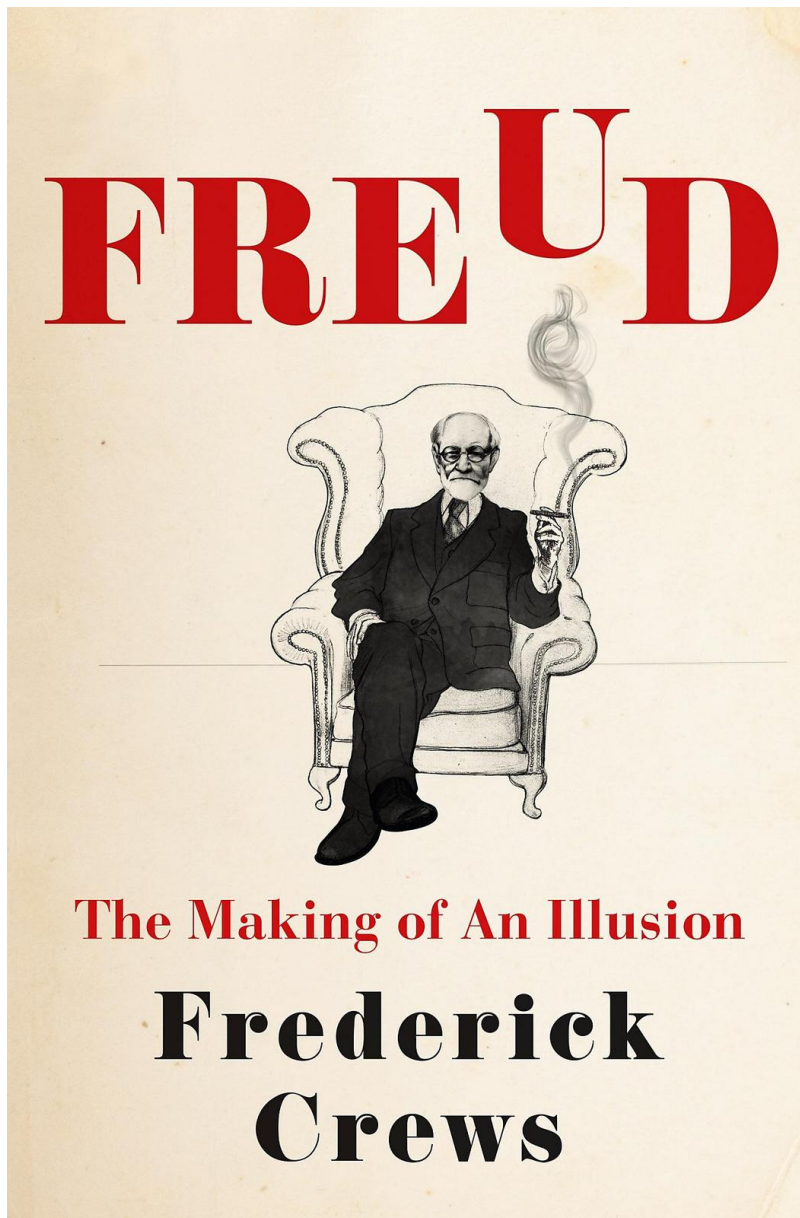


Some of the People, All of the Time

by James Como (November 2017)



A Review of *Freud: The Making of an Illusion* by Frederick Crews (Metropolitan Books, 746pp., with an appendix and eighteen photographs, \$40)

It had to happen. Why it took so long is astounding—it's

lasted longer than the fraudulence hidden by that other wall, now gone nearly thirty years; Karl Popper had been seeing through the 'science' of psychoanalysis since 1919—but at last we know now with certainty that this emperor not only has no clothes but is in clothing deficit, and this from a man of stern intellectual integrity and scholarly rigor whose skepticism respecting Freud has been building for a long time, not least in the pages of *The New York Review of Books*.

In seven sections (e.g. Sigmund the Unready, Playing Doctor, Little Big Man), consisting of thirty-five chapters (e.g. The Travesty, Traumas on Demand, A Law Unto Himself) buttressed by over seventeen hundred notes (preponderantly from primary sources, including a recently-published cache of papers, the *Brautbriefe*), and a bibliography of some five hundred sources, Crews carves up at nearly every turn the phony ideas, practices, social and professional interactions, and character of this patient, unetherized upon the table. It seems Freud—craven, venal, and fraudulent—was also profoundly self-serving, manipulative, and downright creepy.

Open the book randomly and you will likely be appalled. On pages 277-78, for example, we read that “Freud was a latecomer to the idea that mental disturbances can have sexual causes.” Krafft-Ebing, Moll, Bloch, Schrenck-Notzing, and Ellis all had beaten him to it, so that “there is no sexual topic in his writings, from homosexuality bisexuality, sadomasochism, and fetishism through infantile masturbation . . . that wasn't anticipated . . . all of [the antecedents] eventually suppressed in favor of the specious appeal to [his own] clinical experience.”

Or consider pages 495-97. Crews lists seven challenging questions, from the first, asking how Freud could be certain “that all psychoneurotics have been abused in childhood,” to

the last, asking where the reconstructed memories (“reconstructed” mostly by Freud himself “under the most energetic pressure,” as Freud himself proclaimed) now resided. That prepares the reader for Freud’s bidding “farewell to the stage of his career in which independent evidence matters to him. His new criterion was *internal consistency*.” In what would become a pattern of circular reasoning—cases invented to satisfy theory, not theory explaining cases, with “self-evident” being a favorite argument along the way—Freud would declare, “the ideas put forward here are not in harmony with the psychological theory of [anyone else]; but they perfectly agree with my own speculations . . .” Crews concludes, “agreeing with his own self: from now on [the late nineteenth century] until the end of his career, that would be the only proof of correctness Freud would require.”

Along the way we learn of Freud’s sexual and professional exploitation (the former especially of his sister-in-law: prolonged), his many physical and mental troubles (e.g. “laziness,” his term for “a depressive paralysis of will,” Crews tells us, which derived, according to Freud himself, from his thwarted drive for professional success), his drug abuse, and his hallucinations. All of this is riveting, not least Anna von Lieben’s conclusion, after a futile five years of intimate exchanges, “that Freud had been out to enrich himself all along,” a pattern that would recur over and again.

Nearly two-thirds in, Crews describes Peter Swales’ evisceration of Freud’s treatment of “Katharina” (established by Swale as Aurelia Kronich). His own prurient eroticism aside—a prurience, Crews demonstrates, that would only grow—Freud falsified about the age of Katharina, as well as the chronology of her treatment, and would say “it was a nice case for me”; that is, Crews concludes, “he felt no compunction about adjusting facts in order to simulate the

outcomes he desired." Or about the lying. On page 494, Crews first provides Freud's public claims respecting eighteen successful cases (actually thirteen, consisting of over "100 consultation hours," according to Freud) then provides Freud's report to his friend Wilhelm Fliess utterly contradicting the public claim.

Consider *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930, not discussed by Crews). At its end Freud tells us, "the fateful question of the human species [is] to what extent the cultural processes developed in it will succeed in mastering the derangements of communal life caused by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction," a derangement he has posited but not proven. Unless, that is, you buy a number of postulates such as the following: "for the father of prehistoric times was undoubtedly terrible, and an extreme amount of aggressiveness may be attributed to him." Of which I ask, Is that so? Is there any evidence at all for this assertion? Is the assertion within light years of Freud's training? Such links arise page after page, posited only on the basis of "may be attributed" or "everyone knows" (when claiming that the "sexual life of civilized man is seriously disabled," as, we know, Freud's own sexual life was).

Very near the beginning of his book Crews has a chapter called *Between Identities*. There he limns the struggle undergone by a man who would never use his actual name, Shlomo Sigismund, and adumbrates an influence exercised by Franz Brentano, one of Freud's professors. Freud's intellectual brilliance blossoms, and he will go his own way, in fact a great distance from Brentano's admonition to strongly favor empirical verifiability. In his *The Question of God*, the late Dr. Armand Nicholi, Jr., went farther than Crews in exploring Brentano's influence, one that pulled Freud toward theism. In the event, Brentano seems to have offered his pupil two

possibilities—methodological and creedal—both rejected. I am tempted to call both depictions of Freud, but especially Crews', studies in the psychopathology of Narcissism, but I prefer the older, more accurate, term: Pride.

With this sort of book a reviewer must choose to go short or very long. For the latter there is Antonio Melechi's "Doctor Fraud" in the *TLS* of October 6th. Unlike the half-baked rear guard reviewers, rag-picking correspondents, or the noble but tragic atavists who confuse an autopsy with character-assassination, Melechi is devastatingly favorable to Crews—because he knows he cannot *not* be favorable. I have chosen the former approach mostly to avoid spoilers, for Crews tells a dramatic tale of intellectual depredations, each a hinge around which Freud's reputation swings ever lower. (Karl Kraus saw this clearly enough in the obsession with Freud: "psychoanalysis", he declaimed, "is that mental illness for which it regards itself as therapy.") To the potential customer who might have the book at hand in a bookstore I recommend reading the Table of Contents in full then skipping to the Appendix, where ten pivotal Freudian concepts (e.g. Repression, Sublimation, the Oedipus complex) are examined, to Freud's discredit. You will know what Crews' project is, and that between those two terminals must come the preposterous and sorry fakery you will have intuited.

And that reader who is skeptical of skepticism? For those I invoke the end of C. S. Lewis's *Miracles* (his response to Hume's argument against them): "And yet . . . and yet . . . It is that 'and yet' that I fear more than any positive argument . . . that soft, tidal return of your habitual outlook as you close the book . . ." Or, if the True Believer ("Freudolaters," as Crews calls them) prefers, there is Freud himself, who wrote that he was ". . . nothing but a conquistador . . . not at all a man of science, not an

observer, not an experimenter, not a thinker"; rather, according to Baroness Marie von Fischel (one of his "goldfish"), a "charlatan."

I conclude as Crews, most fittingly, begins: "It's not a lie if *you* believe it"—George Costanza, *Seinfeld*.

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