Self and Other

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A memorable comic moment in the psychological high jinks of *High Anxiety* occurs when the psychiatrist protagonist, played by Mel Brooks, becomes able to recall the childhood origin of his uncontrollable fear of heights. He visualizes a dreamlike scene of angry conflict between his parents. He remembers sitting in his high chair, fearful of it being tipped over, as his father speaks harshly to his mother, complaining that the baby keeps them prisoners in their own household. She responds with defensive fury: “Whaddya want me to do? Get rid of him?” Then the high chair begins to topple over. On the basis of this memory Dr. Thorndike has a sudden insight into the real meaning of his acrophobia: “It's not heights I'm afraid of; it's parents!”

The shifts of theoretical perspective I have experienced over the past two decades that moved me to write this book have not taken the form of any sudden illuminations such as the one dramatized by Mel Brooks, but in at least one respect the alteration of my viewpoint parallels that of Dr. Thorndike: instead of seeing behavioral problems in terms of impersonal forces (in the movie, the force of gravity, shall we say), I now look at them in terms of the effect of interpersonal relationships.

I cannot take much credit for this improvement for the simple reason that my altered perspectives surely correspond to changes that have been taking place on a far broader scale in the field of psychoanalysis. When I was working on *The Double in Literature* (1970) it seemed perfectly acceptable to base my discussion of splitting and dissociation largely on the foundation of Freud's structural theory. I did not realize at the time that my working knowledge of object relations theory was almost entirely confined to oedipal configurations and was almost exclusively drive-orि-
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PREFACE

ented. As I wrote *Metaphor: A Psychoanalytic View* (1978), I was only beginning to have doubts about Freud's doctrine that individual motivation is largely fueled by libidinal drives, so it still seemed meaningful to try to account for the powerful effects of the language of poetry in terms of certain assumptions about the operations of what Freud calls the primary and secondary processes. At that time my methodology remained locked into the dynamic, economic, and structural metapsychological points of view. Then, as I wrote a series of papers about the interpretive process during the years that followed, I eventually began to repudiate psychoanalytic drive theory—under the guidance of others, of course—even though I was not altogether clear about what there was to replace it. By the mid-1980s the principal new resource available to me, I thought, was Bowlby's attachment theory. But there were certain problems. Relatively few people in psychoanalytic circles appeared to be paying much attention to Bowlby at that time, and my attempts to interest colleagues in his work fell flat. I also began to realize at this time that in some ways Bowlby's theory did not match well with my convictions about internalized object relations, especially as they are represented in literature. Worse yet, I no longer felt very secure about where I stood regarding the etiology of neurosis. Worst of all, I became increasingly aware of the lack of consensus concerning object relations theory in the psychoanalytic community.

The more I thought about these problems, the more it made sense to me to try to explore the possibility of making some sort of contribution, however limited, toward the integration of a science-oriented, person-oriented theory of object relations—one purged of drive theory but merged with the best features of attachment theory and with what I refer to as self theory so as to distinguish it from Kohutian self psychology.

The limits of this undertaking will be more or less apparent from the following prospectus. Chapter 1 begins with an account of the mixed legacy we inherit from Freud, offers a brief overview of the principal contributions to object relations theory from Klein to Kohut, summarizes some of the major arguments against drive theory, and concludes by taking a firm stand in favor of a person-oriented theory of object relations. Chapter 2 attempts to integrate the most meaningful features of traditional object relations theory with attachment theory, with recent findings deriving from the observation of early mother-infant interaction, and with self theory. Chapter 3 provides a critical rereading of all of Freud's major cases in a way that deemphasizes sexual factors while stressing interper-
sonal conflict and attachment deficits. Chapter 4 continues the same strategy using published case histories of Winnicott, Lichtenstein, Sechhaye, and Bettelheim. Chapters 5 through 8 deal with object relations represented in literary fantasy. Chapter 5 emphasizes the permutations of attachment behavior depicted in the text of *Moby Dick*. Chapter 6 focuses on the special, essentially unsuccessful adaptation to aberrant infant-parent relations exhibited by Meursault in *The Stranger*. Chapter 7 treats creative uses of the self as a facilitating environment in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. And chapter 8 traces patterns of attachment, separation, anxiety, and loss in four Shakespearean tragedies.

I am grateful to those who in various ways have assisted me in this endeavor. I especially want to thank the friends and colleagues who have read and commented on one or more chapters of this work: Peter Heller, Joseph Masling (whose high standards concerning what constitutes empirical evidence have remained beyond my reach, I fear), Charles Proudfit, David Richards (whose response has been so constructive and sustaining), and David Willbern. Their efforts helped me to avoid innumerable blunders, yet it goes without saying that they can in no way be held in the least degree responsible for any of the faults that doubtless remain. I am also grateful to Arthur Efron for his willingness to share discoveries with me, to Bruce Jackson for his sound advice, and to Claire Kahane and Ronald Ruskin for their friendly collegiality. I want to thank all of my students, graduate and undergraduate, for their patience in hearing me out and for the stimulation our interactions afforded me. I thank Jonathan Havey especially for the benefits of the many hours we spent discussing object relations theory. My sense of indebtedness to the late Emanuel Peterfreund runs deep. He was a source of strength for many years. I thank Joan Cipperman as much for allowing me to bask in the warmth of her presence as for her labor in typing the manuscript. To Leo Goldberger I am greatly obliged for his willingness to include this book in the *Psychoanalytic Crosscurrents* series. And I want to thank Jason Renker and Despina Gimbel, at New York University Press, for all their help. Finally, and most important of all, I want to thank my wife for her untiring support.