5 “An Impudent Choir of Croaking Frogs”

Freud and the Freudians as the Novel’s Secret Sharers

Freud, however, was not concerned with politics, not even sexual politics.
—Peter Gay

An Anxiety of Influence?

Canetti’s hostility toward psychoanalysis is legendary, yet it is a fact usually mentioned in the context of his much later *Crowds and Power* (1960), and seldom in connection with the novel of 1931. Though commentators on the novel could scarcely have missed Canetti’s disdain for Freud, they seem on the whole to have assumed that the novel dismisses rather than confronts Freud; few, at any rate, have paid any kind of sustained attention to the novel’s thick web of Freudian allusions. Though Gerald Stieg proposes that both *Auto-da-Fé* and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) be seen as quite specific and contrastive responses to the 1927 riot/massacre that followed the burning of the Viennese Palace of Justice, he is unable, in the end, to show how the novel really “answers” Freud. Yet Freud is already present in *Auto-da-Fé*, and it will be the task of this chapter to show how powerful even—or especially—a negative influence can be. How, indeed, could a novelist as intellectually ambitious as Canetti ignore one of the most influential thinkers of his own time?

What complicates our inquiry, however—and this may explain the hesitancy of critics to take this path—is the fact that Canetti never set out to refute Freud directly, for that might on the one hand imply an acquiescence in the Freudian agenda, and on the other would be inappropriate to a *literary* engagement. A more direct confrontation would indeed have to wait
thirty years for *Crowds and Power*. Furthermore, Canetti’s impatience with Freudian grand theories is, at this time, inextricably bound up with his critique of Freud’s disciples, whom he held to be overzealous, to say the least. His targets in the novel, therefore, will never be pure instances of unadulterated Freudian dogma. Instead the novel’s evocations of Freud will always include an element of popularization, deviation and misprision. While this ensures that the novel resonates more richly with the widespread cultural reception of Freud, it will no doubt irritate Freud purists—to the extent that such a group is to be found among Canetti aficionados in the first place.

Surprisingly, there are a few instances in which Canetti acknowledged an intellectual debt to Freud. The most memorable of these is in a 1962 radio interview with Theodor W. Adorno, who was keen to rectify what he perceived to be a glaring lacuna in the recently published *Crowds and Power*. Canetti completed this lengthy anthropological study without once mentioning Freud by name, who, after all, had written the most influential essay to date on the topic of crowd formation and social psychology, namely his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). In response to Adorno’s persistent query—he returns to Freud throughout the interview—Canetti musters a few gracious words for the founder of psychoanalysis: “As you speak of Freud—I am the first to admit that the innovative way in which Freud approached things, without allowing himself to be distracted or frightened, made a deep impression on me in my formative period. It is certainly the case that I am now no longer convinced of some of his results and must oppose some of his special theories. But for the way he tackled things, I still have the deepest respect.”

This diplomatically worded homage—intended, I would wager, to placate those critics who read Canetti’s omission as an arrogant dismissal of a worthy predecessor—may ultimately only confuse the matter. For it suggests that Canetti’s opposition to Freud is both of recent vintage (e.g., “I am no longer convinced”) and partial (“some of his results . . . [and] some of his special theories”). In fact, neither claim is true. For the earliest of Canetti’s writings, *Auto-da-Fé*, already reveals a pattern not of positive influence, but of thoroughgoing dissent. Twenty odd years after the interview with Adorno, an elderly Canetti—the esteemed Nobel laureate approaching his eightieth birthday—seems to have been at greater ease in reflecting on the place of Freud in his life. The final volume of his autobiography, *Das Augenspiel: Lebensgeschichte 1931–1937* (The Play of the Eyes), is strewn with
observations that leave no doubt that the young author of *Auto-da-Fé* was already determined to do battle with Freud.

The Dispute with Broch

The context for such reflections is frequently a reminiscence about the author Hermann Broch, whom Canetti loved and admired despite his devotion to Freud: “He had really fallen for Freud, in a religious manner I would say; I don’t mean to say that he had become a zealot, like so many others whom I knew at the time. Rather, he was permeated by Freud, as by a mystical teaching.” In speaking with Broch, Canetti sounds central objections that will reverberate throughout his work. Again and again he maintains, though not always as civilly as in this friendly debate, essentially two points: (1) Freud is too readily cited and believed, when in reality the phenomena he attempts to explain remain complex and puzzling; and (2) Freud’s theories tend to interiorize and personalize social reality. The following passage, taken from an exchange between Canetti and Broch, is meant to rebuff the latter’s claim that a modernist novel should incorporate Freudian insights by presenting psychologically realistic characters, something Canetti in *Auto-da-Fé* obviously chose not to do. To Broch he counters:

You gladly appeal to modern psychology. It seems to me that you are proud of it because it arose, so to speak, out of your own intimate milieu, from this special area of the Viennese world. This psychology has for you the familiar feel of home [*Heimatgefühl*] . . . Whatever it declares, you find on the spot in yourself. You don’t even need to go in search for it. Precisely this psychology strikes me as completely inadequate. It concerns itself with the individual, and in this it has accomplished something; what it cannot comprehend is the crowd [*Masse*], and that is the most important entity, about which we need to learn. For all new power that arises today draws its sustenance from the crowd. In practice, everybody who is after power knows how to manipulate the crowd.6

The one concession Canetti makes here to individual psychology may be nothing more than a polite way of differing with a respected friend; on the other hand we should be careful not to exaggerate the dispute. As we shall see below, Canetti will *use* Freud to critique Freud and what he perceived
to be the broader Freud mania. Apart from this double-edged tribute, however, we notice the classic laments. The first, that Freud’s theories are all too easily confirmed, indeed, that they are assumed to be correct from the outset, should be judged as much a critique of Freud as of his uncritical followers. The significance of the second point for the novel, which at this time is still lying around in typescript form, could be easily overlooked because Canetti is so clearly using the language we associate with his later work on *Crowds and Power.* Yet we should not overlook the fact that Canetti pointedly places these remarks in the context of a discussion of modernist novels. Broch has just read *Auto-da-Fé* and criticizes Canetti for failing to avail himself of the latest discoveries in psychology. Canetti responds that Broch’s brand of psychological realism leads not to critical distance, but serves instead as a kind of anodyne. In a carefully worded passage, Canetti suggests that Broch’s psychological realism brings insight, but also soothes (“beruhigt”) readers in a manner that he finds problematic.

This exchange, however much it may have been stylized or perhaps even invented in hindsight, is crucial in understanding Canetti’s relationship to Freudian psychology, at least as he saw it. Broch is not an easy opponent, and presses his point: “There is a modern psychology and it says things about people that we simply cannot ignore. Literature must be on the intellectual level of its day. If it falls behind, it becomes a kind of kitsch.” Canetti persists in advocating his use of schematic figures over Broch’s psychologically realistic people (“Menschen”), a point we have touched upon already in chapter 1. What is essential to underscore at this juncture is the fact that Canetti predicates the entire design of his novel upon a considered rejection of Freudian psychology: “I, too, believe that the novel of today must be different, but not because we live in the era of Freud and Joyce. The substance of the times is different, and can only be represented by way of new figures.”

Let us return to that second objection with the assurance that it has an important place in the discussion of the novel: this is Canetti’s assessment of psychoanalysis as essentially an individual, personal affair (“befaßt sich mit dem einzelnen”), which is therefore constitutionally incapable of addressing the social and political, particularly when it comes to the exercise of power. For these are precisely the themes which had already found expression in *Auto-da-Fé,* as we have had occasion to see thus far in this study. Revealing an intimate familiarity with Freud’s *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*—the earliest sustained and perhaps the most important effort on
Freud’s part to come to terms with the social—Canetti once tried to convince Broch of the error of his, and more importantly Freud’s, ways. Otherwise tolerant and patient with his interlocutor, Broch drew the line when it came to assailing Freud; indeed “he seemed angry when I criticized Freudian conceptions.”¹⁰ For our discussion of the novel, it is significant to note that Canetti’s critique here—he argues that crowds are ontologically different and not sufficiently explained by individual psychology—articulates once again his basic objection that Freud overextends the personal. Even as sympathetic a biographer as Peter Gay, himself a fairly orthodox though not uncritical Freudian, comes to a similar conclusion regarding the Group Psychology essay when, in offering this précis, he remarks: “The crowd, as crowd, invents nothing; it only liberates, distorts, exaggerates, the individual members’ traits . . . . In short, crowd psychology, and with it all social psychology, is parasitic on individual psychology; that is Freud’s point of departure, to which he persistently held.”¹¹ For Gay, this is a fairly neutral observation; but for Canetti, this was war.

It is not surprising that the antagonist Freud was on his mind when Canetti sought out his beloved Dr. Sonne as a sounding board for some of his evolving ideas on social phenomena, a project Canetti had already come to see as his “life’s task” (Lebensaufgabe).¹² Canetti succeeds, however, only in eliciting guidance on what—or whom—to avoid. Wondering what it must have been like for Sonne, the known Freud opponent, to suffer Broch’s enthusiasm for psychoanalysis, Canetti muses: “He was friends with Broch, whom he respected and perhaps even loved. Whenever he spoke with him, the conversation will certainly have turned to Freud, to whom Broch was addicted [dem Broch verfallen war]. I would have loved to learn how Sonne withstood that without interjecting a wounding protest.”¹³ Canetti did not need to imagine such scenarios, however, for he knew from personal experience that Sonne had no truck with Freud: “That he had crucial disagreements with Freud, I experienced once when I vehemently attacked the ‘death drive’ in his presence,”¹⁴ a concept, we might note in passing, which though tentatively introduced already in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), became a cornerstone of the extremely popular Civilization and Its Discontents of 1930. Sonne, at any rate, steers his young protégé away from Freud: “He warned me of doctrines that are everywhere present but explain nothing. Better than any he understood how much they stand in the way of gaining insight into public matters.”¹⁵ All of these anecdotal remarks tell us, if
nothing else, that Canetti saw himself and others as crucially engaged with Freudian thought at the time he wrote Auto-da-Fé.

As we have seen on numerous occasions in this study already, Auto-da-Fé is nothing if not centrally concerned to diagnose our blindness to “public things” — “öffentliche Dinge,” as Canetti puts it. And thus it is not surprising that it is within this context that the novel’s confrontation with Freud most clearly emerges. I have selected three episodes for analysis: the notorious chapter entitled “The Good Father” (“The Kind Father” in Wedgwood), as well as two less well known segments that have unjustly suffered neglect in the secondary literature: the incident involving the mad village blacksmith Jean Préval; and finally Georg’s curious “Parable of the Termites.” Each of these passages takes as its target a central Freudian tenet: the Oedipal complex; transference (and countertransference); and sublimation, respectively. Though the novel undoubtedly contests these notions, it would be erroneous to read Auto-da-Fé as an attempt to directly disprove Freud. This is an aim surely inconsistent with imaginative literature in general, and furthermore one that would make the author guilty of the very crime of which he accuses the Freudians: overreaching. In concluding with an analysis of Georg as a parodic vehicle for Freudian ideas and associations, the relationship of Crowds and Power to the novel—an affiliation which thus far has not redounded to the favor of Auto-da-Fé—will emerge in a clearer light. We will see that while both challenge fundamental Freudian notions, they do so in quite different ways.

Father Knows Best: Unseating the “Electra Complex”

“Sadism in the evening is refreshing and bracing!” Max Pulver’s response, the first on record to what is perhaps the best-known chapter of Auto-da-Fé, “The Good Father,” apparently broke the silence of an agitated and bemused salon audience, which had gathered in Zurich to hear the young author read from his yet unpublished work. At a later reading of this same piece in Vienna, Canetti would be accused of “inhumanity” (Unmenschlichkeit); indeed, sometimes the most positive remark Canetti’s auditors could muster was the assurance that the author would one day outgrow this kind of writing. Well before feminist critics would draw our attention to the violence perpetrated upon women in this novel — sometimes in the process ac-
cusing the author himself of promoting the misogyny depicted here (see above, chapter 2)—Canetti had been subjected to “a real scolding” (eine wahre Schelte) by his contemporaries for this stark and unsparing portrayal of child and spousal abuse.18

“The Good Father” (Der gute Vater), an ironic reference, of course, to the very bad father Benedict Pfaff, contains only the most concentrated part of a story that in fact extends throughout the novel. It is in this chapter, however, that we are confronted with a critical mass of incriminating evidence against an abusive father who has been trying (and will continue to attempt) to suppress, distort, and trivialize the extent of his sexual violence. Contemporary readers may be tempted to attribute the attention accorded this chapter to the rise of critical paradigms informed by second-wave (i.e., post-1968) feminism, and to some extent this is perfectly true. Yet as we have seen, Der gute Vater already enjoyed an unmistakable prominence—and not only in the eyes of the author, as we shall see—even before the novel appeared in print. Canetti, at any rate, referred to this chapter as the “indispensable” part of the novel,19 and later as an “obligatory” component of his performance repertoire.20

Our “good father” is of course Kien’s Hausbesorger—a kind of door-man cum building superintendent—long known to us as an unambiguous woman-hater. When Kien first calls upon his services, well before the chapter in question opens, Benedikt Pfaff assumes his assignment is to beat Therese: “For years he had longed in vain for an opportunity to smash up a piece of woman’s flesh.”21 Pfaff is quick to assure us that his motto, “Women ought to be beaten to death. The whole lot of them,”22 is based on personal experience: “My old woman now, she was black and blue to the end of her days. My poor daughter, God rest her, I was that fond of her, there was a woman for you now, as the saying is, I started with her when she was that high.”23

Pfaff’s sexual abuse of his daughter takes on new dimensions starting on the day of his wife’s funeral. Tellingly, Pfaff is reminded of the sexual relationship with his daughter just as he begins sleeping with Therese, a comparison that clearly does not favor the older woman: “If only she [Therese] were forty years younger. His daughter, God rest her, she had a heart of gold. She had to lie down beside him while he watched out for beggars. He used to pinch and look. Look and pinch. Those were the days! . . . Cry, she used to. Didn’t do her no good. You can’t do anything against a father. Ah, she was a love. All of a sudden she died . . . He simply couldn’t do without her.”24
Hausbesorger’s sporadic but insistently bad conscience slowly reveals a pattern of father-daughter assault and molestation. Prodded by the likelihood that the authorities will imminently appear at the Theresianum, where he and Therese are attempting to pawn Kien’s library, Pfaff imagines himself punished not for dealing in stolen property, that is, for his current and evident infraction, but for sexually abusing and murdering his daughter years ago: “The caretaker stood stock still. He saw it: on every first of the month someone would come to take away his pension instead of paying it out to him. They’ll lock him up as well . . . Everything will come out and the plaintiffs will continue to violate his daughter posthumously. He isn’t afraid . . . He is retired on a pension. He isn’t afraid. The doctor said himself, it’s her lungs. Send her away! How would I do that, mister? He needs his pension just to eat . . . Health insurance—the idea! Suddenly she’d return to him with a baby. In that tiny room. He isn’t afraid!”

With the phrase “and the plaintiffs continue to violate his daughter in the grave” (und die Parteien schänden seine Tochter noch im Grab), his fear that “everything will come out” (even while he repeatedly denies being afraid), not to mention his foreboding that Anna will return with a baby from a medical exam supposedly made necessary because of her lungs, Pfaff convicts himself in his own idiom. For this narrated monologue clearly belongs to his linguistic and mental repertory. When the police actually arrive, Pfaff immediately thinks, “My daughter!” and during the ensuing police inquiry he refers the murder that Kien insists having perpetrated upon Therese back to his own guilty conscience: “The Professor was talking about a wife, but he meant my daughter.” Kien is lying about a murder he never committed (though he fervently wishes he had); Pfaff dissimulates about a murder he actually committed but cannot fully suppress. All of this leads up to the episode in question.

“The Good Father” chapter gives a more complete picture of this unsavory incestuous abuse, but one that has rarely been fully acknowledged in the critical literature until recently, as Kristie Foell documents in Blind Reflections, her Canetti monograph of 1995. This may be due to the fact that Pfaff, whose denial of the crimes against his daughter is only occasionally and inadvertently punctured by feelings of guilt and concomitant moments of honesty, is largely in linguistic control of this chapter. This fact, combined with a hesitance on the part of critics—acting, perhaps, on the same feelings of disgust registered by Canetti’s early auditors—to address such issues,
may explain why Kien has so often been portrayed as the principal victim of Pfaff’s aggression. At any rate, as the famous father-daughter dialogue referred to above in chapter 2 illustrates, Pfaff’s power over his daughter is mediated by a kind of semiotic extortion. A central point for Canetti, here as in the contemporaneous play Hochzeit (The Wedding), is that language does not merely represent power relations, but actively structures them. While true, we should also acknowledge that language is simply an easier topic for critics to handle; the venerated “crisis of language” (Sprachkrise) whose pedigree reaches back at least as far as Hofmannsthal’s Lord Chandos Brief (1902) provided a critical context for the discussion of “The Good Father” that often led away from the substance of this infamous exchange. One of the central points of that one-sided dialogue is after all the father’s pointed prohibition of other romantic interests—there shall be no other suitors beside him—a point that is all too easily lost in more abstract discussions of referentiality and linguistics. The exchange commences with Pfaff talking to himself and does not essentially change, despite the coerced inclusion of Anna’s voice:

“A father has a right to . . .” “. . . the love of his child.” Loud and toneless, as though she were at school, she completed his sentences. [. . .] “For getting married my daughter . . .”—he held out his arm—“. . . has no time.”
“She gets her keep from . . .” “. . . her good father.” “Other men do not want . . .” “. . . to have her.”

With regard to the implicit Freud debate, it is of obvious import that the exclusion of other erotic interests is an unambiguous function of the father’s unseemly desire for the daughter, and not vice versa. The extent to which Anna is reduced to a function of her father’s fantasy world is made abundantly evident by the fact that she is compelled not only to speak like her father, but to dress like him as well. Wearing his pants, doing his job, and ultimately bearing his name—he renames her “Poli” (“Polly” in Wedgwood) to remind him of the “Polizist” he once was—Anna’s independent existence is effectively obliterated. And this, Pfaff opines, is the way to handle women after all: “Since he had nominated her Polly, he was proud of her. Women were good for something after all, men just have to understand how to make Pollys of them.”

The “other” whom Anna impersonates is merely a figment of her father’s narcissistic imagination, a sadomasochistic stimulant to his
sexual fantasy. Having subjugated her in this manner, Pfaff was inclined to pleasure: “For hours he fondled her.”

Just as he has scripted his own wife’s death, Pfaff actively—but unsuccessfully—attempts to camouflage the incest as some kind of acceptable paternal solicitousness. Given this imbalance of narrative power, we must sometimes piece together the actual abuse from revelatory fragments scattered throughout the narrative. For example, in a passage clearly describing the father-daughter relationship subsequent to the mother’s death, we encounter the astonishing phrase—clearly attributable to Anna’s consciousness—“in the long years of their marriage” (in den langen Jahren ihrer Ehe). “Marriage” is of course the most arresting term here, whereas the descriptive phrase “long years” indicates the daughter’s subjective experience of time in this oppressive relationship. If this might quickly be passed over, then we need only turn to Pfaff’s blunter formulations. For he uses within the space of three pages two separate terms for the illicit “honeymoon” (Wonnemond and Honigmond) he shamelessly conducts with his daughter since his wife’s premature demise.

Furthermore, when Anna engages in her doomed fantasy of redemption, she attends to a sartorial matter that might seem extraneous until we realize her need to appear to her would-be savior, the “black knight” Franz, as the virgin she no longer is: “She takes all the money with her, over her nightgown she slips on her own coat, the one she’s never allowed to wear, not the old cast-off of her father’s, thus she appears to be a virgin.” The significance of this apparent detail becomes clearer when we turn our attention to the culmination of Anna’s fantasy: just as Franz declares his determination to marry her and her alone, Anna has him take approving notice of her “new coat.” Again, if Anna’s subaltern language permits alternate and less repellent interpretive possibilities, her father’s less subtle manner of speech proves stunningly less ambiguous. Inhabiting the narrator’s voice, he relates: “While she beat the steak for his dinner, he could thump her to his heart’s content. His eye did not know what his hand did.” Thus we can easily surmise the reason for her unmistakable fear of the marital bed, “the fear which this piece of furniture instilled into her.” In the end we learn that, after being beaten almost to death, “she lived for several more years as her father’s servant and wife,” at which point the term “Weib” (wife, woman) as designation for Anna should no longer surprise us—yet it does. We are left to
wonder only if the guilt-ridden Pfaff, in an intertextual reference to Poe,\textsuperscript{38} has walled up his daughter’s corpse in the adjoining room. Certainly the evidence of his escalatingly guilty conscience, whose demands increasingly intrude upon his consciousness and culminate in his confession to Georg,\textsuperscript{39} calls to mind the unforgettable “Tell-Tale Heart.”\textsuperscript{40}

But domestic violence was not Canetti’s only—or, perhaps, even principal—point here, and the contrast with Kien, whom Pfaff threatens with a similar fate of domestic interment, clarifies the issue. Particular to Anna’s story are two factors: the incest itself, and the concomitant, elaborate effort to reconstruct her as a mere supporting actor in Pfaff’s psychodrama. These two elements propel the story into conflict with an influential cultural narrative already firmly entrenched at the time of the novel’s writing and one that, if we can believe Adolf Grünbaum’s pronouncement on “the present stunningly ubiquitous cultural influence of the Freudian corpus,” is largely with us still.\textsuperscript{41} In plotting this story, Canetti goes to some lengths to insure that this narrative both conjures and collides head on with Freud’s account of fathers and daughters. In naming his fictional daughter after Freud’s own daughter, Anna, Canetti may indeed have earned the compliment proffered by Friedl Benedikt: “Nobody can write as wickedly as you.”\textsuperscript{42}

It is this single father-daughter relationship, in fact, that can be said to have given birth to psychoanalysis, despite the fact that Freud would already in the Weimar period be accused of a myopic preoccupation with men—that is, with sons and mothers—and of having founded a “masculine psychology.”\textsuperscript{43} In the beginning, however, Freud derived much of his theory from the analysis of what was then known as female hysteria. Though Freud encountered case after case of incest and sexual assault by fathers and father figures, he interpreted these stories as defenses against a deeper truth: the daughters’ unacknowledged sexual desire for their fathers. And in this way he was able to confirm that cornerstone of psychoanalysis, the Oedipus complex. Later, Freud would contend that any serious detractor would have to come to terms with this central tenet: “Every human newcomer has been set the task of mastering the Oedipus complex. Whoever cannot manage it falls prey to neurosis. The progress of psychoanalytic work has sketched the significance of the Oedipus complex ever more sharply; its recognition has become the shibboleth that separates the adherents of psychoanalysis from its opponents.”\textsuperscript{44} Thus Freud, who by now had placed the Oedipus complex
squarely at the center of his controversial account of the rise of civilization (*To
tem and Taboo*), drew a line in the sand. And Canetti, with his frequent
er public renditions of “The Good Father,” meant to cross it.

Freud’s account of the girl’s passage through the Oedipus complex has
of course proven notoriously controversial. Even in his own words, Freud
seems to suggest that the girl does not so much pass through as remain
mired in her erotic attachment to the father. True, she transfers her love from
mother to father; but where does she go from here? Freud’s own pronuncia-
tion does not offer much hope: “She slips — along the line of symbolic equa-
tion, one might say — from penis to a baby. Her Oedipus complex culminates
in a desire, which is long retained, to receive a baby from her father as a
gift — to bear him a child.” Indeed, as Judith Lewis Herman argues, Freud’s
model posits girls who are predisposed to father-daughter incest. It is not
difficult to see how this side of the Oedipus complex would prove useful to
Freud in dispelling the claims of sexual trauma made by his female “hyste-
rics”: their stories only served to conceal their own illicit desire. Though it
would be unfair to suggest that Freud actually sanctioned the sexual assault
of daughters by fathers (and father figures, like uncles and older male friends
of the family), or that he completely denied such abuse, his theory would
serve powerfully to disguise such molestation as the fantasy of maladjusted
women. In the *Introductory Lectures*, Freud recounts rather candidly why he
was moved to recant his own seduction theory, an interpretation that ac-
tcepted at face value the accounts of his female “hyste-
rics,” in favor of the
allegedly deeper explanatory power of the Oedipus complex: “Almost all of
my women patients told me that they had been seduced by their father. I
was driven to recognize in the end that these reports were untrue and so
came to understand that the hysterical symptoms are derived from phan-
tasies and not from real occurrences . . . It was only later that I was able to
recognize in this phantasy of being seduced by the father the expression of
the typical Oedipus complex in women.” In a footnote appended to a sub-
sequent edition of *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud did admit to falsifying a case
study by suppressing the fact that a father was in fact the perpetrator of the
molestation of his daughter. But this was of little consequence in light of
his continued trumpeting of the female Oedipal complex, which in effect
suggests that if the daughter does not wholly imagine the abuse, then at least
she can be thought to have elicited it on account of an unresolved erotic
attachment to her father.
What Freud had driven inward, Canetti was determined to bring into the light of day. “The Good Father,” with its blunt portrayal of Pfaff’s abuse of Anna, challenges the Freudian internalization of this father-daughter conflict. Despite obvious thematic parallels that would at first invite a Freudian reading, Anna’s predicament cannot possibly be grasped by means of the Freudian prefabricated postulate of daughterly desire. And, as if it were not already abundantly clear that Freud is the spectral antagonist in “The Good Father,” the title itself seems designed to cement the allusion and clarify the target. For though it is the beleaguered daughter who is forced to bestow the epithet “the good father” on the villainous Pfaff, we come to see by means of the intertextual dynamic implicit in this chapter that it is none other than Freud who makes this appellation culturally available — and problematic.

In bequeathing this title to the patriarchal society of his day, Freud authorizes — however inadvertently — a kind of blindness to social reality, one of the principal varieties of “Blendung” arraigned in this novel. Viewing “The Good Father” as a counternarrative to what Jung later dubbed the “Electra Complex” expands our understanding of Canetti’s critique of contemporary misogyny, explored above in chapter 2. In the case of Pfaff it is clearly not a matter of an individual’s use of the feminine to shore up a dissolving self — he, like many lower-class personages of literary modernism, does not possess enough of a self to be taken seriously in this regard — but a larger cultural narrative that is here put on trial. From this perspective, the stability and affirmation the Viennese patriarchy derives from Freud’s Oedipus complex — despite the surface clamor and claims of outrage — comes at the price of repressing a reprehensible social reality.49

Apropos of overreaching theory and in particular of his reception of Freud, Canetti once observed:

Among the most uncanny phenomena of human intellectual history is the evasion of concrete experience [das Ausweichen vor dem Konkreten]. There exists a striking penchant to go after the most distant of things first and to overlook everything that one continually knocks up against in the immediate vicinity. The soaring arc of grand [interpretive] gestures — the adventure and audacity of expeditions into the unknown — masks the motivations for going there. Not infrequently, it is simply a matter of avoiding the most immediate reality because we are not equal to it.50
This “evasion of the concrete” is, I would suggest, the rubric that best captures Canetti’s Freud critique, here and in subsequent passages considered in this chapter. Freud’s promulgation of the Oedipus complex comes under fire in Auto-da-Fé not because it is inherently wrong as a model for individual psychology—that is simply not at issue here—but because it is overextended in a manner inconsistent with observable social facts. It is quite true that Canetti would later reject the Oedipus complex outright—replacing it in Crowds and Power with the more positive concept of “Verwandlung” (transformation)\textsuperscript{51}—but the novel’s disavowal of this central Freudian notion is already conspicuous.

Canetti is fully aware that his father-daughter narrative shifts the sympathy to the “tortured daughter” and toward the recognition of the intersubjective reality of power. As he approvingly remarks in noting the response to a public reading, “The auditors were moved by the ‘Good Father,’ there was the opportunity for sympathy with the tormented daughter.”\textsuperscript{52} Moreover, Canetti is fully convinced that his version of the story resonates with palpable Viennese reality: “The frightful ‘Good Father’ provoked horror; the Viennese were well aware of the power of their building superintendents [Hausbesorger] and I don’t believe that anyone would have dared doubt the truth of this figure as long as everyone in the room was in his [Pfaff’s] power.”\textsuperscript{53} Actual—not just fictionalized—child abuse was in any case a great sensation in fin-de-siècle Vienna, as Larry Wolff has documented. “The Viennese cases,” Wolff observes, “provide us with an extraordinary picture of how child abuse was perceived and interpreted in an age that had not yet accepted the fundamental concept of child abuse.”\textsuperscript{54} Canetti’s stark reinscription of this issue in the Pfaff-Anna conflict might therefore be seen not merely as a sobering evocation of this as yet unrecognized social pathology, but also as an inquiry into “why it had to be obliterated and forgotten.”\textsuperscript{55} The social resonance of Pfaff-like violence is further corroborated by the modernist sculptor Fritz Wortruba, who, remarking on the same reading of “The Good Father” Canetti refers to above, is said to have quipped “that nothing was more Vienna, the real Vienna, than that which [was] selected for this reading.”\textsuperscript{56} And later Dr. Sonne will testify to the irreducible truth of the Pfaff figure.\textsuperscript{57} It can hardly be a coincidence that when Canetti later set down his own definition of “hysteria,” he would eschew all references to intrapsychic disturbances, and view it instead as a woman’s frequently unsuccessful attempt to escape male violence and domination.\textsuperscript{58}
To appreciate Canetti’s revision of the Freudian masterplot does not require that we fully endorse it. Faithful Freudians could easily exempt themselves from the novel’s critique by crying foul. Though Anna is clearly disturbed and apparently delusional, she does not seem to exhibit classical symptoms of “hysteria.” And is not Pfaff a kind of extreme, tailor-made exemplum? While Canetti never wavered in his insistence that “The Good Father,” nourished by the “darkest aspects” of Viennese society, exhibits a quantum of social truth, devout Freudians could claim that Canetti holds Freud to a standard that is simply incommensurate with the latter’s own claims. Whatever the case may be, it should be noted that Canetti sounds a critique here (and in the instances discussed below) that will echo throughout later Freud reception. Even—or especially—those who wish to redeem Freud for use in social theory will have occasion to address what is seen as psychoanalysis’s inherent propensity to privatize what properly belongs to the social. In the end, of course, *Auto-da-Fé* is limited in its engagement to the tools of fiction: it can merely provoke, satirize, and suggest; clearly, it cannot disprove in a purely analytic sense.

If the assessment of the novel’s Freud critique must to some extent remain in the eye of the beholder, there can be little doubt as to the narrative’s almost heavy-handed allusion to Freud. Anna imaginatively refashions the sickly and slight grocery clerk into an avenging black knight, creating a fairy tale with a thick network of Freudian motifs that would seem to rival any of Bruno Bettelheim’s examples from *Kinder brauchen Märchen* (published as *The Uses of Enchantment*). Franz gives Anna a treasured cigarette, which she caresses and nuzzles as if it were a baby, stowing it on her person in a place her father would never think to violate (just below her breasts); but of course he does. Franz, “the noble knight” (*der edle Ritter*), declines the opportunity to elope quietly, insisting instead on the honor of ceremoniously beheading the father, which in turn triggers an additional Oedipal desire. Suddenly Franz feels impelled to bring “the father’s red head” to mother (albeit to Anna’s mother): “‘To mother,’ he says, ‘she should also have some happiness.’” Upon winning his “virgin” bride in this manner, Franz comments in a way that seems to exceed his own understanding: “Today . . . I’ll carry you off back home.” But just as Canetti explicitly invokes the fairy tale atmosphere only to parody it, so too does he evoke the language and imagery of psychoanalysis only to undermine it. For in the chapter’s parting gambit, it becomes clear that the expectations aroused by these Freudian allusions
are not only unfulfilled, but reversed. Pfaff’s naked aggression fully suffices to motivate the unmistakable masochism of Anna’s richly imagined revenge fantasy; we have little need for Freudian notions that posit masochism in pubescent girls and women as a product of the female Oedipus complex.\textsuperscript{64} Franz’s utility to Anna lies not in his function as father replacement, or even as erotic love object, but purely in his role as potential patricide. When we read “She wants to get a husband in order to get away from home,”\textsuperscript{65} we fully realize that Anna is not just any teenage girl anxious to make her way in the adult world. Quite in contrast to the powerful black knight of her fantasy, the real Franz turns out to be a common thief who is thrown in jail, whence he is unable to perform his rescue function. Because he is impotent to deliver her from paternal harm, Anna dismisses Franz as immaterial to her real concern.\textsuperscript{66}

If “The Good Father” disputes the dominant Freudian narrative on fathers and daughters, it does so without the intent of creating sustained sympathy for Anna, or for similarly abused girls, as an end in itself. Though aware that his narrative revision cast the daughter in a relatively more compassionate light, Canetti’s aesthetics demand here as elsewhere a cool, unsentimental consideration of the issues at stake. By abjuring the aesthetics of identification, that is, by eschewing a lachrymose portrayal of the brutalized daughter, Canetti prevents us from “dissolving ourselves”—to echo Kien’s fears about popular novels—in empathy for an Anna, who of course to some extent remains a comic cipher. Instead (and, like Brecht, Canetti saw this as an either/or situation), the novel’s strikingly dispassionate depiction of father-daughter violence invites a response whose energies would not be discharged within the story, but directed outward to the world the novel seeks to engage. To put it simply: Anna’s stark unreality contrasts productively with the reality of the social problems to which she points. In confronting Freud’s “Dora” with his own Anna, Canetti strikes a blow at the explanatory power of the Oedipus complex, the very centerpiece of Freud’s whole theory. Pfaff’s sexual violence is undeniably real and inescapably “out there”: “To be sure he took his stepdaughter off the bed and beat her bloody.”\textsuperscript{67} No less than Georg’s neoempiricism and Kien’s elitist conception of scholarship and idealist culture, psychoanalysis makes its appearance in Auto-da-Fé as a popular but fatally flawed brand of blindness to a world that will not be ignored.
Georg and Countertransference: The Machiavellian Analyst

The figure of Georg, the gynecologist turned psychiatrist, might seem at first glance the most obvious place to begin an investigation of the novel's engagement with Freud. But are we justified now in viewing Georg as a kind of Freudian analyst, especially in light of our prior association of him with the explicitly non-Freudian psychological movement known as neoempiricism? Can we have it both ways? Canetti’s undogmatically and capacious drawn figure does indeed evince several key Freudian concepts and practices, as we will see below; but we must keep in mind that Georg both evokes and exceeds this role. He is not merely a cipher, as in a roman à clef, for the psychoanalyst; as we have seen, he is a crystallization site for a whole cluster of cultural movements, including neoempiricism, primitivist “life philosophy” (Lebensphilosophie), and, yes, Freudian analysis as well. Though Canetti goes to some lengths to satirize the psychoanalyst as unacknowledged powerbroker — reprising one of his favorite themes — the parody ultimately functions to discredit Georg as the oracle of crowd theory. In other words, in this case Canetti actually employs Freudian notions, though only provisionally, in order to undermine Georg’s pseudosolution to the crisis of modern culture.

The chapter that introduces us to Georg, “A Mad House” (Ein Irrenhaus), is laced with Freudian references, as perhaps any sustained treatment of psychology by 1930 would inevitably be. Georg’s jealous assistants, for example, link their director’s unorthodox methods and unbridled ambition to a disturbed childhood and in particular to a fear of sexual impotence.68 Earlier in the novel, too, we notice the broad influence of popularized Freudian ideas in the comic portrayal of the wedding night — a subject to which Georg himself will later turn in an effort to analyze his brother. After the wedding ceremony, Therese produces the key, which Kien cannot find despite desperate fumbling in his pant pockets. She proceeds to dominate sexually, albeit unsuccessfully, in a manner that has led one critic (Foell) to view her as a “phallic mother.” Kien clearly recognizes that his chief nuptial task (“seine Aufgabe”) is now to initiate sexual intercourse, and attempts to build up his courage to do so.69 Ultimately, he reaches the conclusion that sexual intercourse, presumably by means of the Freudian “principle of constancy,” will bring him relief from the nightmares he attributes to his abstemious life-
style: “The bad dreams of these last days were doubtless connected with the exaggerated austerity of his life. Everything would be different now.” Thus, sex is for Kien a necessary evil, a kind of pressure release valve that will allow him to carry on his service to culture more efficiently.

Evoking similar notions of popularized Freudianism, Georg, on his way to Munich to aid his beleaguered brother, wonders what could possibly be ailing his virtually sexless older brother. Revealing the Freudian conception that personality disorders are rooted in the psychic management of sexual instincts, Georg queries: “What could be oppressing him, an almost sexless creature?” Peter’s apparent sexlessness only momentarily stumps the stellar psychiatrist, who quickly modifies his diagnosis to madness brought on by exaggerated repression (rather than absence) of sexuality: “Peter belongs in a lock-up facility. He has lived chastely for too long.” These and numerous other episodes that evoke the general atmosphere of Freudian psychology are more than witty and wicked instances of the novel’s comic background music. Indeed, they set the stage and direct our attention to the question of Georg’s relationship to psychoanalysis.

On closer consideration, however, we discover there is much that sets Georg apart from Freud, at least on the surface. Most important is Georg’s conviction that his whole approach to psychology is fundamentally anti-bourgeois, not to mention his deepest desire to leave the mentally ill, as far as possible, in their state of intense and “authentic” (if psychotic) delirium. While some critics may wish to view precisely these characteristics as inverted references, respectively, to Freud’s own pronounced political conservatism and to psychoanalysis’s reputation as an essentially “bourgeois discipline,” it may be more correct to say that it is specifically Georg’s misplaced belief in his own radicalism that constitutes the parody. That is, just as Freud fancied himself a bourgeois critic in certain matters of sexuality, he actually served to undergird that class at a deeper level. This aside, there is a more obvious point of contact with Freud: Georg’s lauded form of treatment consists exclusively of the “talking cure.” Gerald Stieg, at any rate, does not hesitate to refer to this practice as “Georg’s psychoanalytic therapy” and to the practitioner himself as a “psychoanalyst.”

An example of Georg’s “Freudian” approach can be gleaned from his attempt to cure Kien by taking him back to the origins of his misogyny in order then to rid him of this disturbance:
Georg noticed very well every time Peter’s voice went sharp. It was enough that his thoughts returned to the woman upstairs. He had not said a word about her, but already in his voice there betrayed itself a screeching, shrill, incurable hatred . . . He must be induced to give vent to as much of his hatred as possible. If only he would simply retrace the events as they had appeared to him from their origins onwards in a simple narrative! Georg knew well how to play the part of the eraser in such a retrospect, and to wipe from the sensitive plate of memory all its traces.  

Here we see Georg intent upon helping Kien manage his irrational hatred not with drugs or electroshock therapy or even by means of incarceration (despite an earlier temptation to do just that), but by listening to and interpreting the stories of his patient. The very image of Georg as eraser (Radiergummi) may already contain the novel’s caricature of this practice, yet “erasure” is not all that far from the term Anna O. would famously give to the Freudian talking cure: “chimney sweeping.” This attempt to have Peter “talk away” his problems raises the question of Georg’s overall track record with patient treatment, his own claims to unqualified success notwithstanding.

The hallmark of Georg’s spectacular new treatment consists not merely in talking (and then erasing), but in his active encouragement of that central event in psychoanalytic therapy known as “transference.” Freud once described transference as the therapeutic revival of “a whole series of psychological experiences . . . not as belonging to the past, but as applying to the person of the physician at the present moment.” This process of inappropriate projection onto the essentially unknown person of the psychoanalyst provides crucial insights into the patient’s personal history and is considered to be indispensable to the psychoanalytic cure. Psychologist and Freud expert Stephen Frosh explains that “transference has increasingly come to be seen as the central element in the psychoanalytic situation, encouraged by the passivity and ‘blank screen’ behaviour of the analyst.”

Georg considers himself, as we observed above, to be precisely such a neutral recipient of his patients’ manias, his preferred self-appellation being eine spazierende Wachstafel that passively registers only his patients’ needs: “Instead of working over things or responding to them, he received them mechanically.” Canetti could hardly have devised an image more likely to
conjure Freud’s own figure for the properly objective and distant analyst. “The physician,” Freud writes, “should be opaque to the patient and, like a mirror, show nothing but what is shown to him.” 82 Though Georg’s claim to objectivity and neutrality is ultimately belied, as we saw above, by his own behavior, his effort to engage his patients’ fantasies and desires does evoke (even if it simultaneously misconstrues) the Freudian “reliance of analysts on making an alliance with the patient’s ego.” 83

Notice in the following passage, part of which we have already visited in another context, how the encouragement of the patient’s fantasy projections is intimately linked to the therapist’s exercise of power. Here Georg, clothing himself in the narrator’s voice, is describing his most promising patients, whom he (like Freud) would treat in his own apartment:

There he would easily win, if he did not enjoy it already, the confidence of those who, towards anyone else, would hide behind the screen of their insanity. Kings he addressed reverently as Your Majesty; with Gods he would fall on his knees and fold his hands. Thus even the most sublime eminences stooped to him and went into particulars. He became their sole confidant, whom, from the moment they had recognized him, they would keep informed of the changes in their own spheres and seek his advice. He advised them with crystal cleverness, as though their wishes were his own, cautiously keeping their arms and their beliefs before his eyes . . . Was he not after all their chief minister, their prophet or their apostle, occasionally even their chamberlain? 84

It hardly needs to be said that Georg, his self-image notwithstanding, hardly fulfills the psychoanalytic contract: rather than assisting his patients to resolve their conflicts, he actively encourages their delusions by taking on and playing out their fantasies. Without a doubt, Georg’s evocation of transference simultaneously contravenes the fundamental Freudian precept barring analysts from abandoning their neutrality: “On no account must the analyst live up to the transference,” writes Frosh, paraphrasing Freud’s own warnings of 1915 contained in a paper titled “Observations on Transference Love”: “every departure from analytic distance and the pure pursuit of truth supports the patient’s resistances and makes the analytic work more difficult.” 85

The caricatured nature of this allusion to Freudian analysis may be held by some to exonerate authentically practiced psychoanalysis. But the opposite may in fact be true: For the caricature only draws out the structural
imbalance endemic to the patient-analyst relationship. Frosh elucidates this inherent potential for abuse, of which Georg makes rich use: “[Psychanalysis] accentuates the power of the therapist to such a degree that it appears to validate authoritarianism . . . The real distress engendered in the patient by experiences which s/he has undergone are taken up into the person of the analyst so that all reality is lost and everything is understood in terms of the transference relationship—an astonishing piece of megalomania, if nothing worse.” Canetti satirizes this aspect of analytic hubris in Georg’s purported ability to cure schizophrenia precisely by hosting, as it were, the patient’s rival personalities in his own consciousness: “The scientific world argued vigorously over his treatment of schizophrenia of the most varied kinds. If a patient, for instance, imagined himself to be two people who had nothing in common or who were in conflict with each other, Georg Kien adopted a method which had at first seemed very dangerous even to him: he made friends with both parties . . . Then he would proceed to the cure. In his own consciousness he would gradually draw the separate halves of the patient—as he embodied them—closer to each other, and thus gradually would rejoin them.” It does not much matter that the bulk of Freud’s patients were neurotics, not psychotics like Georg’s clientele. Nor is it ultimately important that Freud specifically cast doubt on the effectiveness of analysis for psychotics. For this caricature is clearly not drawn out of a concern for scrupulous fairness to Freud, but to ridicule the tyranny of the analyst. Indeed, Freud’s own dictatorial certainty that Dora’s adamant denials of the master’s diagnosis were actually covert affirmations of his insights may not have been far from Canetti’s mind. The last sentence of the passage quoted above indulges in comic hyperbole, to be sure, yet it also expresses Canetti’s conviction that psychoanalysis, authorized in this instance by the privilege of the all-powerful analyst, is complicit in the reduction of social to mental phenomena. The patient, after all, no longer even exists for Georg, except as a function of the analyst’s consciousness. As in the case of Pfaff’s attempt to subordinate Anna’s existence to his own, we are meant to recognize psychoanalysis as a dubious accomplice in this process. Despite considerable liberties, then, Georg’s “quite controversial” treatment captures rather effectively the problematic role assigned to the Freudian therapist, namely to “take up into the person of the analyst” (Frosh) all the patient’s fantasies and desires in order then to assist in the resolution of psychic disturbances. It should come as no surprise, then, to learn that Canetti would later describe
the psychoanalyst’s “blank screen” behavior as “cold” and “power-hungry” and the analysand, conversely, as “helpless” and “exposed.” From this perspective, Georg’s celebrated method of mending a split ego serves as a kind of cautionary tale about the potential for ontological reductionism implicit in the therapeutic relationship.

But Georg is not merely a walking illustration of the imbalance of power intrinsic to the transference phenomenon. He crosses the line and commits the cardinal psychoanalytic sin of countertransference in allowing his own response to one of his favorite patients to influence the treatment outcome of that patient. Jean Préval is one of the doctor’s model patients, and as such serves well in characterizing Georg. The assistants at the psychiatric institute marvel at and envy their leader’s ability to treat this particularly intractable case. Georg’s phenomenal success consists of nothing more than encouraging Jean’s delusion that his absent wife is indeed present, when she has in fact disappeared long ago, having run off with a young officer. Georg’s encouragement is clearly the key factor in the diurnal conjuring of an imaginary Jeanne: “But Jean, she’s in the net, don’t you see her?” the analyst would insist; and, lo: “He was always right. His friend opened his mouth and look, his wife was there.” Although the assistants try the very same trick (“die Zauberformel”), only the trusted Georg can fulfill this fantasy: “Every day he helped Jean produce her.”

While this may already constitute psychoanalytic malpractice, it is not yet countertransference. This first occurs at a point in the novel celebrated by other critics as Georg’s eloquent disquisition on the futility of individuality and the inevitability of the crowd—a passage that, as we noted above, has consistently been seen as an expression of Canetti’s own views on the crowd, and therefore has endowed Georg with an ill-deserved authority. Basking in his ability to mediate the multitudinous roles imagined for him by his psychotic patients, and despairing at his assistants’ constitutional incapacity to do so, this preeminent psychiatrist is inspired to explain what distinguishes him from these mundane colleagues. Georg decries their overly restrictive, unidimensional psyches (“ihre flachen Seelen”). What these overly cultivated apprentices refuse to acknowledge, claims Georg, and here he is echoing the Lebensphilosophie that first converted him to psychiatry, is the primal drive toward the crowd: “Of that far deeper and most essential motive force of history, the desire of men to rise into a higher type of animal, into the mass, and to lose themselves in it so completely as to forget that one man ever existed,
they [the assistants] had no idea. For they were educated, and education is in itself a *cordon sanitaire* for the individual against the mass in his own soul.”92

As we noted above when we first began to glimpse the fundamental similarity between Georg and Kien, Georg’s espousal of the crowd is calculated initially to evoke readerly sympathy. Not only is the bearer of this message the novel’s first—and only—really attractive character, but the message itself seems correctly to diagnose Kien’s own abuse of high culture, namely as a “Festungsgürtel” (fortress belt) against a feared modernity envisioned by the elitist professor precisely as the province of the masses. Kien’s fortress-like library, the walled-up windows of which are meant to keep the world at bay, is only the most obvious of symptoms and symbols in this regard. Add to this Canetti’s later analysis of crowds—in pointed but unacknowledged opposition to Freud—as fundamentally positive human groupings fulfilling primal urges, and one can easily grasp the temptation of so much Canetti scholarship to view Georg as the mouthpiece of the author of *Crowds and Power*.

This view, actively encouraged by the novel on the one hand, is substantially qualified by the very context of these remarks, thus creating a stimulating narrative dynamic, a push and pull that makes us aware of our own readerly desire inherent in the hermeneutic process. Some critics, beginning with Barnouw, had early on begun to suspect that Georg is hardly the dispassionate voice of reason, as we have noted. Yet apart from what has been said about Georg’s questionable practices and general unreliability elsewhere in the novel, no one has yet observed how the very passage that is supposed to elevate Georg’s trustworthiness as bearer of crowd theory actually undermines his status considerably. For it is within the context of an egregious instance of countertransference onto his star patient Jean that Georg delivers this vaunted soliloquy on the crowd.

Madness, says Georg, is attributable to an untenable repression of the masses within. In what sounds like an instinctual theory à la Freud—substitute “libido” for “crowd” and it would be hard to tell the difference—our psychiatrist postulates the following: “Countless people go mad because the crowd in them is particularly strongly developed and can get no satisfaction. In no other way did he explain himself and his own activity. Once he had lived for his private tastes, his ambition and women; now his one desire was perpetually to lose himself. In this activity he came nearer to the thoughts and wishes of the crowd, than did those other individuals who surrounded
Whereas Georg had previously claimed to be interested also in historically real crowds—“die Wirksamkeit der Masse in der Geschichte”—he ends up interiorizing this social phenomenon. Like his philologist brother, Georg’s advocacy of grand explanatory theories turns out to serve his immediate (and, as we will presently see, changing) needs. Here Georg is claiming to have successfully circumvented the dangers of an erupting crowd by assimilating the porous, malleable self he so valued in the gorilla man; in other words, by his therapeutic practice of “perpetually losing himself.” We might note in passing that this conception implies a humorous reversal in which patients serve as fodder for the analyst’s own self-therapy—a preparatory step in the process of countertransference that will follow. But at this point, which represents the grand finale of Georg’s oration about crowds, what is essential to notice is that the crowd has become an intrapsychic phenomenon. Precisely by playing out the many roles assigned him, above all by successfully mediating the presence of the spectral Jeanne that inaugurates this discourse on the crowd in the first place, Georg claims to have appeased his own “inner crowd.” Like the psychotic patients he treats, Georg has become the crowd, and therefore need not fear its vengeance.

All such “philosophical” musings on crowd theory are of course bracketed by the story of the unfortunate village blacksmith turned mass murderer, Jean Préval, whom Georg approaches once again on evening rounds. But Georg’s fortunes have suddenly turned: his assistants are no longer enamored or even jealous of their leader, and the once fawning patients have become indifferent: “A sad day, he said softly to himself... He always breathed in the stream of other people’s feelings. Today he could feel nothing around him, only the heavy air.” In this depressive mood, Georg encounters Jean’s relentless and now tiresome preoccupation with his long-since-departed wife. Reminded of his own flagging marriage—Georg will soon confess: “My wife bores me”—he mounts the countertransference. Annoyed specifically by the connubial loyalty he observes in his patient, Georg takes his revenge on the imaginary wife Jeanne: “‘Hit her over the head,’ said Georg, he was sick and tired with this thirty-two years of faithfulness. Jean hit her hard and performed the screams of help for her.” Though Jean’s behavior is initially no different today than on any other day, his request elicits not the blank screen analytic behavior even Georg sometimes musters, but functions instead to trigger a crisis in the analyst’s own life. Georg’s cherished self-image, the very therapeutic structure, let us recall, that permits
him to host his inner crowd and cure his patients, is now endangered: “Be-
sides, the wax tablet was melting.” ⁹⁸ Now not even indulging in a fantasy of
his own future fame can cheer him up, for he must face the fact that such rev-
eries only delay what he desperately wants to avoid entirely, namely going
home to his wife: “Why don’t I go home? Because my wife’s there. She wants
love . . . The wax tablet weighed heavy.” ⁹⁹

This instance of imaginary wife-beating probably has very little to do
with raising readers’ consciousness about actual domestic violence, particu-
larly since Jean himself supplies the screams for his imagined victim. Yet it
represents an important point of convergence for the themes we have been
thus far considering. The only Jeanne we know, and the one Jean batters, is
after all largely the product of the omnipotent analyst. As such, she under-
scores her creator’s depoliticizing tendency, already in evidence during the
interpolated monologue on crowd theory. In deploying “Jeanne,” Georg
clearly employs his power to enforce the internalization of a problem en-
meshed in the iconic events of economic modernity. Though trapped now
in psychotic delusions, Jean Préval’s woes originate of course in his eco-
nomic displacement. As village blacksmith, he has been ruined by the ar-
ival of automobiles. “His wife, after a few weeks of acute poverty, could no
longer endure her life with him and ran off with a sergeant.” ¹⁰⁰ Though he
claims to want to find the actual wife, Georg is constitutionally ill equipped
to do so; as a psychologist he is disinclined to attend to the socioeconomic
causes of his patient’s symptoms.¹⁰¹ Rather than persuade Jean to learn a
new trade more promising in the late industrial period, Georg encourages
him to see himself not as socially embedded, but as an eternal type, that
is, as the wronged and vengeful husband from ancient mythology, Vulkan,
who catches his wife in the act of infidelity. Alluding to Freud’s own well-
known love of ancient mythology, and his tendency to build psychoanalysis
around archetypical situations prefigured in myth, Canetti endows Georg
with a similar passion. This is why Georg, even when he speaks of Jeanne
as a real-world woman, incites his star patient to imagine his regained wife
as Venus, trapped in Vulkan’s incriminating and punishing net.¹⁰² Though
a specific act of countertransference triggers the intertextual connection to
Freud, what is principally on trial here is Georg’s larger transference of a
fundamentally social problem—one pointedly rooted in the industrial dis-
locations of the early part of this century—to the realm of fantasy and uni-
versal myth. At issue, by extension, is Georg’s entire conversion to psychia-
try. Recall that he then claimed to leave behind the debauchery of easy sex and anesthetizing French literature, a kind of “schönegeistige Literatur” he felt papered over the cracks of the real world, in order honestly to confront a more complex and diverse reality. In his treatment of Jean Préval we see that Georg’s earlier commitment to multiplicity and difference is belied by his method of subsuming individual cases under prefabricated mythological constructs, a charge that precisely coincides with one of Canetti’s central and repeated critiques of psychoanalysis as master narrative—“the aridity of a single theory that would apply to all human beings.” 103 In the end, then, Georg’s apparent abandonment of gynecology in favor of psychiatry proves to be a homecoming— itself a kind of humorous Freudian allusion. Yet as much as Canetti may wish to loosen the grip of Freud on the popular imagination, it is noteworthy that the novel also capitalizes on this widespread cultural narrative. For it is partly due to the unwitting help of an admittedly bowdlerized Freud that we come to see Georg’s crowd theory as the opportunistic cant it essentially is.

In the Termite Colony

Alluding to the extremely popular Civilization and Its Discontents, Canetti has his fictional Freudian analyst concoct and apply his own, roughly parallel, account of the rise of society and culture. The context of Georg’s tale of the termite colony, which is meant to coax Kien into revealing his own libidinal drives, is at least as important as the story itself. Rather than rendering Kien a cooperative patient, however, Georg’s efforts only incite the learned scholar to ever greater heights of misogynist erudition. At the heart of this sibling rivalry, in which Kien ultimately gains the upper hand, are competing notions of culture. Kien’s rebuttal of Georg’s termite parable illustrates the shortcomings of the Freudian account: culture is not so much the achieved product of sublimation, we learn, but the site and record of ongoing conflict.

Though Freud had already rehearsed his fundamental ideas on societal ontogeny in Totem and Taboo (1912–13), these views received fresh articulation and widespread circulation in 1930, the year Canetti began work on the novel. “Freud could take comfort in his book’s astonishing popularity,” notes Gay; “within a year, its first edition of 12,000, exceptionally large for a work of Freud’s, was sold out.” 104 Georg’s anthropomorphic tale, which en-
visions a society founded upon the renunciation of the sexual drive, could thus scarcely have failed to evoke Freud at this time. Reflecting his primitivist orientation and the influence of his guru (the gorilla man), Georg displaces his story onto the animal kingdom. The very choice of termites seems calculated, as Stieg has suggested, to evoke Freud; for at one point in *Civilization* Freud muses about termites as having achieved an ideal state of stable sublimation that forever eludes humans.\textsuperscript{105} Though Freud distinguished human from termite society, he simultaneously presents it as an ideal of sorts and therefore comparable in some respects. Georg’s humorous explosion of the Freudian metaphor affords us the critical perspective we have come to expect in Canetti. Above all, the use of termites permits Canetti the opportunity of targeting one of the weakest links in Freudian theory, namely a notoriously unspecific theory of drives.\textsuperscript{106} Contrary to Stieg, who argues that Canetti’s cultural critique actually rests upon the Freudian theory of psychic economy, we will see how the novel parodies this foundational conception of drives.\textsuperscript{107}

But first let us have the tale—or at least the first half—in Georg’s own words:

Even some insects have it better than we do. One or a very few mothers bring into being the entire race. The rest remain underdeveloped. Is it possible to live at closer quarters than the termites do? What a terrifying accumulation of sexual stimuli such a stock would produce—if the creatures still possessed their sexuality! They do not possess it; and have the related instincts only in small quantities. Even what little they have, they fear. When they swarm, at which period thousands, nay millions, are destroyed apparently without reason, I see in this a release of the amassed sexuality of the stock. They sacrifice a part of their number, in order to preserve the rest from the aberrations of love. The whole stock would go aground on this question of love, were it once to be permitted.\textsuperscript{108}

While broadly alluding to Freud, this is clearly a rather imperfect clone of that master narrative. Yet it is precisely in those ways in which Georg’s tale alters its original that it becomes interesting as critique. Repression and sublimation are for Freud the *sine qua non* of human society, whereas the instincts of termites represent unalterable, genetically determined behavior patterns. A termite’s sociability is as predetermined as a moth’s attraction to light; there is never a question of their forgetting or remembering a sexuality
sacrificed for the benefit of society. The pseudoscience again pokes through as we observe Georg’s unabashed anthropomorphism: the termites, we are told, fear even the residual sexual instinct still in their possession.

Canetti’s use of the termite parable could be dismissed as another instance of the novel’s “hyperbolic parody,” a perhaps gratuitous burlesque on contemporary ideas. But to do so would be to fail to grasp the way in which this perhaps illegitimate transposition nevertheless raises valid and fundamental questions about Freud’s theory of drives. Freud of course observed a distinction between hardwired animal instincts (what Laplanche calls the “zoological” viewpoint) and those human drives (Trieb) deemed to be malleable and redirectable to other ends; yet Freud himself remained unclear on this crucial point. In having Georg espouse the patently absurd view that termites can somehow manage their own instincts, Canetti raises a serious set of questions regarding the process in humans. What is the domain of the “Instinkt” and what that of the “Trieb”? Where does biological determinism leave off, and where (and how) can analysis intervene in the economy of drives? If the actual determinants of sublimation remain shrouded in uncertainty, then what can be said about the civilization to which these repressed drives have supposedly given rise? These are some unresolved and perhaps unresolvable aporias of psychoanalysis implied in Georg’s blatantly incommensurate example.

The parody achieves sharper focus in the second half of the story, in which Georg’s fixation on a potential termite bacchanalia reflects his own unabated prurient interests as much as it continues to assault the Freudian notion of drives. Tellingly, the hard-wired Instinkt we noted above metamorphoses into the Trieb just at the point when the termites begin to act like the humans Georg really has in mind. The following passage, which in the novel follows immediately upon the one quoted above, begins as pure speculation but modulates by way of the historical present verb tense into a very immediate scenario:

I can imagine nothing more poignant than an orgy in a colony of termites. The creatures forget—a colossal recollection has seized hold of them—what they really are, the blind cells of a fanatic whole. Each will be himself, it begins with a hundred or a thousand of them, the madness spreads, their madness, a mass madness, the soldiers abandon the gates, the whole mound burns with unsatisfied love, they cannot find their partners, they
have no possibility of sex, the noise, the excitement far greater than anything usual, attracts a storm of ants; through the unguarded gates their deadly enemies press in, what soldier thinks of defending himself, they only want love; and the colony might have lived for all eternity—that eternity for which we all long—dies, dies of love, of that drive [Trieb] through which we, mankind, prolong our existence! A sudden reversal of the wisest into the most foolish.¹¹⁰

This “sudden reversal” dramatizes the conflict inherent in the Freudian explanation of culture: in so far as we are civilized at all, we are doomed to unhappiness. Georg’s specter of the advance of the killer ants may distort the threat (since Freud did not envision the peril as coming from without), but it does so in a manner that draws our attention to the fundamental trade-off implicit in the Freudian model of repression. If the termites seek to fulfill their deep sexual urges, this leads inevitably to social disintegration and certain death. Frosh could be speaking about Georg’s make-believe termites, but he is of course commenting on Freud’s view of civilization when he observes: “Before society there is only the unremitting and potentially calamitous libertarianism of the instincts; as soon as these instincts become bridled, society is formed . . . The theory that society is ineluctably opposed to individuality is one of the most pessimistic strands of thought associated with the bourgeois era. For Freud, the passions of the individual were primordial and dangerous, the work of civilisation being to control them—a justifiable work in the interests of the perpetuation of human existence.”¹¹¹

It is not merely the termite story that mocks Freud’s global explication of society and culture, it is Georg himself. He has positioned himself, as we recently saw, as the novel’s bold proponent of the crowd, as the sworn enemy of an isolationist, overindividuated cultivation that insulates us from our deepest “crowd drives.” In pointed contrast to his brother, Georg anoints himself—to borrow the title of Ernst Toller’s well-known Weimar-era play—the novel’s great “Masse Mensch” (crowd man). Here we catch him in the act of donning yet another, ill-fitting pseudosophical, hat. As the “Freudian” teller of the termite tale, he espouses a view quite incompatible with the very recently and earnestly espoused belief that the so-called crowd instinct is our deepest drive. With his claim that the sexual drive is both primordial and, in its naked quest for fulfillment, inherently opposed to social organization, he has clearly reversed himself. Whereas the “mass drive” (Massentrieb) made
its appearance just a few pages prior as itself a kind of libido, somehow both mankind’s first cause and destiny, here the sexual drive emerges as a decidedly less reliable friend of the “crowd.” It functions as a force for social cohesion only as long as it is bound by sublimation. But Georg suggests that it is only a matter of time until it emerges unshackled and destructive. It will erupt even amidst a species as sexless as termites, and, by extension, within his “virtually sexless” (beinaug geschlechtslos) elder brother; and in this push for erotic requital it operates (as Freud had argued) as a virulent solvent on social bonds. If this turnabout has eluded some critics, it is because Georg—no less than Pfaff—is a great manipulator of language. This individualistic drive for sexual gratification that dissolves the group into pleasure-seeking monads becomes within the space of a sentence a “mass hysteria” (Massenwahn), a term that may mask the otherwise blatant inconsistency with his previous position. Georg, it turns out, really is the protean player (Schau-spieler) Kien accuses him of being; in championing a roughly Freudian view of culture, he is now simply following the latest fad.

All the pseudoscientific jargon notwithstanding, Georg was never really talking about instinctual theory per se, but about women. Freud simply presented Georg the opportunity to dress up the misogyny he hoped would please his older brother in the garb of a respectable scholarly illustration. Georg admits as much when, just before he deploys the termite tale, he sees as his primary mission the task of removing Therese: “Evidently [Kien] expected Georg to take her away.”

By way of introduction to the termite parable, Georg remarks: “I believe . . . that you overestimate the importance of women. You take them too seriously, you think they are human beings like us. I see in women merely a passing necessary evil. Even some insects have it better than we do.” The subsequent story—or at least the first half, which holds out the prospect of firmly repressed sexuality—is meant to appease if not win over his brother; for the termites have in this segment already overcome this “necessary evil.” Kien refuses to take the point, however, and instead launches a tirade against the creation of woman, which he concludes with the lamentation, “What misery for all time!” This, in turn, provides Georg the opportunity to clarify the point of his parable: “Why for all time? We were just speaking a moment ago about the termites who have overcome sex. It is therefore neither an inevitable nor an invincible evil.”

In the second half of the story, which ostensibly represents a fundamental reversal, it remains clear that “sexuality” (das Geschlecht) is not to be
read as libidinal drives in general, but more specifically as “woman.” If the first half of the story functions as a carrot, the second half is meant as a stick. Even before he begins the story, Georg is evidently frustrated with his brother’s unwillingness to submit to therapy. For Georg cannot perform his chimney-sweeping function unless Kien cooperates in revealing the source of his troubles with Therese. This is the passage, noted above, where Georg offers to play the eraser, “if only Kien would simply retrace the events... narratively back to their origin!” The specter of the doomed termite orgy is Georg’s threat of the return of the repressed, a warning he explicitly couches as the (otherwise unmotivated) burning of Kien’s library. Submit to my therapy, Georg is saying, or suffer a similarly destructive fate. In denying the applicability of the termite allegory (and its implicit threat), Kien underscores the fact that he and Georg are talking about women and not sexual drives.

Spare me your idle threats, Kien is saying, for I have already killed off the woman at the root of my woes: “Of my own free will, alone, leaning on no one—I had not even an accessory—I have liberated myself from a weight, a burden, a living death, a rind of accursed granite. Where would I be if I had waited for you?” Georg’s termite parable is thus dismissed as superfluous. Kien has no need of grand psychosocial theories, for he has tended to the concrete problem in his own immediate vicinity.

Have the Kien brothers, in their predisposition to see women as the seat of sexuality and therefore as the real threat to culture, misread Freud? Not entirely. For while Freud intoned in Civilization and Its Discontents that “it is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct,” he simultaneously succumbed to a tendency to identify instinct with women and the work of sublimation with men. “Women represent the sexual impulse,” explains Frosh; “more prosaically, they are always trying to reclaim their menfolk from the clutches of the work of building culture (which forces men [according to Freud] to ‘carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable’) into their isolated family units. Hence, civilisation opposes women by the same principle that it opposes love.” While the novel’s parody certainly extends to this instance of slippage in Freud’s own work—about which Freudian revisionists have had a good deal to say—it takes primary aim at the more popular Freudian reception. For it is within this larger orbit that popularizations, like Georg’s termite narrative, would commingle Freudian “science” with deeply ingrained cultural prejudice. Here Canetti shows how the language
of biology and positivistic inquiry could be used to camouflage if not justify real-world aggression toward women.

This is the cultural malaise with which Canetti confronts Freudian social psychology, and he does so through the improbable mouthpiece of Kien himself. By this point in the novel—we are just short of the comic resolution in which Georg buys the cooperation of Pfaff and Therese—it no longer matters that the protagonist himself is discredited. For the truth of this cultural diagnosis depends not on the benighted Kien, but on the data he musters, which we recognize as existing independently of the fictional novel. At the outset of this diatribe, we may be inclined to dismiss Kien’s claim that “all really great thinkers are convinced of the worthlessness of women” as the bluster of a madman. But just as Georg often inadvertently makes his case, Kien manages to give us pause, despite himself. When at first he cites Confucius and Buddha, we may still cling to the belief that we are in the hands of a merely idiosyncratic Orientalist. Yet Kien soon demonstrates that he has plenty of other illustrations at his disposal. “I will prove to you that all women deserve hate,” he says to Georg. “You think I am expert only on the Orient. The proofs he needs, he’s taken from his own area of specialty—or so you thought. I shall tear the blue down from the sky for you, and I will tell no lies. Truths, beautiful, hard, pointed truths, truths of every size and shape, truths of feeling and truths of understanding, even though in your case only your feelings function, you woman.”

Indeed, as Kien is able to pluck his “proofs” so readily from ancient Greek mythology and philosophy, and then quote whole passages from Homer in support of his case, not to mention his citation of the Nibelungenlied, Michelangelo’s Sistine murals, Thomas Aquinas, Thomas More, a foray into ancient history, and so forth, it gradually becomes clear that this is no longer merely a case of private dementia. A symptom of the very cultural malady he illustrates, Kien powerfully demonstrates not “that all women deserve hate,” but the extent to which misogyny has been a constituent element of the cultural canon. The picture we gain here is one of culture as a chauvinistic semiotic battlefield, not the product of successfully sublimated libido. The violence we witnessed in the single case of Anna is here multiplied in the imagination of artists and philosophers, and given high cultural standing in the process. Kien does not cite Freud in this misogynist pantheon; he is far too past-minded to take notice of this newcomer. But the novel does: not for promoting the kind of rabid hatred that Kien spews forth, but for propagating
a grand theory that is at once amenable to this age-old prejudice and simultaneously diverts our attention from it. Though Freud knew of real-world violence—he famously sought to explain the barbarism of World War I—his psychological model would emphasize violence as intrasubjective and prior to the benefits of civilization. In one of the greatest, if bleakest, surveys of world literature and culture, *Auto-da-Fé* seems intent upon redirecting our attention to the fact that violence occurs within and in the name of civilization, as well as to the fact that the object of that violence is not in the first place some amorphously defined drives, but fellow human beings.

**Rejection and Displacement: Freud as Foil**

David Roberts asserted as recently as 1996 that “the rejection of psychoanalysis, fuelled by Canetti’s encounter with and direct experience of the crowd, is already the driving impulse of his early novel, *Auto-da-Fé.*” While the foregoing has been concerned precisely to show in some detail how this “driving impulse” determines the particular shape of this complex novel, Roberts’s thesis had to wait for verification until we could move beyond the assumption that Canetti’s two principal works, *Auto-da-Fé* and *Crowds and Power,* respond to this psychoanalytic impulse in the same manner. Reading *Auto-da-Fé* as a kind of literary encryption of *Crowds and Power* has actually tended to emarginate Freud from the discussion of the novel; for Georg can hardly be seen as the simultaneous bearer of Canetti’s truth *and* of Freud’s error. This, too, was to prove a pitfall for Roberts, whose laudable impulse to align these two works vis-à-vis Freud results in the less than convincing proposition that Georg’s crowd theory encapsulates a kind of alternate, group psychology that contrasts favorably with Freud’s untenable individual psychology. This simply entails too much reading backward and fails to respect the novel in its own right.

Looking back at the novel’s literary engagement with Freud, we perceive thoroughgoing negation rather than the positive “counter image” of society Roberts would see in the novel. Now there can be no question of Freud receiving a fair hearing in *Auto-da-Fé.* Canetti’s selection of recognizable Freudian notions, though hardly capricious, is undoubtedly polemic in that these ideas make their appearance only to be discarded as socially naive. In “The Good Father” we were reminded of psychoanalysis’s predilection
to psychologize real-world brutality; and in the person of Georg we noted an associated tendency to discredit socioeconomic determinants (e.g., the root causes of poor Jean Préval’s misfortune) in favor of intrapsychic and mythological accounts. Similarly, the ultimate and unexpected applicability of Georg’s termite parable to his elder brother’s deeply sexist and isolationist practice of high culture illustrated the problematic limits of Freud’s group psychology qua social theory. Auto-da-Fé thus echoes a standard critique of psychoanalysis’s introverted gaze—though, given the novel’s chronological priority, it would of course be more correct to say that these subsequent critics echo Canetti. Hermann Broch perceptively observed that the novel leaves only destruction in its wake; it does not rebuild on the site of its ruin. Broch’s comment is no less apropos of the novel’s repudiation of Freud than any other system of ideas or set of cultural practices treated in this study. “There is something uncompromising about it that one has to respect,” Broch observes. “But does that mean that you’ve given up hope? Does it mean that you yourself cannot find the way out, or does it mean that you are in doubt altogether about such a way out?”

Broch did not live long enough to get the answer to his question, for the “way out” he sought but clearly missed in the novel would not emerge for another thirty years, that is, until the publication of Crowds and Power in 1960. It is tempting to say that, by viewing Freud as the unacknowledged agon motivating both works, the latter study presents the answer to the question posed by the novel. But this would simplify the way in which Crowds and Power makes its own complex and ambitious case against Freud with the quite different analytical tools available to a writer of nonfiction. Despite significant differences, it is nevertheless arresting to note how similar both works are in their general approach to Freud. Indeed, Adorno could be speaking of the novel when he says to Canetti: “Your critique seems to me to be extremely fruitful and correct in many points, for the very reason that Freud’s basic tendency to replace the theory of society by individual psychology extended to the collectivity leads him time and again to the invariant fundamental quanta of the unconscious, neglecting essential historical modifications. As a result his social psychology remains somewhat abstract.” In the novel, Canetti was primarily concerned with clearing the way for further inquiry, that is, with negation, but not because he wished to promote a nihilistic worldview, as Peter Russell would famously accuse him. Freud’s widespread acceptance, Canetti complained, simply led to compla-
cency and to a dampening of intellectual curiosity. “The psychoanalytic epidemic had made advances,” Canetti laments. “The most astounding things were occurring in the world, but it was always the same, arid background against which they placed these events. They spoke of these things and considered them explained, and the phenomena were no longer surprising. Where thinking should have commenced, there croaked instead an impudent choir of frogs.”

With *Crowds and Power* Canetti fulfills the very agenda he set forth in the novel. By then it was no longer enough to show the insufficiency of Freudian ideas, confronting them with stubborn facts of social reality. Now that he had killed off father Freud, he would replace him. Significantly, Canetti begins his study with the crowd (“die Masse”), viewing it as a fundamentally positive unit of social organization. The *sine qua non* of the crowd is an elemental human experience Canetti labels “discharge” (*Entladung*), which engenders a foundational sense of equality. “Before this the crowd doesn’t really exist, it is the discharge which actually first constitutes it. This is the moment in which all who belong to the crowd rid themselves of their differences and feel as equals.” All subsequent egalitarian social theories, Canetti maintains, derive their power from the discharge phenomenon: “All demands for justice, all theories of equality draw their energy in the final analysis from this experience of equality, which everyone knows in his/her own way from the crowd.” Canetti very likely chose the term *Entladung* specifically to challenge—or dislodge—Freud’s notion of psychic “Abfuhr” (discharge). For Canetti posits a fundamental, positive value to the individual’s relationship to social organization in implicit contrast to Freud’s notion of social groupings as the deeply conflicted by-product of libidinal sublimation. Society, in other words, is not a necessary evil (as in the Freudian schema), but a central good, albeit one eminently corruptible by the abuse of power.

Equally important was the need to dismantle and replace the central Freudian concept, namely the Oedipus complex. At Adorno’s prodding, Canetti admitted that it was his ambition to retire the ill-defined Freudian concept, which he referred to as “identification,” and replace it with his own notion of “transformation” (*Verwandlung*), a concept that allows for growth and development rather than the foreordained replay of the Oedipal conflict. Aware of the centrality of his own (and of the rival Freudian) concept, Canetti vowed to return to this issue in a second volume of *Crowds and Power* that never appeared in print during his lifetime. As his title (*Masse*
promises, Canetti lavishes a great deal of attention on the subject of power, espousing the proposition that violence and aggression are not primarily intrapsychic, but intersubjective, phenomena. Power circulates by way of “commands” (Befehle), which leave behind damaging “thorns” (Stachel). This curiously mechanistic conception of power leaves no doubt in the reader’s mind that violence breeds violence. Like Freud, Canetti acknowledges the profound influence of childhood experience in later adult life; but unlike Freud, Canetti is specifically worried that vulnerable children will become the repositories of thorns, which will in turn only lead to another cycle of violence in the next generation, when the victimized children become perpetrating adults—this time with them as perpetrators—later on in life. Guilt is redefined not as a function of Oedipal desires or as a response to the primordial crime of killing the father, but as the consequence of the misapplication of power. In case after case, Freud provides the antimodel, a kind of invisible grid that explains the content and structure of *Crowds and Power*.

This is not the place either to fully summarize or to critically assess the ideas put forth in *Crowds and Power*. Yet enough may have been said to demonstrate that this work contains a positive fund of ideas meant to displace those of Freud and others. While there are clear and undeniable continuities between the novel and anthropological study at the level of fundamental attitude, there is much in the latter work that is not even hinted at in the former. The novel whets our appetite for the subsequent study by re-creating the curiosity Canetti claimed was destroyed by reverential and derivative Freudian disciples—followers not unlike Georg’s fawning assistants at the asylum. But it is simply untenable to claim that those innovative ideas central to *Crowds and Power* (“discharge,” “transformation,” “command,” “thorn,” and so on) are present or even vaguely discernible in *Auto-da-Fé*. Having read about the brutal Pfaff and the abused Anna, we may appreciate better Canetti’s later concern for children as particularly susceptible to becoming labile thorn repositories, but that is all. Canetti did not spend thirty years reformulating ideas that were essentially already complete in the novel. Moreover, the fictional Georg is not only not an illustration of the later work, he is a sometime exemplum of precisely that which *Crowds and Power* will reject. In stark contrast to this study’s valorization of society, the novel depicts a world in which society seems dangerously to inhere in the minds of monomaniacal figures—a true “Welt im Kopf” (World in the
Head), to borrow the title from the novel’s third book. In short, *Auto-da-Fé* speaks eloquently and hilariously about false approaches to the social, but is ignorant of the social concepts Canetti will propound in *Crowds and Power*.

All of which suggests that the most influential branch of scholarship on the novel has got it backward. It is not *Crowds and Power* that provides the theoretical key to the novel, but the novel that illuminates the concerns of the later study. The implications may prove mutually liberating: *Crowds and Power* can be released from its narrow literary-critical function and the novel can be further exposed to critical approaches at variance with Canetti’s own views. This is hardly a radical proposition; for it was Goethe who long ago suggested that we approach a writer’s work genetically, that is, by respecting the chronology and context of its genesis. Ironically, we owe this insight on the Canetti oeuvre to a man whose determinative influence Canetti never fully acknowledged—namely to Sigmund Freud.

Up to this point in this study, we have drawn upon an array of Weimar-era texts and contexts to illuminate the concerns of this ambitious novel. It may be helpful now to see how modernist and antimodernist critical paradigms of the post–World War II era can help us understand why *Auto-da-Fé* remains virtually in a class of its own, despite many obvious points of contact with literary high modernism. What is it about the novel—and the critics—that enforced this state of literary segregation? And in what sense might we think of this novel as an intentional boundary or endpoint to this movement?