 and 1898: "The cases of hysteria are proceeding especially poorly. I shall not finish a single one this year either; and as for the next one, I shall be completely without patient material." And: "My work now appears to me to have far less value, and my disorientation to be complete,...another entire year has gone by without any tangible progress in the theory."

Freud's crisis of confidence, though, inspired a great leap from the world of clinical documentation—where nothing ever went right—to the grand assertion of theories that could not be proven. He abandoned the molestation theory of neurosis, which required the identification of specific sexual acts perpetrated upon the patient during childhood, to a general theory of sexuality that framed all human relationships in terms of libido. The Oedipus complex was the cornerstone of this new theory.

**C**REWS SO BADLY WANTS TO EXPOSE both the revised theory and its enshrinement in the Freudian narrative that he gives scant attention to an important question: at what point did Freud transform himself from an obscure, impecunious clinician into psychiatrist-to-the-world? In scientific terms it was "the breakthrough that wasn't," as Crews entitles a chapter, but it surely was a breakthrough for Freud's influence. Freud's claim to have derived the Oedipus complex from clinical work was humbug; rather, "Freud had 'discovered an Oedipus complex' in his own mind." Nonetheless, it was his conjecture about neurosis and sexuality that catapulted him into the first rank of influence.

Freud later told Carl Jung that neuroses' sexual origin was to be defended as a "dogma" of psychoanalysis (Jung split from Freud over this issue). If psychological distress had sexual causes, sex must be the cure. Freud would've been shocked by the 21st century's polymorphous perversity—his condemnation of homosexuality followed the convention of his time—but he stood godfather to the sexual revolution. "I stand for an infinitely freer sexual life," he wrote to the neurologist James J. Putnam, and, later, "I thought it the good right of every human being to strive for sexual gratification and tender love if he saw a way to attain them, both of which he had not found with his wife." As Crews documents, Freud took his own advice. After marrying Martha Bernays, he took her younger sister Minna as a live-in concubine.

Crews's indictment is crushing, his narrative relentless. The stink of deceitfulness pervaded every step of Freud's career, every case history, every publication, and all his personal and professional relations. He sustained the deception because a coterie of apostles in the psychoanalytic movement, including his official biographer, Ernest Jones, conspired to airbrush his record, eliminating lies, inconsistencies, and betrayals. All that's missing from Crews's account is an explanation of why so many clever, energetic men and women should have rallied to Freud's cause in full



knowledge of his foibles, and why this charlatan and mountebank should have arrived at the second decade of the 20th century with “the whole world as a patient.”

A second book gestates inside Crews’s exposé—the story of Freud the German philosopher, following in the footsteps of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Nietzsche. Crews did well to relegate this to a sidebar, for he is less at home among the German sources than he is with Freud’s clinical record. Freud’s intellectual background is less interesting to American readers than the debunking of his therapeutic approach, which perhaps is unfortunate; as Allan Bloom argued 30 years ago in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), behind every baneful idea in the popular culture there lurks a German intellectual. A closer reading of Nietzsche would help explain why Freud’s influence flourishes no matter how thoroughly he’s debunked.

CREWS OBSERVES SHREWDLY THAT Freud’s appeal was literary rather than clinical. It’s hard to understand why Freud’s appeal was irresistible to his contemporaries without knowing the literary context. When Crews ventures out from the confines of his prosecutorial brief into Freud’s cultural context, he is less sure-footed. He believes Freud’s inspiration for the Oedipus complex came from Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872). I do not think that true—if anything, Freud’s mature theory is a riposte to Nietzsche, who toppled the twin pillars of 19th-century German rationalism. The first was Immanuel Kant’s claim that reason alone could derive an ethics. To this Nietzsche’s Zarathustra replied that once humanity (namely Kant) had killed God, everything is permitted. The second is the classical ideal of beauty. Against this Nietzsche offered the story of King Midas, who was told that the demigod Silenus possessed the ultimate secret of wisdom. Midas trapped Silenus and demanded to know the secret. The demigod replied,

Oh, wretched race of a day, children of chance and misery, why do ye compel me to say to you what it were most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is for ever beyond your reach: not to be born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. The second best for you, however, is soon to die.

Classical beauty was a palliative that mankind invented to distract attention from its horror in the face of nothingness. Paul Gordon, in *Tragedy After Nietzsche* (2001), sug-

gests that this is the source of Freud’s theory of *Thanatos*, the death wish.

Nietzsche himself had composed a variation on Goethe’s *Faust* (1829), the first modern literary work to raise the existential question that has dominated modernism: what makes life tolerable? Crews knows that Freud immersed himself in *Faust*, but he does not appear to have read the work himself. His summary is top-to-bottom wrong:

On *Walpurgisnacht* in Goethe’s *Faust*, Mephistopheles offers the hero a magical elixir that grants him both sexual and intellectual mastery. *Faust* was already Freud’s favorite work of serious literature, and it would remain so. The figure of Dr. Faust, risking his soul for freedom from the ethical constraints that render the experience of other mortals so impoverished, would become central to his later self-conception as the founder of an anti-Christian science that could penetrate forbidden realms.

Crews seems to have in mind Christopher Marlowe rather than Goethe. In the latter’s drama, Faust eschews Mephistopheles’s offer of women, money, and fame to ask for *life*. In Walter Arndt’s translation:

What to all of suffering mankind is apportioned  
I mean to savor in my own self’s core,  
Grasp with my mind both highest and most low,  
Weigh down my spirit with their weal and woe.

To which a bemused Mephisto replies:

Oh, take my word, who for millennia past  
Has had this rocky fare to chomp,  
That from his first breath to his last  
No man digests that ancient sourdough lump!  
Believe the likes of us; the whole  
Is made but for a god’s delight!

MEPHISTO BETS THAT NO MAN CAN digest the “sourdough” of ordinary life. Faust dares the devil to show him a moment so rapturous that he will want to hang onto it, rather than continue to strive. Mephisto gives him an elixir (and not on *Walpurgisnacht*, but in a witch’s kitchen) to restore his youth in the hope that love will spellbind his prospective victim. The illusions he offers—the innocent love of Gretchen, the power of the imperial chancellery, the ideal beauty

of Helen of Troy—all fail to seduce Faust, who dies exclaiming, “Only he earns freedom as well as life who must conquer them every day.” Faust without the wager is like Hamlet without the Ghost.

Freud was Mephisto rather than Faust. From Goethe and Nietzsche he learned that mortals can’t digest life’s sourdough. That’s the nub of the *Studies on Hysteria*’s celebrated dictum: “Much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness.” Freud didn’t discover *Eros* and *Thanatos*; Europe had been besotted on *Liebestod* since Richard Wagner premiered *Tristan und Isolde* in 1865. Wagner’s heroines expire in an erotic paroxysm; Freud’s wake up the next morning hysterical and hope to be guided back to the ordinary unhappiness of everyday life. He might’ve been a snake-oil salesman, but he sold a potion to cure what ailed the world: disgust at life disenchanting. That explains why Freud’s influence grows in inverse proportion to his credibility. The post-religious world is not in the market for clinical proof or historical consistency. What it wants is a palliative for the hysterical misery it derives from unrestricted sexual gratification and arbitrary self-invention.

THERE IS ANOTHER ASPECT OF CREWS’S account that bears mention: his discomfort with Freud’s Jewishness. He writes, for example, that

[i]t may be asked why Freud continued to accept patients at all. The answer can be stated in one word, but it is the word that, in most Freud studies, dare not speak its name: *money*. A critic who so much as mentions the topic is regarded as having displayed anti-Semitism or “Jewish self-hatred.”

Crews believes that Jewish rancor against Christianity was Freud’s primary motivation. “Christianity, for Nietzsche, was the institutionalized revenge of the weak upon the strong, who were now encouraged to cast it aside,” he avers.

That counsel was emboldening for Freud. It is hardly news, by now, that psychoanalytic theory constituted a thoroughgoing inversion of Christian principles, with sexual gratification triumphant over virtuous sacrifice for heaven, and with the clinical interview serving as a mock confessional in which absolution could be granted without any need for repentance. Only gradually has it been realized, however, that this remissive



order, instead of having been deduced from efficacious treatments of neurotics, answered to Freud's craving to pull down the temple of *Pauline law* [emphasis added].... [H]e meant to overthrow the whole Christian order, earning payback for all the bigoted popes, the sadists of the Inquisition, the modern promulgators of "blood libel" slander, and the Catholic bureaucrats who had held his professorship hostage.

CREWS HAS HERE MISREAD BOTH Nietzsche and Freud. The reference to "Pauline law" is a (pardon the term) Freudian slip. Saint Paul offered freedom from the "curse of the law" to Christians who were adopted into Israel by love and faith rather than observance of the law. Nietzsche did not say that Christianity was the revenge of the weak against the strong; he wrote (in 1887's *The Genealogy of Morals*) that Christianity was *Jewish* revenge on the pagan world:

From the tree trunk of Jewish vengeance and hatred—the deepest and sublimest hatred in human history, since it gave birth to ideals and a new set of values—grew a branch that was equally unique: a new love, the deepest and sublimest of loves.... But let no one surmise that this love represented a denial of the thirst for vengeance, that it contravened the Jewish hatred. Exactly the opposite is true. Love grew out of the hatred as the tree's crown, spreading triumphantly in the purest sunlight.... Jesus of Nazareth, the gospel of love made flesh, the "redeemer," who

brought blessing and victory to the poor, the sick, the sinners—what was he but temptation in its most sinister and irresistible form, bringing men by a roundabout way to precisely those Jewish values and renovations of this ideal? Has not Israel, precisely by the detour of this "redeemer," this seeming antagonist and destroyer of Israel, reached the final goal of its sublime vindictiveness?

Freud reserved his deepest rancor for Judaism rather than Christianity. Crews notes in passing that Freud's last book, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), claims Moses was an Egyptian priest who invented the Jewish religion to control a slave rabble. The slaves murdered Moses and out of guilt mythologized him. Freud cribbed this canard from an 18th-century German Jesuit made famous by Friedrich Schiller. One might say that Freud's attitude towards Judaism was (pardon the term) Oedipal.

FREUD READ NIETZSCHE MORE CAREFULLY than Crews; like Nietzsche, he discerns Jew-hatred at the foundation of pagan disdain for Christianity. He wrote in *Moses and Monotheism*:

We must not forget that all the peoples who now excel in the practice of antisemitism became Christians only in relatively recent times, sometimes forced to it by bloody compulsion. One might say they are all "badly christened"; under the thin veneer of Christianity they have remained what their ancestors were, barbarically poly-

theistic. They have not yet overcome their grudge against the new religion which was forced on them, and they have projected it on to the source from which Christianity came to them. The fact that the Gospels tell a story which is enacted among Jews, and in truth treats only of Jews, has facilitated such a projection. The hatred for Judaism is at bottom hatred for Christianity, and it is not surprising that in the German National Socialist revolution this close connection of the two monotheistic religions finds such clear expression in the hostile treatment of both.

That is hardly the declaration of a Jew consumed by hatred of Christianity. On the contrary, Freud's argument that "hatred for Judaism is at bottom hatred for Christianity" in my view is on the mark.

Frederick Crews's *Making of an Illusion* lays bare Freud's mendaciousness. Sigmund Freud was a dreadful physician but a brilliant salesman who understood all too well what the world wanted to buy. After two centuries of the Age of Reason, he grasped that a world that had given up its religion wanted permission to be irrational once again. The world wallowed in hysterical misery; he offered to replace it with ordinary unhappiness. Thanks to scholars like Crews, we no longer believe in Freud, even if we remain, unwittingly, under his thrall.

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