

Psychoanalysis and  
Cinema: Moments of  
Letter from an  
Unknown Woman



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WHEN THE MAN IN Max Ophuls' film *Letter from an Unknown Woman* reaches the final words of the letter addressed to him by the, or by some, unknown woman, he is shown—according to well-established routines of montage—to be assaulted by a sequence of images from earlier moments in the film. This assault of images proves to be death-dealing. His response to finishing the reading of the letter is to stare out past it, as if calling up the film's images; and his response to the assault of the ensuing repeated images is to cover his eyes with the outspread fingers of both hands in a melodramatic gesture of horror and exhaustion. Yet he sees nothing we have not seen, and the images themselves (as it were) are quite banal—his pulling the veil of the woman's hat up over her face, the two of them at the Prater amusement park in winter, her taking a candied apple, their dancing, his playing a waltz for her on the piano in an empty ballroom. *An apparently excessive response to apparently banal images*—it seems a characterization of a response to film generally, at least to certain kinds of film, perhaps above all to classical Hollywood films. But since Max Ophuls is a director, and this is a film, of major ambition, the implication may be that the man's response here to the returning images of the film and of his past—his horror and exhaustion—somehow underlies our response to any film of this kind, perhaps to major film as such, or ought to. It seems a particular mode of horror that these hands would ward off, since we may equally think of the images looming at this man not as what he has seen but as

what he has *not* seen, has refused to see. Then are we sure that we have seen what it is up to us to see? What motivates these images? Why does their knowledge constitute an assault? If *Letter from an Unknown Woman* were merely the high-class so-called woman's film it is commonly taken to be—as the bulk of the melodramas I refer to here are generally taken to be—it and they could not justify and satisfy the imposition of such questions of criticism.

Remarriage comedy, in effect enacting what Freud calls the diphasic character of human sexuality, displays the nostalgic structure of human experience. Since these films, being major achievements of the art of film, thus reveal some internal affinity of the phenomenon of nostalgia with the phenomenon of film, the popular nostalgia now associated with movies stands to be understood as a parody, or avoidance, of an inherent, treacherous property of the medium of film as such. The drama of the remarriage genre, the argument that brings into play the intellectual and emotional bravery of the distinctive, lucid pairs whose interactions or conversations form the interest of the genre—Irene Dunne and Cary Grant, Barbara Stanwyck and Henry Fonda, Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy—turns on their efforts to transform an intimacy as between brother and sister into an erotic friendship capable of withstanding, and returning, the gaze of legitimate civilization. They conduct, in short, the argument of marriage. In *The Philadelphia Story* (directed by George Cukor in 1940) this ancient intimacy—here between Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant—is called, twice, growing up together. In *The Awful Truth* (directed by Leo McCarey in 1937) the woman (Irene Dunne) actually, climactically, enacts a role as her husband's sister (the husband is again Cary Grant), in which this high-minded society lady blatantly displays her capacity for low-down sexiness.

The transformation of incestuous knowledge into erotic exchange is a function of something I call the achievement of the daily, of the diurnal, the putting together of night and day (as classical comedy puts together the seasons of the year), a process of willing repetition whose concept is the domestic, or marriage, however surprising the images of marriage become in these films. “Repetition” is the title Kierkegaard gives to his thoughts about the faith required in achieving marriage; and the willing acceptance of repetition, or rather eternal recurrence, is the recipe Nietzsche discovered as the antidote for our otherwise fated future of nihil-

ism, the thing Nietzsche calls “the revenge against time and its ‘It was’”—a revenge itself constituting a last effort not to die of nostalgia.

Nietzsche explicitly invokes the concept of marriage in his prophetic cry (in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) for this redemption or reconception of time. (In German *Hochzeit* [literally, high time] means marriage or wedding. In the section called “Of Great Events,” Zarathustra says it is now *die höchste Zeit* [the highest time]; moreover, in the section called “The Seven Seals,” Zarathustra explicitly enough presents his symbol of eternal recurrence as “the wedding ring of rings [*dem höchsten Ring der Ringe*]—the Ring of Recurrence.”) These ideas of repetition may be said to require of our lives the perpetual invention of the present from the past, out of the past. This seems to be the vision of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which death—I take it to comprehend psychological death—comes either through the success of this invention, that is, the discovery of one's own death (hence, surely, of one's own life, say, of one's willingness to live), or else through the relapse of the psychological into the biological and beyond into the inorganic, which may be viewed as counter modes of repetition.

In writing *Pursuits of Happiness* I incurred a number of intellectual debts that I propose here not to settle but somewhat to identify and organize—in effect, to rewrite certain of my outstanding promissory notes. My initial business is to continue to confirm a prediction of *Pursuits of Happiness* to the effect that there must exist a genre of film, in particular some form of melodrama, adjacent to, or derived from, that of remarriage comedy, in which the themes and structure of the comedy are modified or negated in such a way as to reveal systematically the threats (of misunderstanding, of violence) that in each of the remarriage comedies dog its happiness. My next main business will be to say how I cloak my debt to the writing of Freud, which means to say what I conceive certain relations of psychoanalysis and philosophy to consist in. My concluding piece of business, as a kind of extended epilogue, will be to produce a reading of the moment I invoked in opening these remarks, a man's melodramatic covering of his eyes, from the Ophuls film from which I have adapted the title of the new genre.

THE PREDICTION THAT some form of melodrama awaited definition was based on various moments from each of the comedies of

remarriage. In the earliest of the definitive remarriage structures, *It Happened One Night*, the pair work through episodes of poverty, theft, blackmail, and sordid images of marriage; in *The Awful Truth* the pair face distrust, jealousy, scandal, and the mindless rumoring of a prospective mother-in-law; in *His Girl Friday* the pair deal with political corruption, brutal moralism, and wasting cynicism; in *The Lady Eve* with duplicity and the intractableness of the past; in *The Philadelphia Story* with pretentiousness, perverseness, alcoholism, and frigidity.

But it is in the last of the remarriage comedies, *Adam's Rib*, that melodrama threatens on several occasions almost to take the comedy over. The movie opens with a sequence, in effect a long prologue, in which a wife and mother tracks her husband to the apartment of another woman and shoots him. Played by the virtuoso Judy Holliday, the part is continuously hilarious, touching, and frightening, so that one never rests content with one's response to her. An early sequence of the film proper (so to speak) consists of the screening of a film-within-a-film, a home movie that depicts the principal pair coming into possession of their country house in Connecticut, in which Spencer Tracy twice takes on comically the postures and grimaces of an expansive, classical villain, threatening, with a twirl of his imaginary mustache, to dispossess Katharine Hepburn of something more precious than country houses. These passing comic glimpses of the man's villainous powers recur more disturbingly toward the end of the film, when he in turn tracks his spouse and confronts her in what he might conceivably take to be a compromising situation, and for all the world threatens to shoot her and her companion (David Wayne). What he is threatening them with soon proves to be a pistol made of licorice, but not too soon for us to have confronted unmistakably a quality of violence in this character that is as genuine—such is the power of Spencer Tracy as an actor on film—as his tenderness and playfulness. I say in the chapter on *Adam's Rib* in *Pursuits of Happiness* that Tracy's character as qualified in this film declares one subject of the genre as a whole to be the idea of maleness itself as villainous, say sadistic. (Having made his legal point, Tracy turns the candy gun on himself, into his mouth, and proceeds to eat it—a gesture that creates its comic effect but that also smacks of madness and of a further capacity for violence and horror hardly less frightening on reflection than the simple capacity

for shooting people in anger.) The suggestion I drew is that if the masculine (I should say, male heterosexual) gender as such, so far in the development of our culture, and in so beautifully developed a specimen of it as Spencer Tracy, is tainted with villainy, then the happiness in even these immensely privileged marriages exists only so far as the pair together locate and contain this taint—you may say domesticate it, make a home for it—as if the task of marriage is to overcome the villainy in marriage itself. Remarriage comedies show the task to be unending and the interest in the task to be unending.

The taint of villainy leaves a moral cloud, some will say a political one, over these films, a cloud that my book does not try, or wish, to disperse. It can be pictured by taking the intelligent, vivid women in these films to be descendants of Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, who leaves her husband and children in search of what she calls, something her husband has said she required, an education. She leaves saying that he is not the man to provide her with one, implying both that the education she requires is in the hands of men and that only a man capable of providing it, from whom it would be acceptable, could count for her as a husband. Thinking of the woman of remarriage comedy as lucky to have found such a man, remarriage comedy studies, among other matters, what has made him, inescapably bearing the masculine taint, acceptable. That she can, with him, have what the woman in *The Awful Truth* calls “some grand laughs” is indispensable, but not an answer; the question becomes how this happens with him.

This prompts two further questions, with which we are entered into the melodrama of unknownness. What of the women who have not found, and could not manage or relish a relationship with such a man, Nora's other, surely more numerous, descendants? And what, more particularly, of the women of the same era on film who are at least the spiritual equals of the women of remarriage comedy but whom no man can be thought to educate—I mean the women we might take as achieving the highest reaches of stardom, of female independence so far as film can manifest it—Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich and, at their best, Bette Davis and Barbara Stanwyck and Ingrid Bergman, perhaps a few others.

The price of the woman's happiness in the genre of remarriage comedy is the absence of her mother (underscored by the attractive and signal presence, whenever he is present, of the woman's

father) together with the strict absence of children for her, the denial of her as a mother—as if the woman has been abandoned, so far, to the world of men. Could remarriage comedies achieve their happiness in good faith if they denied the possibility of another path to education and feminine integrity? It would amount to denying that the happiness of these women indeed exacts a price, if of their own choice, affordable out of their own talents and tastes, suggesting instead that women without these talents and tastes are simply out of luck. Such an idea is false to the feeling shown by these women toward women unlike themselves—as, for example, Rosalind Russell toward the outcast woman in *His Girl Friday*, or Irene Dunne toward the nightclub singer whose identity she takes on in *The Awful Truth*, or Claudette Colbert toward the mother who faints on the bus in *It Happened One Night*. It is as if these moments signal that such films do not stand in generic insulation from films in which another way of education and integrity is taken.

With one further feature of the way of education sought by Nora's comedic progeny, I can formulate the character I seek in a melodrama derived from the comedy of remarriage that concerns those spiritually equal women (equal in their imagination of happiness and their demand for it) among those I am calling Nora's other progeny.

The demand for education in the comedies presents itself as a matter of becoming created (not, eventually, *by* anyone other than herself, and not *for* anyone), as if the women's lives heretofore have been nonexistent, as if they have haunted the world, as if their materialization will constitute a creation of the new woman and hence a creation, or a further step in the creation, of the human. This idea has various sources and plays various roles as the theory of remarriage develops in *Pursuits of Happiness*. Theologically, it alludes to the creation of the woman from Adam in *Genesis*, specifically its use by Protestant thinkers, impressive among them John Milton, to ratify marriage and to justify divorce. Cinematically, it emphasizes the role of the camera in transforming human figures of flesh and blood into psychic shadows of themselves, in particular in transforming the woman, of whose body more than is conventional is on some occasion found to be revealed (today such exposure would perhaps be pointless), so that Katharine Hepburn will be shown pointedly doing her own diving in *The*

*Philadelphia Story*, or awkwardly crawling through the woods in a wet, clinging dress, or having her skirt torn off accidentally on purpose by the man in *Bringing Up Baby*, or being given a massage in *Adam's Rib*. The most famous of all such exposures, I guess, is that of Claudette Colbert showing some leg to hitch a ride in *It Happened One Night*. Dramatically, the idea of creation refers to a structure Northrop Frye calls Old Comedy—he is, however, thinking primarily of Shakespearean drama—in which the woman holds the key to the happy outcome of the plot and suffers something like death and resurrection: *All's Well That Ends Well* and *The Winter's Tale* would be signal examples. I take Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* to be the other primary source (along with Ibsen's Nora) of the woman in remarriage comedy, understanding that play as a whole, in the light of the film genre, as the greatest of the structures of remarriage. *The Winter's Tale* also proves (along with *A Doll's House*) to underlie the women of the derived melodrama of unknownness, since while Hermione's resurrection at the close of the play (which I interpret as a kind of marriage ceremony) is a function of Leontes's faith and love, it is before that a function of Paulina's constancy and effectiveness, and the ceremony provides Hermione not just with her husband again (to whom she does not at the end speak) but as well with her daughter again (to whom she does speak).

In remarriage comedy the transformation of the woman is accomplished in a mode of exchange or conversation that is surely among the glories of dialogue in the history of the art of talking pictures. The way these pairs talk together I propose as one perfect manifestation of what Milton calls that “meet and cheerful conversation” (by which he means talk as well as more than talk), which he, most emphatically among the Protestant thinkers so far as I have seen, took to constitute God's purpose in instituting sexual difference, hence what is generally called marriage. But now if deriving a genre of melodrama from remarriage comedy requires, as I assume, the retaining of the woman's search for metamorphosis and existence, it nevertheless cannot take place through such ecstatic exchanges as earmark the comedies; which is to say that the woman of melodrama, as shown to us, will not find herself in what the comedies teach us marriage is, but accordingly in something less or conceivably more than that.

Then the sense of the character (or underlying story or myth)



of film I was to look for in establishing a genre of melodrama may be formulated in the following way: a woman achieves existence (or fails to), or establishes her right to existence in the form of a metamorphosis (or fails to), apart from or beyond satisfaction by marriage (of a certain kind) and with the presence of her mother and of her children, where something in her language must be as traumatic in her case as the conversation of marriage is for her comedic sisters—perhaps it will be an aria of divorce, from husband, lover, mother, or child. (A vast, related matter, which I simply mention here, is that what is normally called adultery is not to be expected in these structures, since normally it plays no role in remarriage comedies—something that distinguishes them from Restoration comedy and from French farce. Thus, structures such as *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary* are not members of what I am calling the melodrama of the unknown woman. In this genre it will not be the threat of social scandal that comes between a woman and a man.)

But what is the emphasis on unknownness for? What does it mean to say that it motivates an argument? And what has the argument to do with nihilism and diurnal recurrence? And why is it particularly about a woman that the argument takes place? What is the mystery about her lack of creation? And why should melodrama be expected to “derive” from comedy? And what is it that makes the absence of a woman’s mother a scene of comedy and the presence of her mother a scene of melodrama? And—perhaps above all—what kinds of questions are these? Philosophical? Psychoanalytic? Historical? Aesthetic? If, as I hope, one would like to, answer “All of these, at least,” then one will want to say how it is that the same questions can belong to various fields that typically, in our culture, refuse to listen to one another.

The questions express further regions of what I called the intellectual debts incurred in writing *Pursuits of Happiness*, ones I had the luxury then of mostly leaving implicit. The debt I have worked on most explicitly in the past several years concerns the ideas of the diurnal, and of eternal repetition, and of the uneventful, as interpretations of the ordinary or everyday.

The concept of the ordinary reaches back to the earliest of my debts in philosophy. The first essay I published that I still use—“Must We Mean What We Say?” (1958)—is a defense of so-called ordinary language philosophy as represented by the work a genera-

tion or so ago at Oxford of J. L. Austin and at Cambridge of the later Wittgenstein. Their work is commonly thought to represent an effort to refute philosophical skepticism, as expressed most famously in Descartes and in Hume, and an essential drive of my book *The Claim of Reason* (1979) is to show that, at least in the case of Wittgenstein, this is a fateful distortion, that Wittgenstein’s teaching is on the contrary that skepticism is (not exactly true, but not exactly false either; it is the name of) a standing threat to, or temptation of, the human mind—that our ordinary language and its representation of the world *can* be philosophically repudiated and that it is essential to our inheritance and mutual possession of language, as well as to what inspires philosophy, that this should be so. But *The Claim of Reason*, for all its length, does not say, any more than Austin and Wittgenstein do very much to say, what the ordinary is, why natural language is ordinary, beyond saying that ordinary or everyday language is exactly not a special philosophical language and that any special philosophical language is answerable to the ordinary, and beyond suggesting that the ordinary is precisely what it is that skepticism attacks—as if the ordinary is best to be discovered, or say that in philosophy it is only discovered, in its loss. Toward the end of *The Claim of Reason*, the effort to overcome skepticism begins to present itself as the motivation of romanticism, especially its versions in Coleridge and Wordsworth and in their American inheritors Emerson and Thoreau. In recent years I have been following up the idea that what philosophy in Wittgenstein and Austin means by the ordinary or everyday is figured in what Wordsworth means by the rustic and common and what Emerson and Thoreau mean by the today, the common, the low, the near.<sup>1</sup>

But then *Pursuits of Happiness* can be seen as beginning to pay its philosophical debts even as it incurs them. I have linked its films’ portrait of marriage, formed through the concepts of repetition and devotion, with what, in an essay that compares the projects of Emerson and of Thoreau with—on an opposite side of the American mind—those of Poe and of Hawthorne, I called their opposite efforts at the interpretation of domestication, call it marriage. From this further interpretation of the ordinary (the ordinary as the domestic) the thought arises (as articulated in the Introduction) that, as in the case of literature, the threat to the ordinary that philosophy names skepticism should show up in film’s

favorite threat to forms of marriage, namely, in forms of melodrama. This thought suggests further that, since melodramas together with tragedy classically tell stories of revenge, philosophical skepticism will in return be readable as such a story, a kind of violence the human mind performs in response to its discovery of its limitation or exclusion, its sense of rebuff by truth.

The problem of the existence of other minds is the formulation given in the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy to the skeptical question whether I can know of the existence (not, as primarily in Descartes and in Hume, of myself and of God and of the external world, but) of human creatures other than myself, know them to be, as it were, like myself, and not, as we are accustomed to asking recently with more or less seriousness, some species of automaton or alien. In *Pursuits of Happiness*, I say explicitly of only two of the comedies that they are studies of the problem of the existence of the other, but the overcoming of skeptical doubt can be found in all remarriage comedy: in *It Happened One Night* the famous blanket that empirically conceals the woman and thereby magnifies her metaphysical presence dramatizes the problem of unknownness as one of splitting the other, as between outside and inside, say between perception and imagination (and since the blanket is a figure for a film screen, film as such is opened up in the split); in *The Lady Eve* the man's not knowing the recurrence of the same woman is shown as the cause of his more or less comic, hence more or less forgivable, idiocy; in *The Awful Truth* the woman shows the all-knowing man what he does not know about her and helps him find words for it that take back the divorce; in *Adam's Rib* the famously sophisticated and devoted couple demonstrate in simple words and shows and in surrealistic ordinariness (they climb into bed with their hats on) that precisely what neither of their sexes knows, and what their marriage is the happy struggle to formulate, is the difference between them; in *The Philadelphia Story* the man's idea of marriage, of the teaching that the woman has chosen to learn, is his willingness to know her as unknown (as he expresses it, "I'll risk it, will you?").

OTHER OF MY intellectual debts remain fully outstanding, that to Freud's work before all. A beholdenness to Sigmund Freud's intervention in Western culture is hardly something for concealment, but I have until now left my commitment to it fairly implicit. This

has been not merely out of intellectual terror at Freud's achievement but in service of an idea and in compensation for a dissatisfaction I might formulate as follows: psychoanalytic interpretations of the arts in American culture have, until quite recently, on the whole been content to permit the texts under analysis not to challenge the concepts of analysis being applied to them, and this seemed to me to do injustice both to psychoanalysis and to literature (the art that has attracted most psychoanalytic criticism). My response was to make a virtue of this defect by trying, in my readings of film as well as of literature and of philosophy, to recapitulate what I understood by Freud's saying that he had been preceded in his insights by the creative writers of his tradition; that is, I tried to arrive at a sense for each text I encountered (it was my private touchstone for when an interpretation had gone far enough to leave for the moment) that psychoanalysis had become called for, as if called for in the history of knowledge, as if each psychoanalytic reading were charged with rediscovering the reality of psychoanalysis. This still does not seem to me an irrelevant ambition, but it is also no longer a sufficient response in our altered environment. Some of the most interesting and useful criticism and literary theory currently being produced is decisively psychoanalytic in inspiration, an alteration initiated for us most prominently by the past three or so decades of work in Paris and represented in this country by—to pick examples from which I have particularly profited—Neil Hertz on the Dora case, Shoshana Felman on Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw," and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick on homophobia in *Our Mutual Friend*.<sup>2</sup> And now my problem has become that I am unsure whether I understand the constitution of the discourses in which this material is presented in relation to what I take philosophy to be, a constitution to which, such as it is, I am also committed. So some siting of this relation is no longer mine to postpone.

I content myself here with saying that Freud's lifelong series of dissociations of his work from the work of philosophy seems to me to protest too much and to have done harm whose extent is only now beginning to reveal itself. I call attention to one of those dissociations in which Freud's ambivalence on the matter bleeds through. It comes in chapter 4 of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, just as he has distinguished "the operations of two psychical forces (or we may describe them as currents or systems)." Freud goes on to

say: "These considerations may lead us to feel that the interpretation of dreams may enable us to draw conclusions as to the structure of our mental apparatus which we have hoped for in vain from philosophy."<sup>3</sup> Given that this feeling is followed up by Freud in the extraordinary chapter 7, which ends the book, a piece of theoretical speculation continuous with the early, posthumously published "Project for a Scientific Psychology," the ambiguity of the remark seems plain: it can be taken, and always is, so far as I know, to mean that our vain waiting for *philosophy* is now to be replaced by the positive work of something else, call it psychoanalysis (which may or may not be a "scientific" psychology); but the remark can equally be taken to mean that our *waiting* for philosophy is at last no longer vain, that philosophy has been fulfilled in the form of psychoanalysis. That this form may destroy earlier forms of philosophizing is no bar to conceiving of psychoanalysis as a philosophy. On the contrary, the two thinkers more indisputably recognized as philosophers who have opened for me what philosophy in our age may look like, such as it interests me most—Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* and Martin Heidegger in such a work as *What Is Called Thinking?*—have both written in declared opposition to philosophy as they received it. Heidegger has called philosophy the deepest enemy of thinking, and Wittgenstein has said that what he does replaces philosophy.

The idea of "replacing" here has its own ambiguity. It could mean what the logical positivists roughly meant, that philosophy, so far as it remains intelligible, is to become logic or science. Or it could mean what I take Wittgenstein to mean, that the impulse to philosophy and the consequences of it are to be achieved by replacing, or reconceiving, the ground or the place of the thus preserved activity of philosophizing. And something like this could be said to be what every original philosopher since at least Descartes and Bacon and Locke has illustrated. It is as if in Wittgenstein and in Heidegger the fate to philosophize and the fate to undo philosophizing are located as radical, twin features of the human as such.

I am not choosing one sense of replacement over the other for Freud's relation to philosophy. On the contrary, my sense remains that the relation so far is ambiguous or ambivalent. Such matters are apt to be discussed nowadays in terms of Freud's preoccupation with what is called priority or originality—issues differently associated with the names of Harold Bloom and Jacques Derrida. So it

may be worth my saying that Bloom strikes me as unduly leveling matters when he speaks of Freud's crisis in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as obeying the structure of a poet's demand, against his precursors, for equal immortality.<sup>4</sup> Freud's problem there was less to *establish* his originality or uniqueness than to determine whether the cost or curse of that *obvious* uniqueness might not itself be the loss of immortality. I find that I agree here with what I understand to be Derrida's view (of chapter 2 anyway) of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—that in it, and in anticipation of his own death, Freud is asking himself whether his achievement, uniquely among the sciences (or, for that matter, the arts) in being bound to the uniqueness of one man's name, is inheritable.<sup>5</sup> This is the question enacted by the scenes of Freud the father and grandfather circling the Fort/Da game of repetition and domination, looking so much like the inheritance of language itself, of selfhood itself. What is at stake is whether psychoanalysis is inheritable—you may say repeatable—as science is inheritable, our modern paradigm for the teachable. If psychoanalysis is not thus inheritable, it follows that it is not exactly a science. But the matter goes beyond this question. If psychoanalysis is not exactly (what we mean by) a science, then its intellectual achievement may be lost to humankind. But now if this expresses Freud's preoccupation in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and elsewhere, then this preoccupation links his work with philosophy, for it is in philosophy that the question of the loss of itself is internal to its faithfulness to itself.

This claim reveals me as one of those for whom the question whether philosophy exists sometimes seems the only question philosophy is bound to, that to cease caring what philosophy is and whether it exists—amid whatever tasks and in whatever forms philosophy may appear in a given historical moment—is to abandon philosophy, to cede it to logic or to science or to poetry or to politics or to religion. That the question of philosophy is the only business of philosophy is the teaching I take from the works of Wittgenstein and of Heidegger whose inheritance I have claimed. The question of inheritance, of continued existence, appears in their work as the question whether philosophy can be taught or, say, the question how thinking is learned, the form the question takes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. It is perhaps primarily for this reason that my philosophical colleagues in the Anglo-American profession of philosophy still generally (of course there

are exceptions) hold Wittgenstein or Heidegger at a distance, at varying distances from their conceptions of themselves.

What would be lost if philosophy, or psychoanalysis, were lost to us? One can take the question of philosophy as the question whether the life of reason is (any longer) attractive and recognizable, or as the question whether by my life I can and do affirm my existence in a world among others, or whether I deny this, of myself, of others, and of the world. It is some such question that Nietzsche took as the issue of what he called nihilism, a matter in which he had taken decisive instruction from Ralph Waldo Emerson. I persist, as indicated, in calling the issue by its, or its ancestor's, older name of skepticism; as I persist in thinking that to lose knowledge of the human possibility of skepticism means to lose knowledge of the human, something whose possibility I envision in *The Claim of Reason*, extending a problematic of Wittgenstein's under the title of soul-blindness.

It is from a perspective of our culture as having entered on a path of radical skepticism (hence on a path to deny this path) from the time of, say, Shakespeare and Descartes—or say from the time of the fall of kings and the rise of the new science and the death of God—that I see, late in this history, the advent of psychoanalysis as the place, perhaps the last, in which the human psyche as such, the idea that there is a life of the mind, hence a death, receives its proof. It receives its proof of its existence in the only form in which that psyche can (any longer) believe it, namely, as essentially unknown to itself, say unconscious. As Freud puts it in the closing pages of *The Interpretation of Dreams*: “The unconscious is the true psychical reality” (5:613). This can seem a mere piece of rhetoric on Freud's part, arbitrarily underrating the reality of consciousness and promoting the unconscious out of something like a prejudice that promotes the reality of atomic particles over the reality of flesh and blood and its opposable things—and certainly on less, or no, compelling intellectual grounds. But when seen in its relation to, or as a displacement of, philosophy, Freud's assertion declares that for the mind to lose the psychoanalytic intuition of itself as unconscious would be for it to lose the last proof of its own existence. (One may feel here the need for a dialectical qualification or limitation; this loss of proof, hence of human existence, is specific to the historical-political development in which the individual requires such a proof before, as it were, his or her own eyes, a private proof.

The question may then be open whether, in a further development, the proof might be otherwise possible, say performed before the answering heart of a community. But in that case, would such a proof be necessary? Would philosophy?)

How easy this intuition is to lose (the mind's [psychoanalytic] intuition of its existence as unconscious), how hard the place of this intuition is to find—the place of the proof of existence constituted in the origin of psychoanalysis as a fulfillment of philosophy—is emblemized by how obscure this or any relation of philosophy and psychoanalysis is to us, an obscurity our institutions of learning serve to enforce. (I do not just mean that psychoanalysis is not usually a university subject and only questionably should become one; I mean as well that philosophy is, or should become, only questionably such a subject.) The tale to be told here is as yet perhaps untellable, by us and for us in America—the tale of Freud's inheritance (inescapable for an ambitious student of German culture of Freud's time) of the outburst of thinking initiated by Kant and then developed continuously by Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. One possible opening passage of this story is from the same closing pages I just cited from *The Interpretation of Dreams*: “What I . . . describe is not the same as the unconscious of philosophers. . . . In its innermost nature it [that is, psychical reality, the unconscious] is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communication of our sense organs” (5:614, 613). Freud allows himself to dismiss what he calls “the unconscious of philosophers” (no doubt referring to what some philosophers have referred to with the word “unconscious”) without allowing himself to recognize that his connecting in the same sentence the innermost nature of psychic reality and the innermost nature of external reality as equally, and hence apparently for the same reasons, unknown, is pure Kant, as Freud links the unknown ground of both inner and outer to a realm of an unconditioned thing-in-itself, which Kant virtually calls the It (he spells it “X”).<sup>6</sup> Kant's linking of the inner and the outer sounds like this: “The conditions of the *possibility of experience* in general are at the same time the *possibility of the objects of experience*.”<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, in *What Is Called Thinking?* quotes this passage from Kant and from it in effect rapidly derives the tradition of German so-called Idealism. He adduces some words of Schelling,



in which the pivot of inner and outer sounds this way: "In the final and highest instance, there is no being other than willing. Willing is primal being and to [willing] alone belong all [primal being's] predicates: being unconditioned, eternity, independence of time, self-affirmation. All philosophy strives only to find this highest expression."<sup>8</sup> The predicates of being unconditioned and of independence of time will remind us of Freud's predicates of the unconscious. Schelling's lectures in Berlin in 1841 were, as noted in Karl Löwith's *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, attended by Engels, Bakunin, Kierkegaard, and Burckhardt. And 1841 is also the year of Emerson's first volume of essays. His volume sounds, for example, this way: "Permanence is a word of degrees. Every thing is medial." "It is the highest power of divine moments that they abolish our contritions also . . . for these moments confer a sort of omnipresence and omnipotence, which asks nothing of duration, but sees that the energy of the mind is commensurate with the work to be done, without time. . . . I unsettle all things . . . I simply experiment."<sup>9</sup> Compared with the philosophical culture of Schelling's audience, Emerson's mostly had none; yet his philosophizing was more advanced than Schelling's, if Nietzsche's is (since Emerson's transcendental realm is not fixed; the direction or height of the will is in principle open). Heidegger claims for his quotation from Schelling that it is the classic formulation of the appearance of metaphysics in the modern era, an appearance that is essential "to understand[ing] that—and how—Nietzsche from the very start thinks of revenge [the basis of nihilism] and the deliverance from revenge in metaphysical terms, that is, in the light of Being which determines all beings."<sup>10</sup> However remote the fate of such a claim may seem to us here now, it will, if nothing else, at any time stand between us and our desire, however intermittent, yet persistent, for an exchange with contemporary French thought; since Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche is one determinant of the Paris of, say, Derrida's Plato and Rousseau and of Lacan's Freud. (It may be pertinent to cite the effort in recent decades to bring Freud within the orbit of German philosophizing, in particular within that of Heidegger's thought, made by the existential-analytic movement [*Daseins-analyse*]). This is no time to try to assess that effort, but I may just note that my emphasis on Freud as, so to speak, an immediate heir of German classical philosophy implies that establishing this relation to philosophy does not require mediation [or absorp-

tion] by Heidegger. The point of my emphasis is that Freud's is to be understood as an alternative inheritance, a competing inheritance, to that of Heidegger. Otherwise Freud's own break with philosophy, his [continued] subjection to it and its subjection to him, will not get clear. Then Wittgenstein's is a third inheritance, or path, from Kant.)<sup>11</sup>

In these paths of inheritance, Freud's distinction is to have broken through to a practice in which the Idealist philosophy, the reigning philosophy of German culture, becomes concrete (which is roughly what Marx said socialism was to accomplish). In Freud's practice, one human being represents to another all that that other has conceived of humanity in his or her life, and moves with that other toward an expression of the conditions which condition that utterly specific life. It is a vision and an achievement quite worthy of the most heroic attributes Freud assigned himself. But psychoanalysis has not surmounted the obscurities of the philosophical problematic of representation and reality it inherits. Until it stops shrinking from philosophy (from its own past), it will continue to shrink before the derivative question, for example, whether the stories of its patients are fantasy merely or (also?) of reality; it will continue to waver between regarding the question as irrelevant to its work and as the essence of it.

It is hardly enough to appeal here to conviction in reality, because the most untutored enemy of the psychological, as eagerly as the most sophisticated enemy, will inform you that conviction is one thing, reality another. The matter is to express the intuition that fantasy shadows anything we can understand reality to be. As Wittgenstein more or less puts an analogous matter: the issue is not to explain how grammar and criteria allow us to relate language to the world but to determine what language relates the world to be. This is not well expressed as the priority of mind over reality or of self over world (as, among others, Bloom expresses it).<sup>12</sup> It is better put as the priority of grammar—the thing Kant calls conditions of possibility (of experience and of objects), the thing Wittgenstein calls possibilities of phenomena—over both what we call mind and what we call the world. If we call grammar the Logos, we will more readily sense the shadow of fantasy in this picture.

FROM THE reassociation of psychoanalysis with philosophy in its appearance on the stage of skepticism, as the last discoverer of

psychic reality (the latest discoverer, its discoverer late in the recession of that reality), I need just two leaps in order to get to the interpretation I envision of the moment I began with from *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. The two leaps I can represent as questions that together have haunted the thoughts I am reporting on here. Both questions were broached in the preceding essay, on *Gaslight*. The first is: Why (granted the fact) does psychic reality first present itself to psychoanalysis—or, why does psychoanalysis first realize itself—through the agency (that is, through the suffering) of women, as reported in the *Studies on Hysteria* and in the case of Dora, the earliest of the longer case histories? The second question is: How, if at all, is this circumstance related to the fact (again, granted the fact) that film—another invention of the last years of the nineteenth century, developing its first masterpieces within the first decades of the twentieth century—is from first to last more interested in the study of individual women than of individual men? My conviction in the significance of these questions is a function, not surprisingly, of my speculations concerning skepticism, two junctures of it especially. The one is a result of my study of Shakespeare's tragedies and romances as elaborations of the skeptical problematic; the other concerns the role of the human body in the skeptical so-called problem of other minds. I will say something about each of these junctures.

Since we are about to move into speculations concerning differences in the knowing of women from that of the knowing of men, I just note in passing that I am not leaping to but skipping over the immensely important matter of determining how it is that the question of sexual difference turns into a question of some property that men are said to have that women lack, or perhaps vice versa—a development that helps to keep us locked into a compulsive uncertainty about whether we wish to affirm or to deny difference between men and women. As *Adam's Rib* ends, Tracy and Hepburn are joking about this vulgar error of looking for a *thing* that differentiates men and women. (It is my claim that they are joking; it is commoner, I believe, to assume—or imagine, or think, or opine—that they are perpetuating this common error. Here is a neat touchstone for assessing the reception of these comedies; perhaps their endings form the neatest set of such touchstones.)

In Jacques Lacan's work, the idea of the phallus as signifier is

not exactly a laughing matter. The reification, let me put it, of sexual difference is registered, in the case of knowledge, by finding the question of a difference in masculine and feminine knowing and then by turning it into a question of some fixed way women know that men do not know, and vice versa. Since in ordinary, nonmetaphysical exchanges we do not conceive there to be some fact one gender knows that the other does not know, any more than we conceive there to be some fact the skeptic knows that the ordinary human being does not know, the metaphysical exchanges concerning their differences are apt to veer toward irony, a sense of incessant false position, as if one cannot know what difference a world of difference makes. No one exactly denies that human knowledge is imperfect; but then how does that become the skeptic's outrageous removal of the world as such? No one exactly denies that there are differences between men and women; but then how does that become an entire history of outrage? It is from this region that one must expect an explanation for climactic passages of irony that characterize the melodrama of the unknown woman.

When in *Blonde Venus* Marlene Dietrich hands a derelict old woman the cash her husband has handed her, repeating to the woman, in raging mockery, the self-pitying words her husband had used to her in paying her back, to be quits with her, the money she had earlier given him to save his life, the meanness of the man's gesture is branded on his character. When toward the end of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* the man calls out smoothly to the woman, whose visit he interprets as a willingness for another among his endless dalliances, having disappeared to get some champagne, "Are you lonely out there?" and she, whose voice-over tells that she came to offer her life to him, replies, mostly to the camera, that is, to us, "Yes. Very lonely," she has taken his charming words as her cue for general death.

The state of irony is the negation, hence the equivalent in general consequence, of the state of conversation in remarriage comedy. Some feminists imagine that women have always spoken their own language, undetected by men; others argue that women ought to develop a language of their own. The irony in the melodrama of unknownness develops the picture, or figuration, for what it means idiomatically to say that men and women, in denying one another, do not speak the same language. I am not the only

male of my acquaintance who knows the victimization in this experience, of having conversation negated, say, by the reactively masculine in others. The finest description known to me of ironic, systematic incomprehension is Emerson's, from "Self-Reliance":

Well, most men have bound their eyes with one or another handkerchief, and attached themselves to some one of these communities of opinion. This conformity makes them not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars. Their every truth is not quite true. Their two is not the real two [as in the idea of two genders? or of just two Testaments?], their four not the real four [as in the idea of four corners of the earth? or of just four Gospels?]: so that every word they say chagrins us, and we know not where to begin to set them right.<sup>13</sup>

The first of my concluding leaps or questions about the origination of psychoanalysis and of film in the sufferings of women concerns the most theoretically elaborated of the studies I have so far produced of Shakespeare, on *The Winter's Tale*. It has raised unforgettably for me, I might say traumatically, the possibility that philosophical skepticism is inflected, if not altogether determined, by gender, by whether one sets oneself aside as masculine or feminine. And if philosophical skepticism is thus inflected then, according to me, philosophy as such will be. The issue arises as follows: Leontes obeys the structure of the skeptical problematic in the first half of *The Winter's Tale* as perfectly as his forebear Othello had done, but in the later play jealousy, as an interpretation of skeptical, world-removing doubt, is a cover story not for the man's fear of female desire (as Othello's story is) but for his fear of female fecundity, represented in Leontes's doubt that his children are his. Leontes's story has figured in various talks of mine in the past two or three years, and more than once a woman has afterward said to me in effect: If what Cartesian skepticism requires is the doubt that my children are mine, count me out. It is not the only time the surmise has crossed my mind that philosophical skepticism, and a certain denial of its reality, is a male business; but from the dawning of *The Winter's Tale* on me the business seems to me to be playing a role I know I do not fathom in every philosophical move I make. (It is the kind of answer I can contribute to the question who or what Shakespeare is to say that it is characteristically in texts associated with this name that the bearing of the issue

of skepticism, and therewith of (modern) philosophy as such, is shown to be establishing itself in, and transforming, our consciousness.)

From the gender asymmetry here it should not be taken to follow that women do not get into the way of skepticism, but only that the passion of doubt may not express a woman's sense of separation from others or that the object of doubt is not representable as a doubt as to whether your children are yours. The passion is perhaps another form of fanaticism, as in part Leontes's is. (*Letter from an Unknown Woman* suggests that the fanaticism is of what you might call love.) And the object of doubt might be representable as one directed not toward the question of one's children but toward the question of the father of one's children. (This is the pertinence of Kleist's *The Marquise of O*—the main reason in its content for what I called its specialness in relation to the melodrama of unknownness.) But how can one know and show that this other passion and this other object create equivalents or alternatives to masculine skepticism?

It is at this juncture of the skeptical development that psychoanalysis and cinema can be taken as asking of the woman: How is it that you escape doubt? What certainty encloses you, whatever your other insecurities, from just this torture? At an early point in my tracking of the skeptic, I found myself asking: Why does my search for certainty in knowing the existence of the other, in countering the skeptic's suspicion concerning other minds, come to turn upon whether I can know what the other *knows*? (*Claim of Reason*, p. 102). So the formulation of what we want from the woman as an access to her knowledge would record the skeptical provenance of the woman's presence at the origin of psychoanalytic and of cinematic discovery. But then we must allow the question: But *who* is it who wants to know? A natural answer will be: The man wants the knowledge. (Would it answer, or motivate, his supposed question: What does a woman want?) This answer cannot be wrong; it is the answer feminists may well give to Freud's handling of the case of the woman he called Dora. But the answer might be incomplete.

At this point two sources of material bearing on psychoanalysis and feminism warrant being brought prominently into play, which I can now barely name. The first is represented in two texts by Lacan entitled "God and the *Jouissance* of The Woman" and "A

Love Letter,” which when I came upon them twelve months ago (in 1984) struck me at several points as having uncanny pertinence to the particular considerations that arise here. When Lacan announces, “There is no such thing as *The woman*” (sometimes paraphrased or translated as “The woman does not exist”)<sup>14</sup> I was bound to ask myself whether this crossed the intuition I have expressed as the task of the creation of the woman. I find that some of Lacan’s followers react to the remark as obvious and as on the side of what women think about themselves, while others deny this reaction. I take it to heart that Lacan warns that more than one of his pupils have “got into a mess” (“G,” p. 144) about the doctrines of his in which his view of the woman is embedded; clearly I do not feel that I can negotiate these doctrines apart from the painful positions I am looking to unfold here.

My hesitations over two further moments in Lacan’s texts—moments whose apparent pertinence to what I am working on strikes me too strongly to ignore—are hesitations directed less to my intellectual difficulties with what is said than to the attitude with which it is said. When Lacan says, “I believe in the *jouissance* of the woman in so far as it is something more” (ibid, p. 147), he is casting his view of women as a creed or credo (“I believe”), as an article of faith in the existence and the difference of the woman’s satisfaction. So he may be taken as saying: What there is (any longer?) of God, or of the concept of the beyond, takes place in relation to the woman. It matters to me that I cannot assess the extent or direction (outward or inward) of Lacan’s (mock?) heroism, or (mock) apostlehood here, since something like this belief is in effect what I say works itself out, with gruesome eloquence, in the case of Othello, who enacts Descartes’s efforts to prove that he is not alone in the universe by placing a finite, feminine other in the position assigned by Descartes to God (see my “Othello and the Stake of the Other”). Moreover, letting the brunt of conviction in existence, the desire of the skeptical state, be represented by the question of the woman’s orgasm, is an interpretation of Leontes’s representation of the state of skepticism by the question of the woman’s child (following a familiar equation in Freud’s thinking of the production of the child with the form of female sexual satisfaction, an equation present in Shakespeare’s play). So skeptical grief would be represented for the man not directly by the

question “Were her children caused by me?” but by the double question “Is her satisfaction real and is it caused by me?”

The other source of material (still within my first leap) that I can do little more than name here is the excellent recent collection of essays, subtitled *Freud—Hysteria—Feminism*, on the Dora case.<sup>15</sup> When the case of Dora came up in the discussion of *Gaslight*, it served to focus the resemblance of the relation of Gregory and Paula to a desperate mockery, or interpretation, of a therapeutic relation, one that a particular patient might predictably invite, in therapy, of that relationship. Here I lift up one consideration that speaks specifically to both of the leaps or questions at hand: How does the problem of knowing the existence of the other come to present itself as knowing what the other knows? And: Who is it who wants to know of the woman’s existence? The former seems—in the light of the Dora collection—a way of asking what the point is of the “talking cure” (the name of psychoanalytic therapy that Anna O., the woman whose case was reported by Breuer in *Studies on Hysteria*, was the first to use); and the answer to the latter seems routinely assumed to be Freud the man. The contributors to the volume are about equally divided between men and women, and it seems to me that while the men from time to time are amazed or appalled by Freud’s assaults upon Dora’s recitations, the women, while from time to time admiring, are uniformly impatient with Freud the man. The discussions are particularly laced with dirty talk, prompted generally by Freud’s material and drawn particularly by a remark of Lacan’s on the case in which, in an ostentatious show of civilization, he coolly questions the position of the partners in Freud’s fantasy of Dora’s fantasy of oral intercourse. It is in their repetition of Lacan’s question, not now coolly but accusingly, that the women’s impatience is clearest; it is a kind of structural impatience. To talk to Freud about his talking cure is to be caught up in the logic expressed by Lacan in the formula: “Speaking of love is in itself a *jouissance*.”<sup>16</sup> Feeling the unfairness in thus being forced to talk love to Freud, a woman may well accuse him of ignorance in his designs upon Dora, upon her knowledge, not granting him the knowledge that his subject is the nature of ignorance of exactly what cannot be ignored. She may well be right.

The consideration I said I would lift here from the discussions of Dora takes on the detail of Freud’s choice of the fictitious name



Dora in presenting his case. Freud traces his choice to the paradigm of a change of name his sister had required of, and chosen for, her maidservant. The women represented in this collection on the whole use this information to accuse Freud of treating the woman he called Dora like a servant, of thus taking revenge on her for having treated him in this way. It is an angry interpretation, which seeks to turn the tables on the particular brilliance Freud had shown in calling Dora's attention to her angry treatment of him in announcing her termination of treatment by giving him two weeks' notice. A less impatient interpretation would have turned Freud's act of naming around again, taking it not as, or not alone as, a wish to dominate a woman, but as a confession that he is thinking of himself in the case through an identification with his sister: as if the knowledge of the existence of a woman is to be made on the basis of already enlisting oneself on that side.

THIS TAKES ME to the other of my concluding leaps or questions, now concerning not generally the genderedness of the skeptical problematic, but specifically concerning the role of the body in the problem of other minds. To counter the skeptical emphasis on knowing what the other doubts and knows, I have formulated my intuition that the philosophical recovery of the other depends on determining the sense that the human body is expressive of mind, for *this* seems to be what the skeptic of other minds directly denies, a denial prepared by the behaviorist sensibility in general. Wittgenstein is formulating what behaviorism shuns—and so doubtless inviting its shunning of him—in his marvelous remark: “The human body is the best picture of the human soul.”<sup>17</sup> One can find some such idea expressed in the accents of other thinkers—for example, in Hegel's *Philosophy of Fine Art*: “The human shape [is] the sole sensuous phenomenon that is appropriate to mind”;<sup>18</sup> or again in Emerson's essay “Behavior”: “Nature tells every secret once. Yes, but in man she tells it all the time, by form, attitude, gesture, mien, face and parts of the face, and by the whole action of the machine.”<sup>19</sup> Freud is expressing the idea in one of his reasonably measured, yet elated, Hamlet-like recognitions of his penetration of the secrets of humanity. In the middle of his writing of the Dora case he turns aside to say: “He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his finger-tips; betrayal oozes out of

him at every pore.”<sup>20</sup> Freud's twist on the philosophers here is registered in his idea of our expressions as betraying ourselves, giving ourselves (and meaning to give ourselves) away—as if, let us say, the inheritance of language, of the possibility of communication, inherently involves disappointment with it and (hence) subversion of it.

Expression as betrayal comes out particularly in Freud's phrase from his preceding paragraph, in which he describes one of what he calls Dora's “symptomatic acts” as a “pantomimic announcement” (specifically in this case an announcement of masturbation). Freud and Breuer had earlier spoken of the more general sense of human behavior as pantomimic—capable of playing or replaying the totality of the scenes of hidden life—in terms of the hysteric's “*capacity for conversion*,” “a psychophysical aptitude for transposing very large sums of excitation into the somatic innervation,”<sup>21</sup> which is roughly to say, a capacity for modifying the body as such rather than allowing the excitation to transpose into consciousness or to discharge into practice. While this capacity is something possessed by every psychophysical being—that is, primarily human beings—a particular aptitude for it is required for a given sufferer to avail herself or himself of hysteria over other modes of symptom formation, as in obsessions or phobias. The aptitude demands, for example, what Freud calls “somatic compliance,” together with high intelligence, a plastic imagination, and hallucinatory “absences,” which Anna O. (in *Studies on Hysteria*) taught Breuer to think of as her “private theatre.”<sup>22</sup>

It seems to me that Freud describes the aptitude for hysterical conversion with special fascination—as if, for example, the alternative choice of obsession were, though no less difficult to fathom, psychologically rather undistinguished.<sup>23</sup> Breuer and Freud's most famous statement of the matter, in their “Preliminary Communication” of 1893, is: “Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences” (*ibid.*, 2:7), a statement to be taken in the light of the insistence that hysterical motor symptoms “can be shown to have an original or long-standing connection with traumas, and stand as symbols for them in the activities of the memory” (*ibid.*, 2:95). Hysterical symptoms are “mnemonic symbols,” where this means that they bear some mimetic allegiance to their origins. Freud will say fifteen years later, in the “Rat Man” case, that “the leap from a mental process to a somatic innervation—hysterical conversion . . . can

never be fully comprehensible to us,"<sup>24</sup> a claim I find suspicious coming from him, as though he wishes sometimes to appear to know less than he does, or feels he does, about the powers of women.

In place of an argument for this, I offer as an emblem for future argument the figure of the woman who on film may be understood to have raised "the psycho-physical aptitude for transposing . . . large sums of excitation into the somatic innervation" to its highest art; I mean Greta Garbo, I suppose the greatest, or the most fascinating, cinematic image on film of the unknown woman. (Perhaps I should reassure you of my intentions here by noting that Freud's sentence following the one I just repeated about the psychophysical aptitude in question begins: "This aptitude does not, in itself, exclude psychical health.")<sup>25</sup> It is as if Garbo has generalized this aptitude beyond human doubting—call this aptitude a talent for, and will to, communicate—generalized it to a point of absolute expressiveness, so that the sense of failure to know her, of her being beyond us (say visibly absent), is itself the proof of her existence. (The idea of absolute expressiveness locates the moment in the history of skepticism at which such a figure appears as the moment I characterize in *The Claim of Reason* as the anxiety of inexpressiveness.)

This talent and will for communication accordingly should call upon the argument of hysteria for terms in which to understand it. In Garbo's most famous postures in conjunction with a man, she looks away or beyond or through him, as if in an absence (a distance from him, from the present), hence as if to declare that this man, while the occasion of her passion, is surely not its cause. I find (thinking specifically of a widely reprinted photograph in which she has inflected her face from that of John Gilbert, her eyes slightly raised, seeing elsewhere) that I see her *jouissance* as remembering something, but, let me say, remembering it from the future, within a private theater, not dissociating herself from the present moment, but knowing it forever, in its transience, as finite, from her finitude, or separateness, as from the perspective of her death: as if she were herself transformed into a mnemonic symbol, a monument of memory. (This would make her the opposite of the femme fatale she is sometimes said—surely in defense against her knowledge—to be.) What the monument means to me is that a joyful passion for one's life contains the ability to mourn, the

acceptance of transience, of the world as beyond one—say, one's other.

Such in my philosophy is the proof of human existence that, on its feminine side, as conceived in the appearance of psychoanalysis, it is the perfection of the motion picture camera to provide.

HERE I COME UPON my epilogue, and a man's hands over his eyes, perhaps to ward off a woman's returning images. *Letter from an Unknown Woman* is the only film in our genre of melodrama that ends with the woman's apparent failure; but as in *Gaslight*, her failure perfectly shadows what the woman's success in this genre of human perplexity has to overcome: the failure here is of a woman's unknownness to prove her existence to a man, to become created by a man. It is a tale the outcome of which is not the transcendence of marriage but the collapse of a fantasy of remarriage (or of perpetual marriage), perhaps in favor of a further fantasy, of revenge, of which the one we see best is a screen; a tale in which the woman remains mute about her story, refusing it both to the man and to the world of women; and a tale in which the characters' perspective of death is not to know forever the happiness of one's own life but finally to disown it, to live the death of another (as they have lived the other's life). (For some this will establish the necessity of psychology; for others, the necessity of politics; for others, the need of art.)

A reading of the film, in the context I have supplied here, might directly begin with the marks of these fantasies, of their negations of the reality, as it were, of remarriage as established in the genre that explores remarriage. For example, the woman in Ophüls's film is shown to be created through metamorphosis, not, however, by or with the man, but for him, privately—as her voice-over tells him (and us) posthumously:

From that moment on I was in love with you. Quite consciously I began to prepare myself for you. I kept my clothes neater so that you wouldn't be ashamed of me. I took dancing lessons; I wanted to become more graceful, and learn good manners—for you. So that I would know more about you and your world, I went to the library and studied the lives of the great musicians.

What is causing this vortex of ironies, the fact of change or the privacy of it? The idea that woman's work is not to converse with

men but to allure them is hardly news, and it is laid out for observation in Ophuls's work, in his participation in the world of fashion and glamour. That the intimacy of allure exactly defeats the intimacy of conversation is a way to put the cause of irony in the film, not alone its incessance in its closing sequences ("Are you lonely out there?") but also at the beginning of their reencounter, as the woman tracks the man back in Vienna until he notices her. He says, "I ought to introduce myself," and she interrupts with, "No. I know who you are"—a remark that could not be truer or more false.

Privacy and irony are in turn bound up in the film with the theme and structure of repetitions. Again this feature here negates its definitive occurrences in remarriage comedy, where repetitiveness is the field of inventiveness, improvisation, of the recurrence of time, open to the second chance; in (this) melodrama time is transient, closed, and repetition signals death—whether the repetition is of its camera movements (for example, the famous ironic repetition of the girl's waiting and watching on the stairs) or its words ("I'll see you in two weeks, two weeks") or its imagery (the woman's denial of chance and her weddedness to fate is given heavy symbolization in the film's endless iteration of iterated iron bars, which become less barriers against this woman's desire than the medium of it). Passing these essential matters, the moment I close with is also one of ironic repetition, and I ask of the woman's returning images: Why are they death-dealing?

Of course, they must make the man feel guilt and loss; but the question is why, for a man whose traffic has been the sentiments of remorse and loss, the feeling this time is fatal. Surely it has to do with the letter itself, beginning as from the region of death ("By the time you read this I may be dead") and ending in the theme of nostalgia ("If only . . . if only . . ."). And, of course, it has to do with the fact that there is a double letter, the depicted one that ends in a broken sentence, and the one that depicts this one, the one bearing the title *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, this film that ends soon but distinctly after, narrated from the beginning, it emerges, by the voice of a dead woman, ghost-written.

The implication is somehow that it is the (ghost) woman who writes and sends the film. What can this mean? That the author of the film is a question for the film is suggested when the man says to his mute servant, who enters as the man has finished reading the letter, "You knew her," and the servant nods and writes a name

on a page on the desk on which the letter lies, by the feeling that the servant is signing the letter, and hence the film. No doubt Ophuls is showing his hand here, breaching and so declaring, as it were, his muteness as a director, as if declaring that directing (perhaps composing of any kind) is constantly a work of breaching muteness (how fully, and how well timed, are further questions). But this cannot deny that it is a woman's letter he signs, assigns to himself as a writer, a letter explicitly breaching, hence revealing, muteness.

Moreover, the letter already contained a signature, on the letterhead of the religious order in whose hospital the unknown woman died, of someone styled "Sister-in-charge." Whether or not we are to assume that this is the same locale to which the unknown woman had gone to be delivered anonymously of her and the man's child, her connection with the religious order happens in front of our eyes, as she leaves the train platform after rushing to see the man off for a hastily remembered concert tour. Walking directly away from us, she gradually disappears into blackness at the center of the vacant screen, upon which, at what we might project as her vanishing point, there is a rematerialization, and the figure of the woman is replaced, or transformed into, walking at the same pace toward us, what turns out as it comes into readable view to be a nun. So the woman is part of the world of religion, of a place apart inhabited, for all we see of it, solely by women, a world Ophuls accordingly also assigns himself, I mean his art, in signing the woman's letter. (Whether in claiming the mazed position of the feminine the actual director is manifesting sympathy with actual women or getting even with them; and whether in competing with the feminine other the director is silencing the woman's voice in order to steal it and sport its power as his [his?] own; and whether positive [or negative] personal intentions could overtake the political opportunism [or political insight] of any such gesture; these are questions that I hope are open, for my own good.)

Granted that forces both lethal and vital are gathered here, and granted that the film is the medium of visible absence, I ask again how these forces, in the form of returning images, deal death. Since I mostly am not considering here the narrative conditions of the woman depicted as writing the letter, I leave aside the question whether the vengeance in this act is to be understood as endorsed or reversed in the director's countersigning of it. I concentrate now

on the sheer fact that the images return as exact moments we and the man have witnessed, or perhaps imagined, together. The present instants are mechanically identical with the past, and this form of repetition elicits its own amalgam of the strange and the familiar. I take it as a repetition that Freud cites as causing the sense of “the uncanny” in his essay to which he gives that title. Then this is also a title Ophuls’s film suggest for the aesthetic working of film as such, an idea of some vision of horror as its basis. Freud’s essay includes a reading of E. T. A. Hoffmann’s romantic tale “The Sand-Man,” a tale that features a beautiful automaton, something not untypical of Hoffmann or more generally of the romantic tale of the fantastic. Freud begins his reading by denying, against a predecessor’s reading, that the uncanniness of the tale is traceable to the point in the story of “uncertainty whether an object is living or inanimate.”<sup>26</sup> Now that point is precisely recognizable as an issue of philosophical skepticism concerning our knowledge of the existence of other minds. But Freud insists that instead the uncanny in Hoffmann’s tale is directly attached to the idea of being robbed of one’s eyes, and hence, given his earlier findings, to the castration complex.

I find this flat denial of Freud’s itself uncanny, oddly mechanical, since no denial is called for, no incompatible alternative is proposed: one would have expected Sigmund Freud in this context to invoke the castration complex precisely as a new explanation or interpretation of the particular uncertainty in question, to suggest it as Hoffmann’s prepsychoanalytic insight that one does not see others as other, acknowledge their (animate) human existence, until the Oedipal drama is resolved under the threat of castration, the threat of a third person. (This is a step, I believe, that Lacan has taken; I do not know on what ground.) Instead Freud’s, as it were, denial that the acknowledgment of the existence of others is at stake amounts, to my mind, to the denial that philosophy persists within psychoanalysis, that the psychoanalytic tracing of traumatically induced exchanges or metamorphoses of objects of love and subjects of love into and out of one another remains rooted in philosophy.

And I think we can say that when the man covers his eyes—an ambiguous gesture, between avoiding the horror of knowing the existence of others and avoiding the horror of not knowing it, between avoiding the threat of castration that makes the knowledge

accessible and avoiding the threat of outcastness should that threat fail—he is in that gesture both warding off his seeing something and warding off at the same time his being seen by something, which is to say, his own existence being known, being seen by the woman of the letter, by the mute director and his (her?) camera—say, seen by the power of art—and seen by us, which accordingly identifies us, the audience of film, as assigning ourselves the position, in its passiveness and its activeness, of the source of the letter and of the film; which is to say, the position of the feminine. Then it is the man’s horror of us that horrifies us—the revelation, or avoidance, of ourselves in a certain way of being feminine, a way of being human, a mutual and reflexive state, let us say, of victimization. The implications of this structure as a response to film, to art, to others, for better and for worse, is accordingly a good question. I guess it is the question Freud raises in speaking, in “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” of the “repudiation of femininity”—which he named as the bedrock at which psychoanalytic activity is at an end. My thought is that film, in dramatizing Freud’s finding, oddly opens the question for further thought—the question, call it, of the differential feminine and masculine economies of the active and the passive.<sup>27</sup>

Emerson devotes the ninth paragraph of “Fate,” cited in my previous essay, to a fair intuition, or tuition, of the question:

Jesus said, “When he looketh on her, he hath committed adultery.”

But he is an adulterer before he has yet looked on the woman, by the superfluity of animal, and the defect of thought, in his constitution.

Who meets him, or who meets her, in the street, sees that they are ripe to be each other’s victim. (“Fate,” p. 11)

Transcribing so as to isolate a couple of Emersonian master-tones, I read as follows: Our “constitution” is of course both our physiology or individuality, the thing that what agrees with us agrees with, and at the same time it is the thing we are in agreement on; it is the fate at which private and public cross. Who the “we” is who are subject to agreement is given in the slightly later paragraph that begins: “The population of the world is a conditional population; not the best, but the best that could live now.” I have argued that the essay “Fate,” with a focus on “limitation,” takes a focus on “condition” in its register as meaning “talking together,” setting out “terms” (of agreement). (It is part of Emerson’s interpretation/



obedience to/mastery of/appropriation/substantiation/underwriting/undermining of Kant.) This merely identifies “the population of the world” as talkers (hence, no doubt, as hearers). Now grant that Emerson’s address to this population—I mean his writing—is what he has from the beginning defined as his “constitution” (anyway since the seventh paragraph of “Self-Reliance”: “The only right is what is after my constitution”;<sup>28</sup> it is what he means to bring to his nation (but surely not he alone?), as its bedrock, or say stepping-stone. Then the question of “adultery” (which is some question of the “other”), the question of victimization, is to be seen, and assessed, in each case of the saying of a word, the citing of any term, in all our conditions. In writing, hence in reading, we have to see for ourselves what our relations are—whether we conform to the demands and the scandals of our readers, or of our authors, when we do not recognize them as our own. Emerson’s picture of meeting (“him or her”) “in the street” is perhaps one of meeting his reader not at some bedrock but on some false ground, so that their intimacy victimizes them both, or say adulterates their originalities.

Perhaps Freud, at the end of “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” pictures the repudiation of femininity or passiveness as a biological fact because he wishes to conceive that “for the psychical field, the biological field does in fact play the part of the underlying bedrock.” But suppose the relation of victimization or passiveness Freud described is, as in Emerson, one he senses between his writing and his readers, that is to say, his progeny. Then the bedrock at which psychoanalytic activity ends (whatever the fate of the biological in psychoanalytic theory) is the fate of psychoanalytic understanding in its own terms. Psychoanalytic understanding of the matter of victimization, as of any other matter (for example, that of psychoanalytic theory and practice), has to take place in relation to reading Freud, in subjecting oneself to *this* inheritance. Biology has not lifted this burden from him. If the inheritance is not to take place “in the street,” as victimization, it must take place in the recognition of, in the reading of, our countertransference to Freud, as we expect him to, and rebuke him for failing to, read his countertransference to Dora. Are we then certain what Freud’s “prior” transference to “us” is, who it is we think he thinks we are, what it is he wants of us? The idea of countertransference here is meant as a gloss on a moment in an earlier essay of mine in which

I interpret reading as a process of interpreting one’s transference to (as opposed to one’s projection onto) a text.<sup>29</sup> That idea implies that the fantasy of a text’s analyzing its reader is as much the guide of a certain ambition of reading—of philosophy as reading—as that of the reader’s analyzing the text. In now specifying the transference in question as of the nature of countertransference (that is, as a response to an other’s transference to me) I do not deny the reversal of direction implied in the idea of the text as my reader, but I rather specify that that direction already depends upon a further understanding of a text’s relation to me, and that that further relation cannot be said either (or can be said both) to be prior to or/and posterior to any approach (or say attraction) to a text. How could I suppose that this is an issue for women more than for men? Recall that “A Child Is Being Beaten” is a text which Freud ends by using his material to “test” the theories of two competing men, of Fliess and of Adler—which is to say, to beat them.<sup>30</sup> Talk about theory and practice.

I leave you with a present of some words from the closing paragraphs of Henry James’s “The Beast in the Jungle”:

The creature beneath the sod [the buried woman companion] *knew* of his rare experience, so that, strangely now, the place had lost for him its mere blankness of expression. . . . [T]his garden of death gave him the few square feet of earth on which he could still most live. . . . by clear right of the register that he could scan like an open page. The open page was the tomb of his friend. . . . He had before him in sharper incision than ever the open page of his story. The name on the table smote him . . . and what it said to him, full in the face, was that *she* was what he had missed. . . . Everything fell together . . . ; leaving him most of all stupefied at the blindness he had cherished. The fate he had been marked for he had met with a vengeance . . . ; he had been the man of his time, *the* man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened. . . . This horror of waking—*this* was knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

James’s tale in theme and quality better measures Ophuls’s film than the story of Stefan Zweig’s from which its screenplay was, excellently, adapted. Such is the peculiar distribution of powers among the arts.

# Notes

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## Introduction

1. Catherine Clément, *Opera*, p. 100.
2. Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, pp. 226, 227.

## Chapter One

1. See, e.g., Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane, eds., *In Dora's Case: Freud—Hysteria—Feminism*.
2. Stanley Cavell. *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*.
3. Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference*. (Page references cited in text.)
4. Stanley Cavell. *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays*. (Page references cited in text.)
5. J. L. Austin, "Other Minds," in *Philosophical Papers*.
6. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, chap. 3.
7. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience," in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, pp. 469–92.
8. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fate," in *Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, pp. 941–68.

## Chapter Two

1. See, e.g., Stanley Cavell, "An Emerson Mood," in *The Senses of Walden: An Expanded Edition*, pp. 142–43.
2. See Neil Hertz, "Dora's Secrets, Freud's Techniques," pp. 221–42; Shoshana Felman, "Turning the Screw of Interpretation," pp. 94–207; and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Homophobia, Misogyny, and Capital: The Example of *Our Mutual Friend*," pp. 126–51.

In this connection I want to reaffirm my continuing indebtedness to the work and friendship of Michael Fried. His extraordinary book, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane*, also more explicitly relates itself to Freudian concepts than his past writing has done. I cannot forbear noting specifically, for those who will appreciate the kind of confirmation or ratification one may derive from simultaneous or crossing discoveries in

writing that one admires, the light thrown by Fried's breakthrough discussion of Stephen Crane on the passage from James's "The Beast in the Jungle" on which the present essay closes.

3. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *Standard Edition*, 4:144, 145.

4. See Harold Bloom, "Freud's Concepts of Defense and the Poetic Will" (lecture to Forum on Psychiatry and the Humanities, 1980), in Smith, ed., *The Literary Freud: Mechanisms of Defense and the Poetic Will*, pp. 1–28.

5. See Jacques Derrida, "Coming into One's Own," in Hartman, ed., *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*. The translator, James Hulbert, warns that he has abridged a section from a much longer work in progress. The work has now appeared as "Freud's Legacy," in *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*. Translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press [1987]).

6. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, p. A109. In a set of editorial notes prepared for my use, Joseph H. Smith, in responding to my claim that Freud here takes on Kant's views exactly at a point at which he wishes to distinguish the psychoanalytic idea of the unconscious from "the unconscious of the philosophers," finds that "it is inconceivable to me that Freud was unaware of being Kantian here." I am grateful, first of all, for the confirmation that the Kantian provenance of Freud's thought seems so patent. But further, as to whether Freud could in that case have been "unaware" of the provenance, I would like to propose the following: if Freud was aware of it, then his omitting of Kant's name just here, where he is explicitly dissociating himself from philosophy, is motivated, deliberate, showing an awareness that his claim to dissociation is from the beginning compromised, say ambivalent; but if, on the contrary, Freud was not aware of his Kantianism just here, say unconscious of it, then he was repressing this fact of his origin. Either of these possibilities, suppression or repression, I am regarding as fateful to the development of psychoanalysis as a field of investigation (supposing this more distinct from psychoanalysis as a therapy than it perhaps can be) and rather in support of my claim that Freud's self-interpretation of his relation to philosophy is suspicious and, contrary to what I know of its reception by later psychoanalysts, ought to be treated.

I cite one piece of positive evidence here to indicate Freud's ambivalent awareness or resistant understanding of the depth of his intellectual debt to Kant (one may press this evidence to the point of suppression or repression). Of the dozen or so references to Kant listed in the general index of the *Standard Edition*, one bears directly on whether Freud saw the Kantianism of his view of the proof and the place of the unconscious. At the end of the first section of "The Unconscious" Freud says this:

The psycho-analytic assumption of unconscious mental activity appears to us . . . as an extension of the corrections undertaken by Kant of our views on external perception. Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psycho-analysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes which are their object. Like the physical, the psychical is not necessarily in reality what it appears to us to be. (14:171)

This expression of indebtedness to Kant precisely discounts the debt, since Kant equally "warned us" not to equate the appearance of the psychic with the reality of it, the warning Freud arrogates to psychoanalysis as an "extension" of Kant's philosophical contribution to the study of knowledge. It is the *connection* of the study of inner and outer that my paper claims is "pure Kant."

Now Freud might have meant something further in his arrogation. He might have been compressing, in his discounting of the debt to Kant, a claim to the effect that Kant did not lay out the conditions of the appearance of the inner world with the systematicness with which he laid out the conditions of the appearance of the outer world, the world of objects; in short, that Kant lacked the tools with which to elicit a system of categories of the understanding for the psyche, or the subjective, comparable to the one he elicited for the external, or the objective, world. These tools, unlike those of Aristotle that Kant deployed, came into the possession of Western thought only with psychoanalysis. Something of this sort seems to me correct. But if Freud had claimed this explicitly, hence taken on the obligation to say whether, for example, his "categories" had the same status as Kant's, then the awareness would have been inevitable that his quarrel with philosophy was necessary, was philosophy. Unawareness of his inheritance of Kant would then indeed have been inconceivable.

7. *Ibid.*, p. A158, B197.

8. See Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* The quotation from Kant is on p. 243; that from Schelling on pp. 90–91.

9. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles," in *Essays: First Series*, pp. 404, 411–12.

10. Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?* p. 90.

11. After a conversation with Kurt Fischer, I realize that I should, even in this opening sketch of the problem of inheriting philosophy, be more cautious, or specific, in speaking of Freud's "inheritance" of classical German philosophy. I do not mean that an Austrian student in the later nineteenth century would have had just the same philosophical education as a German student of the period; nor does my claim require that Freud read so much as a page in one

of Kant's works. It would have been enough for my (or Freud's) purposes for him to have received his Kant from the quotations of Kant he would have encountered in his reading of Schopenhauer. My focus, that is, in speaking here of Freud's inheritance of the German outburst, is rather on who Freud is, on what becomes of ideas in that mind, than on what, apart from a mind of that resourcefulness, German philosophy is thought to be. I assume that more or less the same ought to be said of the inheritance of German thought by that other Austrian student, Wittgenstein.

12. See Bloom, "Freud's Concepts of Defense and the Poetic Will," p. 7. Bloom means here to be speaking for Freud; as do I.

13. Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Essays: First Series*, p. 264.

14. Lacan, "God and the *Jouissance* of The Woman," in Mitchell and Rose, eds., *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 144.

15. See n. 2 above.

16. Lacan, "A Love Letter," in Mitchell and Rose, eds., *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 154.

17. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, p. 178.

18. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Fine Art*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (London, 1886), p. 150.

19. Emerson, "Behavior," in *Conduct of Life*, p. 1037a.

20. Freud, *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, in *Standard Edition*, 7:77-78.

21. Freud, "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence," in *Standard Edition*, 3:50.

22. For the phrase "private theatre," see Breuer and Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, in *Standard Edition*, 2:22.

23. See, for example, Freud, "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence," in *Standard Edition*, 3:51.

24. Freud, "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," in *Standard Edition*, 10:157.

25. Freud, "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence," *Standard Edition*, 3:50.

26. Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" in *Standard Edition*, 17:230.

27. Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," in *Standard Edition*, 23:252.

28. Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *Essays: First Series*, p. 262.

29. Cavell, "Politics as Opposed to What?" *Critical Inquiry* 9 (September 1982): 157-78.

30. Freud, "A Child Is Being Beaten," in *Standard Edition*, 17:179-204.

31. Henry James, "The Beast in the Jungle," in vol. 11 of *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, pp. 397-402.