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Shrink

Lawrence R. Samuel

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SHRINK

PSYCHOANALYSIS IN AMERICA

LAWRENCE R. SAMUEL

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Set in Sabon Next LT Pro by Laura Wellington.
Designed by A. Shahan.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?

MACBETH 5.3.43-48

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INTRODUCTION

Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle!

ALICE, in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*

“Give your faves phone envy,” reads a recent headline of an ad for T-Mobile, an homage to the more anatomical concept originated by one Sigmund Freud more than a century ago. Freud and his “systemized, scientific working hypothesis about human behavior,” as Gregory Zilboorg described psychoanalysis in 1949, are very much with us today in one way or another as the T-Mobile ad suggests, deeply embedded in the discourse of American popular and consumer culture. “Psychoanalysis and its ideas about the unconscious mind have spread to every nook and cranny of the culture from Salinger to *South Park*, from Fellini to foreign policy,” wrote Patricia Cohen of the *New York Times*. Almost sixty years after Zilboorg, the topic is seemingly everywhere, despite its current relatively minor presence as a therapy.¹ Even as classic psychoanalysis—the psychological theory and method developed by Freud based on the ideas that mental life functions on both conscious and unconscious levels and that childhood events have a powerful influence throughout life—became just a bit player on the nation’s therapeutic stage, its presence in American culture continued to grow to the point where we now accept it as one of the seminal ways to explain human nature. We’ve all been “shrunk,” it could safely be said, whether or not we have actually spent time on the couch.

Shrink: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in America tells how and why this came to be, focusing not on the technical details of the field but on the major role psychoanalysis has played in the United States since it became a cultural phenomenon immediately after World War

I. The goal of this book is thus not to retrace the seemingly endless ideological debates within the field or outside of it, as many books have done very well, but rather to locate the trajectory of psychoanalysis within American cultural history for scholars, students, professionals, and general readers alike. As a cultural historian (rather than psychologist or scientist), my interest, and I believe that of many readers, resides principally in using incredibly rich subjects like psychoanalysis in order to get a better understanding of what makes America and Americans tick. While literally hundreds of books have been written about some aspect of psychoanalysis, it is difficult if not impossible to find an accessible, nontechnical history of the subject. As a descriptive narrative of the public image of and interest in psychoanalysis rather than an intellectual or institutional history, *Sbrink* tracks the waxing and waning of the field, that is, whether it was trending up or down over the past ninety years. By offering insight into the popular discourse around psychoanalysis throughout its American career, we gain a very good idea of how Freud's ideas about and approaches to the treatment of mental and emotional illnesses were put in play, something I believe is much more valuable than another analytical, systematic treatise on the subject. What follows is thus largely an attempt to fill this Grand Canyon-sized gap in our literary landscape.

With a deep appreciation for Freud's contribution to our understanding of human behavior, I have tried nonetheless to tell a "fair and balanced" story through the accounts of both advocates and critics of psychoanalysis. Even its harshest critics acknowledge that psychoanalysis has a certain magic and amazing staying power, our curiosity still piqued as the debate over its legitimacy continues to simmer. My interest in writing this book sprang out of writing a previous one called *Freud on Madison Avenue*, in which I investigated the history of motivation research and subliminal advertising in America. Having caught the psychoanalytic bug (motivation research was based on Freudian and other psychological theories), I felt that a full study of the phenomenon in the United States was very much needed. Rather than follow the revisionist history vogue of proposing some new and shocking revelation to turn the field upside down, my intent is more to determine the degree to which psychoanalysis shaped our me-based, self-absorbed culture. Too

many top-down histories of psychoanalysis by mental health experts have been written, I believe, and only a bottom-up approach from an outsider's perspective is able to capture the broader significance and implications of the field. And instead of relying on arcane, largely picked-over materials tucked away in musty boxes of archives, this story makes use of popular sources, as a cultural history should. If you are mostly interested in the intricacies of dream interpretation, the Oedipal conflict, or some other Freudian theory, there is no shortage of excellent books and information-filled websites to take you down these paths.

What in American culture fostered and favored our “primitivist” rush to Freud? With our love for all things modern, ambivalent feelings about sex, pronounced streak of individualism, and entitlement to happiness, it should hardly be surprising that psychoanalysis found an ideal climate in which to flourish here. Focused on the unconscious, psychoanalysis was “a new, virgin territory, an interior frontier,” Philip Cushman, author of *Constructing the Self, Constructing America*, has observed; in effect, the method conveniently arrived soon after Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 declaration that the nation's western frontier was officially closed.² The vivid reminder that we were animals, not machines, certainly had something to do with it, the theory's focus on our more primal nature a welcome relief from the overt rationalism, order, and efficiency of the times. The idea that we were the slaves of basic human drives like sex and hunger was controversial enough, but Freud's concept of the “death drive” (conceived in the context of the emotional wounding of soldiers in World War I) made psychoanalysis especially intriguing territory. Its primary promise—an inside peek into the dark and mysterious world of the mind, justified as an opportunity for personal growth and awareness—was simply too tantalizing a proposition for many Americans to resist, even though the method was never intended to be a therapy for the masses. The sheer danger of psychoanalysis—that one was possibly playing with things people could not and should not understand—was itself one of its key draws. Seductive as a forbidden fruit, psychoanalytic thought quickly became firmly embedded in the nation's cultural firmament, fast becoming an integral part of who we are as a people. Despite now accounting for only a fraction of today's therapy marketplace, psychoanalysis remains an essential and likely permanent strain

in our DNA, and a valuable lens by which to view the American idea and experience.

Likewise, psychoanalysis was much transformed in America by Americans, the nation's social landscape significantly altering the trajectory of the field. Eli Zaretsky has noted the substantive difference between the way psychoanalytic theory and treatment was received in Europe versus the United States, a perfect example of the contrasting ways of the Old World with those of the new. Psychoanalysis "emerged *against* an older, traditional, patriarchal order" in Europe through World War II, he observed, while it "became a method of cure and self-improvement" in America because of a less rigid society. As well, with their can-do spirit, Americans firmly believed they could solve personal problems, preferably on their own but open to some help if necessary. While Freud's influence in the United States is undeniable, "the spirit of America has also infused psychoanalysis with an optimistic and pragmatic spirit that has in many ways transformed it," agreed Cushman. Americans, he believed, had reoriented the field toward personal improvement and productivity.³ While marginalized in Europe, psychoanalysis was thus absorbed into the United States, largely limited to intellectuals and elites in the former but perfectly positioned to grow into a mass phenomenon in the latter. The fact that psychoanalysis did not have to confront and challenge a deeply rooted psychiatric community in America as it did in Europe also played a key role in its rapid development in the States, with medical schools receptive to new methods of and techniques in mental healing. "American psychoanalysis rode the wave of professionalization, scientism, and the growth of a mass culture characteristic of the second industrial revolution," Zaretsky concluded. The field benefitted from physicians' desire to put amateurs practicing quasi-psychological techniques like mesmerism, homeopathy, and various other "mind cures" out of business for good.⁴

The biggest factor reshaping European-style psychoanalysis was, without a doubt, American "ego psychology." Developed between the two world wars as "an investigation of unconscious defenses against instinctual drives," as Nathan G. Hale Jr. described it, ego psychology recognized that, through mechanisms of control such as morality and intelligence, individuals could and did sublimate (or at least postpone) aggressive behavior. Although it deviated from classic, conflict-oriented psycho-

analysis, such an approach was perfect for the national temperament, accommodating the central mythology that Americans were an enlightened, superior, and even chosen people. As well, success and social acceptance relied on controlling instinctual drives, making ego psychology particularly appealing in the keep-up-with-the-Joneses 1950s.⁵ After flourishing during the postwar years, ego psychology (like psychoanalysis itself) waned, a victim of competitive theories and modes of therapy.⁶ That Freud's theories had taken a different turn in America with ego psychology was almost beside the point, the phenomenon itself bigger than its particular principles or philosophy. "The actual practice of analysis was less important than its cultural impact," Zaretsky declared, concisely expressing the most amazing part of the story.⁷

Because psychoanalysis (along with psychology—the scientific study of the human mind and mental states—and psychiatry, the medical specialty concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of disorders associated with mental or behavioral symptoms) is so thoroughly woven into our national quilt, telling its story means intersecting with a number of topics central to the American experience. Psychoanalysis has always had an uneasy relationship with science. Researchers trained in using systematic observation and experiments to study the physical world are often skeptical about the methods and claims of psychoanalysis. Religion too has bumped directly into the path of psychoanalysis, the devout viewing the upstart field as a worthy contender for the individual's mind, if not his or her soul. Education and business, on the other hand, have for the most part been allies with psychoanalysis, with large institutions interested in identifying perceived threats to the "norm." For those in the arts and literature, psychoanalysis opened up a whole new way to interpret texts, with the inner, darker recesses of the mind seen as a wellspring of creativity. Psychoanalysis redirected the trajectory of these and other dimensions of everyday life, reshaping American culture (and Americans) in the process and becoming a key signifier of our national identity. "Psychoanalysis permanently transformed the ways in which ordinary men and women throughout the world understand themselves and one another," Zaretsky noted, describing the method as "the first great theory and practice of 'personal life.'"⁸

Of course, the central component of psychoanalysis is identity, or the self, and so I will argue that it is no coincidence that psychoanalysis found a receptive home in the United States in the 1920s—the period during which the modern idea of the self was born. Psychoanalysis in America “was caught up in a process that emphasized personal empowerment, self-regulation, and individual charisma,” Zaretsky thought, drawing on the nation’s profound sense of self. Mental healing was a big part of this, the religious movements of the nineteenth century paving the way for subsequent philosophies promising some kind of spiritual or psychic betterment. The Boston-based Emmanuel Movement, advocating a psychological approach to religious healing, reached its apex of popularity shortly before Freud came to Clark University in 1909; the quasi-religious group consisted of both ministers and doctors offering its members a sort of proto-psychotherapy. The pump was thus very much primed for the appearance of Freud’s writings around the turn of the century, with psychoanalysis viewed as the next (and, importantly, more scientific) generation of “mind cures.”⁹

Throughout the rest of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, psychoanalysis has run on a parallel course with the rise of the self, the field both shaping and reflecting the ascent of individualism in American society (for better and worse). As both a theory and therapy, psychoanalysis served as a primary catalyst for Americans to discover their inner selves in order to fully realize (or complete) their personal identities. The possibility to “know thyself” by exploring conflicts, feelings, and dreams became recognized as perhaps the ultimate achievement in Western and, especially, American culture. This was true whether one was actually in treatment or not, our psychological society encouraging, if not demanding, the formation of one’s “true” self. From the early 1920s through the early 1960s, psychoanalysis helped to reprogram the American mind by shifting our orientation from civic interests to personal ones in all spheres of everyday life. Psychoanalysis in all its many forms has thus been a major factor in the development of the “cult of the self;” undoubtedly one of the biggest stories over the past century. While discovering and expressing one’s true identity has allowed many to find fulfillment and live rewarding lives, it is clear that we are now paying a heavy price for our wholesale rush to the self. Alienated from society,

the American of the twentieth century became an “empty self,” according to Cushman, more likely to find fulfillment in consumerism than anywhere else.¹⁰

As the original, purest, and most intense form of psychotherapy, psychoanalysis played a major role in seeding the rise of our me-based culture. “It’s All About Me” is not just a funny phrase seen on t-shirts worn by Paris Hilton types; rather, it is an anthem for our times in which individualism—and its evil twin, narcissism—rule. “It was on the couch that we boomers learned to boom, that the Me Decade perfected its self-absorption, and that we grew into adults obsessed with childhood,” Susan Cheever wrote in 1995 for *Harper’s Bazaar*, having herself started therapy when she was eleven years old. “We turned to psychiatry for everything once provided by religion, community, and parents who knew what they were doing,” she continued, seeing her parade of shrinks as “more like teachers than teachers, more like priests than priests, more like parents than parents.”¹¹ Cheever’s experience was emblematic of what Nancy Schnog described in 1997 as “inventing the psychological,” a reorienting of the ways in which many Americans conceived their inner selves. “Since at least the 1920s middle-class Americans have been educated into understandings of self and psyche shaped by mainstream concepts of psychoanalytic thought,” she wrote. Freud’s core ideas—repression, resistance, the centrality of sexuality, the Oedipus complex, and transference—made the nation psychology minded, both figuratively and literally.¹²

Don’t blame Freud for our me-first, egocentric, self-obsessed culture, however. A host of criteria—a certain type of personality, a particular kind of problem, a considerable amount of intelligence, and, perhaps most important, lots of time and money—was used to screen candidates for analysis by most practitioners, thereby limiting the number of people who qualified for treatment. The founder of psychoanalysis may have started it all with his theory and therapy centered on the self, but it was what followed that helped turn America into the shamelessly narcissistic society we are today. Although it was probably inevitable, I suggest that the transformation and expansion of America’s psychiatric landscape beginning in the mid-1960s was an unfortunate development. These quicker, cheaper therapies were responsible for turning our inter-

est in ourselves into an obsession. Psychoanalysis often did not work (the one-third “cured,” one-third “improved,” one-third “failed” rule was probably about right), but when it did, it worked wonders. Its practitioners argued that only an intensive course of therapy was able to resolve deep-seated neuroses buried in the unconscious. Over time, as their patients migrated to competitive treatments and psychotropic medication, psychoanalysts repeatedly made this point, but few listened. The appeal of so-called McTherapies and drugs (typically covered by health insurance) was not just powerful but irresistible. In his now classic *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch described the “therapeutic sensibility” that emerged in the 1970s, with “personal preoccupations” and “psychic self-improvement” the centerpiece of the awareness or consciousness movement that swept across the country. (Lasch echoed and expanded many of the themes in Tom Wolfe’s equally iconic 1976 *New York Magazine* article “The ‘Me’ Decade and the Third Great Awakening.”) The rash of new therapies (reaching into the hundreds) was a big part of what Lasch referred to as “the social invasion of the self,” with the resulting “narcissistic personality of our time” a predictable and unfortunate consequence.¹³

Today we hardly notice the narcissism all around us, our reliance on life coaches, infinitely refillable prescriptions of antidepressants, the billion-dollar self-help business, and the relentless pursuit of meaning and purpose in life all reflective of a quick-fix approach to emotional well-being. Applying Band-Aids to those having serious wounds has done more damage than good, I believe; the covering up and superficial triage of traumas experienced in childhood or later in life has actually made us less content and secure people. Our expectations of happiness have risen in direct proportion to our inability to fulfill them, this existential two-ships-passing-in-the-night accounting for the generally sorry emotional state of affairs in the United States in the early twenty-first century. Look anywhere and everywhere—Facebook, blogs, Twitter, *American Idol*, Guitar Hero—and you will see not just a desire but a desperate need to be heard and valued. “Not only are there more narcissists than ever, but non-narcissistic people are seduced by the increasing emphasis on material wealth, physical appearance, celebrity worship, and attention seeking,” observed Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell

in their 2009 *The Narcissism Epidemic*. The two psychologists found that our obsession with ourselves has become a scourge in the thirty years since Wolfe and Lasch wrote about it.¹⁴ Our “trading up” culture, not to mention pure, unadulterated greed, which not too long ago nearly crashed the entire economic system, are at their roots an urgent plea for some kind of recognition and respect. What we fail to see, and what Freud tried to teach us, this book shows, is that these values can only come from within, a lesson we still have not learned.

The rise of the cult of the self that began in the 1920s was a direct result of psychoanalysis linking itself to American popular culture (and vice versa), something that other historians have underappreciated. Psychoanalysis became a key trope in many avenues of popular culture, including literature, film, and art, and this alliance with the “creative class” became a primary form of social currency. More important, psychoanalysis entered the vernacular of popular discourse, part of our everyday conversation and way of looking at the world (especially other people). Psychoanalysis was soon no longer just a psychological theory or therapy but a kind of social tool, a huge leap in the field’s status and significance. Although it remained largely a therapy that only the upper and upper middle class could afford, in terms of both money and time, the theory behind it trickled down from the American cultural elite—intellectuals, the wealthy, and celebrities—to the middlebrow. Psychoanalysis quickly became part of mass culture as its core ideas crossed social boundaries with reckless abandon, a national pastime rivaling baseball. “Freud’s ideas pervade our culture to such an extent that often we use Freudian language—narcissism, sibling rivalry, ambivalence, neurosis—without even realizing it,” said Peter Gay in a 1988 interview with *People Magazine*, the source alone suggesting the pervasiveness of Freud’s theories.¹⁵

Although there have been many schools of psychoanalysis over the last century, this book focuses on Freudian analysis, the best-known and most controversial theory and treatment. Through a long and intense “conversation,” the patient (while yes, lying on a couch) says whatever comes into his or her mind in Freudian analysis, with thoughts and feelings considered unacceptable in normal settings encouraged. As explained by British psychotherapist Philip Chandler, in a 2008 article

in *Psychology Review*, thoughts and feelings of an aggressive or sexual nature are viewed as having their roots in childhood, that crucial time in our lives when we define the boundaries between ourselves and others and determine how to express emotions. Learning how to tolerate frustration, finding a proper balance between “I” and “we,” understanding the impact of one’s parents as an adult, dealing with depression and anger, and figuring out why one is attracted to the “wrong” boy or girl were and remain common themes in analysis, themes probably not much different from those that regularly surface in other forms of therapy.¹⁶

Naturally, it is incumbent upon a book called *Shrink* to take a long, hard look at shrinks (short for “headshrinkers,” the somewhat derogatory slang term for psychologists, psychiatrists, and especially psychoanalysts) themselves, as without them we have no story at all. Although psychoanalysis was viewed with considerable suspicion in the academic world before World War II (the field was positively despised at universities both here and abroad, particularly in Vienna), subsequently, analysts began to be awarded an almost godlike status in the 1950s. The goateed analyst with notebook and pen in hand quickly became an iconic image in American popular culture. A vague European accent was icing on the cake, and something that allowed those who actually had it—Jewish refugees who had fled the Nazis in the 1930s and after—to charge more.¹⁷ As doctors of the mind, psychoanalysts were assumed to have special, divinely ordained powers, able perhaps to read what was going on in one’s dirty little mind. For those actually experiencing the couch, fifty-minute horizontal sessions were a chance to examine one’s life and possibly retell it, a “voyage of inward discovery.” The typical session with the typical analyst was an intense experience (“right-wing scholasticism,” Susan Sontag called it)—the industry’s unofficial motto was to “Think Yiddish, Act British.” Once viewed as the secular equivalent to one’s minister, priest, or rabbi, therapists are now considered more as an essential part of one’s “team,” an ally or coach with access to the pharmacological wonderland. That a good number of Americans still go on a collective freak-out every August when therapists typically take their holiday speaks to their enduring power and to the relevance of this book.

How did a once marginal, highly suspect treatment seed today’s pervasive therapeutic culture? The arc of psychoanalysis, from the shock of

the new to a mature body of knowledge, was without doubt a roller-coaster of highs and lows. With its founder being called everything from “the Columbus of the mind” to “a modern Plato,” psychoanalysis began a rapid ascent in the 1920s, soon rivaling baseball as our Great National Pastime. A smart cocktail party of the 1920s would hardly be complete without the requisite psychoanalytic parlor tricks, with amateur shrinks explaining why one chewed gum (obviously oral fixation), guessing one’s birth order, and decoding the most innocent slip of the tongue. Psychoanalysis and other forms of psychiatry became aligned with the self-help (“self-knowledge,” at the time) movement in the 1930s and 1940s, thereby rounding off some of its sharp edges and broadening its appeal. By the 1950s, the strange and decidedly Jewish practice had become relatively mainstream, the taboos surrounding it (emotionality, vulnerability, sexuality) weakening. (Although Freud was a self-described “completely godless” Jew, Jewish thought—and analysts—pervaded the field he founded.¹⁸) From its prewar days as a bonbon among the wealthy and intellectual elite, psychoanalysis transformed itself into a populist therapy for a postwar middle class intimately familiar with the concept of repression. But with little need to keep one’s id in check starting in the mid-1960s, psychoanalysis began its long slide that continued until the early 1990s. Psychoanalysis has since rebounded somewhat, its place now within the psychiatric community and society at large a relatively secure one.

Much of the power of psychoanalysis resided in its ability to embed itself in other fields in an almost parasitic manner. Between the wars, Nathan G. Hale Jr. wrote in his *The Rise and Crisis of Psychoanalysis in the United States*, “psychoanalysis functioned as an iconoclastic psychology of intellectual drives,” informing modern views of education, social work, and criminology.¹⁹ The impact of émigré analysts in the 1930s and 1940s cannot be overestimated as these hundreds of Europeans (many of whom came from Freud’s inner circle or were students of those men and women) enlarged and complicated the field here in the United States. Propelled by three wars as GIs received treatment to heal their mental wounds, psychoanalysis found a happy home in military circles, viewed in its own way as American as apple pie. The notion that the human mind and thus life itself was rich with drama and hidden meanings was

embraced by those in the arts and literature; Freud's concept of trauma came in especially handy for critical interpretation of texts going back to Shakespeare. By the time of Freud's death in 1939, the movement had passed the father of the field, as a steady stream of "neos" and "posts" (including his daughter) altered the trajectory of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis had by now entered the realm of political discourse, with the lowliest cub reporter weighing in on Hitler's failure as a young artist, Eisenhower's paternalism, Nixon's paranoia streak, Bill Clinton's self-destructive urge, and George W. Bush's need to make his father proud. Almost everything and anyone could be read through the lens of psychoanalysis, it seemed, something deeper and darker lurking underneath the surface.

Many historians and social critics too have plumbed the depths of psychoanalysis over the decades, knowing a good story when they see one. Hale's two-volume history of the subject is nothing less than a tour de force, and C. P. Oberndorf's 1953 *A History of Psychoanalysis in America* was as good as anything written about psychoanalysis up to that point. Paul Roazen's enormous body of work, spread out over more than three decades, is a small library of the field, as is the Psychiatry and the Humanities series published by Johns Hopkins and edited by Joseph H. Smith. Others, notably Peter Gay (focusing on the social impact of psychoanalysis), Philip Rieff (its cultural significance and our therapeutic ethos), Sherry Turkle and Elizabeth Roudinesco (Freud's "French Revolution"), Frederick Crews (a key player in the "Freud wars" of the 1980s and 1990s), Mari Jo Buhle (feminist theory), and Glen Gabbard and Kim Gabbard (portrayal in Hollywood films), have all made significant contributions to the history of the field.

John Burnham has understood the impact and influence of psychoanalysis on American culture perhaps more than anyone else; his writings in the 1970s offer what I believe to be the richest insights into the social dynamics of the field. In a chapter he contributed to *American Psychoanalysis: Origins and Development* in 1978, for example, Burnham saw the history of psychoanalysis in America as divided into two waves, the first coinciding with the flourishing of modernism during the first few decades of the twentieth century and the second with the rise (and subsequent splintering) of mass culture between the 1930s and 1970s.

(The Ohio State history professor did not predict a third wave in which both biotechnology and information technology would revolutionize virtually all aspects of society, including mental health.)²⁰ And in an article titled “From Avant-Garde to Specialism” published in the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* the following year, Burnham showed how, after Freud’s much-celebrated visit to Clark University in 1909, proponents of psychoanalysis actively sought to acquaint ordinary Americans with the man’s ideas. Although psychoanalysis was attacked by the medical community, Greenwich Village bohemians “welcomed Freudianism along with feminism, socialism, and other isms,” as he put it, this sparking interest in the field among the general public. Blessed by the avant-garde, early advocates of psychoanalysis spread the word to the mainstream in the 1920s, popularizing Freud’s ideas while considerably diluting them in the process.²¹

By the 1930s, it was not artsy types living unconventional lifestyles but the intellectual elite who served as the principal sponsors of psychoanalysis, Burnham continued. Jewish analysts fleeing the Nazis (the latter considering the field to be a “Jewish science”) helped turn the United States (and specifically New York City) into the world capital of psychoanalysis.²² These refugees were instrumental in transforming the field from an already visible presence to one that was virtually impossible to miss. Permanently imprinted with these ethnic, physical, and linguistic markers, the “analyst” emerged as an identifiable, if not already iconic, figure during the Depression years. He (and, rarely, she) was considered to hold special powers that were even greater than those of the medical doctor. This actually made sense as all analysts at the time were medical doctors who had undertaken years more education and training.²³

It was the Second World War that pushed psychoanalysis over the top, Burnham and other historians have shown. The method’s ability to help heal mentally wounded soldiers was broadly recognized and greatly appreciated by both physicians and the general public. Although Freud’s ideas were already well entrenched in the United States between the wars, as Ellen Herman has demonstrated, psychology in general was dramatically advanced during and after World War II, as behavioral scientists shaped political and social policy. “Enveloped in a climate of

catastrophic global militarism and divisive national debate over the realization of racial and sexual equality,” she wrote in her *The Romance of American Psychology*, “psychological experts shaped the direction and texture of public life deliberately, with results that were striking and unprecedented.” The war represented a singular chance for psychologists to prove the practical worth of their theories and techniques, the atmosphere of conflict an invitation for them to work in or become advisers to government. From the war through the Vietnam era, Herman convincingly wrote, psychologists seized this opportunity, with the Cold War and the civil and gender rights movements providing the need for a better understanding of concepts such as the development of personality, formation of attitudes, and power of persuasion. Wielding a new kind of influence, academics and clinicians were thus instrumental in infusing a psychological mindset during the postwar years, with psychoanalysis a key part of this accelerated interest in and commitment to mental health.²⁴

Now accepted by the medical establishment, psychoanalysis went on a phenomenal twenty-year run, its success buoyed by being perfect fodder for American popular culture. “Novels about mental illness (*Private Worlds*, *The Crack-Up*, *Brainstorm*, *Snake Pit*, and others) were frequent,” Burnham noted, with Hollywood movies also jumping on the bandwagon (*Spellbound*, *All About Eve*, and *Splendor in the Grass*, to name a few). At least three children’s books about Freud soon could be had and, more important, psychoanalytic theory showed up in Benjamin Spock’s influential work. The psychic well-being of what would turn out to be the largest generation in history was believed by many to be hanging in the balance. “The public acceptance of psychoanalysis/psychiatry mushroomed in that brief moment of expansive optimism of the 1940s when many Americans really did believe that they could make the post-war social environment a significantly better place in which to live,” Burnham observed. The country and the world would benefit from Freud’s teachings. By the late 1960s, however, it was clear that the great run of psychoanalysis (and arguably the United States) was ending. The field was increasingly viewed as out of touch with the times.²⁵ In his 2009 *Psychoanalysis at the Margins*, Paul E. Stepansky charted what he termed the “near-demise” of psychoanalysis as a mental health profession.

The fracturing of the field over the past four decades resulted in what he believed to be “less a cohesive profession than a loose federation of psychoanalytic subcommunities.”²⁶

While the long-standing conflicts between American psychological science and psychoanalysis comprise a book unto itself, it is important to acknowledge this “war,” which still rages at some level today.²⁷ Most psychologists ignored psychoanalysis when it first arrived in the United States, according to Gail A. Hornstein in her 1992 article for *American Psychologist*, “The Return of the Repressed,” but that soon became impossible. “By the 1920s,” she wrote, “psychoanalysis had so captured the public imagination that it threatened to eclipse experimental psychology entirely,” marking the beginnings of what would be a nearly century-long feud. The source of the conflict was the thorny issue of science, specifically how it should be defined with regard to the study of the mind. Psychoanalysts wanted little or nothing to do with the scientific method that psychologists cared so much about, believing that the process itself and the results were enough for their upstart field to qualify as a legitimate science. Psychologists, already sensitive to claims that their own rather new field was less than a true science, compared to biology or even philosophy, found this absurd and began to attack the Freudians and their medical model with increasing intensity. Psychoanalysts defended themselves, (conveniently) pointing out that only those who had personally experienced the process were qualified to evaluate it. The notion that being psychoanalyzed instantly bestowed the title of scientist only made American psychologists that much more incensed for a couple of important reasons. One, it implied that science was subjective rather than objective, the latter requiring publicly verifiable data based on controlled variables, a bold proposition to say the least; and two, it suggested that psychologists were not scientists because they had not laid on the couch, this last point considered even more outrageous and insulting.²⁸

Understandably, psychologists defended their field by employing even more stringent scientific standards to further distance themselves from what they generally saw as more of a foreign religion than anything else. In 1934, however, nearly everyone was shocked to learn that Edwin G.

Boring, a leading experimental psychologist at Harvard, had himself entered analysis. Boring explained to his colleagues that he was doing the unthinkable only for research purposes, but the truth was that he was depressed, anxious, and unable to work. After ten months (and 168 sessions at ten dollars apiece), Boring had had enough, his hopes for what he later described as “a new personality” dashed. Still looking five years later for some evidence that his treatment (with Hanns Sachs, who had been part of Freud’s inner circle) may have been at least partially effective, Boring proposed to the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* that it publish the accounts of notable psychologists like himself who had ventured into enemy territory to be analyzed. Perhaps their stories could shed some light on his own disappointing experience, he thought, titling his own contribution, “Was This Analysis a Success?” His answer was, of course, no, his colleagues reporting equally dismal results in their attempts to explore the depths of their unconscious through free association.²⁹

Spurred by the special issue of the journal (which quickly sold out), the battle lines between psychology and psychoanalysis were now clearly drawn. More popular than ever, psychoanalysis was viewed by most people as the same thing as psychology or, perhaps, the overarching discipline, when in fact it was the other way around. (I would venture to say that nine of ten Americans even today cannot tell psychoanalysis from psychiatry from psychology.) With two decades plus of criticism not working, psychologists took it upon themselves in the mid-1940s to determine which, if any, psychoanalytic concepts were scientifically valid, this smart move finally turning the tables in the mental health field. Over the next thirty years or so, virtually every psychoanalytic tenet was literally put to the test, with fairly predictable results. According to Hornstein, “Every shred of evidence seeming to support psychoanalysis was scrutinized for methodological flaws, whereas studies opposing the theory were flaunted as examples of good science.” The ideological differences between the sister fields were deemed more important than what the findings actually revealed. “Research on psychoanalysis was invigorating because it gave psychologists a sense of mastery,” Hornstein added. Freudian theory was now effectively co-opted and safely contained.³⁰

Appropriated by mainstream psychology, psychoanalysis was, after a tumultuous half-century or so, no longer much of a threat, with B. F. Skinner's 1953 *Science and Human Behavior* delivering the heaviest blow. Introductory college textbooks did further damage, typically reducing psychoanalysis to a footnote in history or presenting the field's ideas as a stray offshoot of psychology. And while undeniably brilliant, Freud was more of a novelist than a scientist, students were taught, this marginalization still very much apparent in the psychological and psychiatric literature and within therapeutic culture. (Telling cognitive-behavioral therapists at parties that I was writing a book about psychoanalysis often produced anything from a mild look of skepticism to a hearty laugh.) In many ways, however, Freudian theory is at its cultural and professional zenith, with some of his concepts (such as self-perception) fully embraced by both the psychological community and laypeople. That psychoanalysis evolved into a much different thing over the course of the last four decades has gone a long way toward making it much less of the monster it appeared to be, as has the balkanization of the field over this same period of time. "As psychoanalysis became less threatening, psychologists were able to notice that the two fields actually shared many of the same basic assumptions," Hornstein concluded, these being "a commitment to psychic determinism, a belief in the cardinal importance of childhood experience, and an optimistic outlook about the possibility of change."³¹

With psychoanalysis less likely to be viewed as the enemy or an oddity, Freud and his ideas have over the past decade or so enjoyed a renaissance of sorts, made most apparent by a greater appreciation for his grand theory of the unconscious. While Freud did not invent the concept of the unconscious mind—philosophers, poets, and even some psychologists had earlier proposed there was a part of the brain in which we stored things that we were not aware of—it could fairly be said that he recognized its importance and significance as no one before and, arguably, no one since.³² "Despite what pollsters would label as 'high negatives,' Freud's influence continues to permeate our secular society, with many of his ideas and symbolic terms acting as a Rosetta stone to explain jokes and everyday slips of the tongue, as well as providing provocative and profound insights into fashionable arts and literature," wrote

Suzanne Fields in her review of a massive retrospective of the man and his work at the Library of Congress in 1998.³³ Others were more to the point. “Without Freud, Woody Allen would be a schnook and Tony Soprano a thug,” mused Jerry Adler in *Newsweek* in 2006, considering the man to be “our postmodern Plato, our secular St. Augustine.”³⁴

What is perhaps most amazing about America’s love affair with psychoanalysis is thus its mere survival. Freud’s theories have, somehow, withstood the torrent of criticism from all corners over the decades, not to mention the rise of Prozac Nation, the emergence of faster and cheaper therapies, and draconian policies of managed care. (“He’s survived more assassination attempts than Rasputin,” quipped Edward Dolnick, author of *Madness on the Couch*.)³⁵ “Freud bashers” of the “Freud wars” (notably Peter Medawar, Allen Esterson, and Frederick Crews) were hyperbolically critical of the theory and practice, seeing psychoanalysis as one of the biggest intellectual con games ever pulled off. Still, some critics of Freud were able to see the value of the discipline he created, a sign of its tremendous resiliency. In his 1985 *The Psychoanalytic Movement*, for example, Ernest Gellner scolded Freud for leading a self-righteous, secretive guild employing authoritarian (and doubtful) practices, while recognizing his theory of the unconscious and techniques of free association and transference as major contributions to the fields of psychology and psychiatry.³⁶

More remarkably, Freud is posthumously getting the last laugh, as a small but dedicated cadre of scientists blesses his healing art. “It appears that Freud’s broad brushstroke organization of the mind is destined to play a role similar to the one Darwin’s theory of evolution served for molecular genetics—a template on which emerging details can be coherently arranged,” wrote Mark Solms in a 2004 *Scientific American* article, “Freud Returns.” A few leading neuroscientists have recently found that the father of psychoanalysis could have been, in some respects, a hundred years ahead of his time. Many of Freud’s key concepts—the existence of an unconscious, repression, the pleasure principle, the libido, and that dreams have meaning—are being shown to be real functions of the brain, this perhaps the sweetest victory for psychoanalysis.³⁷

Ironically, psychoanalysis has been in many ways a victim of its own success, paving the way for America’s self-help movement that not coin-

cidentally took off just as Freud was pronounced dead at the scene. Our line of therapeutic royalty of the past half-century—Dr. Spock, Dr. Joyce Brothers, Dr. Ruth, Dr. Phil—are Freud’s progeny, the teary revelations and confessions on *Oprah* also a direct descendant of the “talking cure.” On an even grander scale, our inner-directed culture, in which feelings and relations (“feminine” values, interestingly) are so highly prized, is rooted in psychoanalysis, as is the flipside of this—that we are a shamelessly self-centered, narcissistic people. Although psychoanalysis as a therapy is at a major competitive disadvantage to quicker-fix cures when time is money, its way of looking at the world and ability to see the entire landscape remains a compelling proposition. “Knowingly or not, we have absorbed the lessons of psychoanalysis,” thought Jonathan Engel in his 2008 *American Therapy*. Freud’s legacy is “firmly rooted in our everyday vernacular.”³⁸

Finally, it is important to make a distinction between psychoanalysis and psychodynamic or psychoanalytic psychotherapy. The latter, as Jonathan Shedler defined it, refers to a “range of treatments based on psychoanalytic concepts and methods that involve less frequent meetings and may be considered briefer than psychoanalysis proper.” In psychoanalysis, patients typically have three to five sessions a week and lay on the couch, while in psychodynamic therapy they have just one or two sessions a week and sit face-to-face with the therapist. Much of the public (and some academics) is unaware of this distinction, something that has caused considerable misunderstanding about the field, past and present. Many people today are unaware that the field has been modernized, the (mostly valid) criticisms of psychoanalysis past still lingering. This is unfortunate, as psychodynamic therapy appears to offer longer-term gains than more popular (and affordable) cognitive-behavior therapy by focusing on the whole person rather than specific symptoms. Freud’s body of work thus remains a valuable vehicle by which to relieve individuals’ emotional suffering and improve their relationships, very much part of the mental health fabric of the twenty-first century. “Freud’s legacy is not a specific theory but rather a sensibility,” Shedler wrote in *Scientific American Mind* in 2010; his lasting contribution is “an appreciation of the depth and complexity of mental life and a recognition that we do not fully know ourselves.”³⁹

Because I believe that journalists serving on the front lines of the scene represent our most valuable resource in recovering unfiltered stories of psychoanalysis, *Shrink* relies primarily on period magazines and newspapers as its source material and secondarily on previous books written about aspects of the topic. From these hundreds of journalists' reports from the field, many of them obscure and largely forgotten but important firsthand accounts of psychoanalytic goings-on, we really do get the first draft of history. As a historian rather than a psychiatrist, I rely on my sources' use of psychological terms, notably "subconscious" and "unconscious" (Freud used only the latter, but the former was often referred to by later practitioners and laypeople alike). This book tells its story chronologically, showing that there have been six major eras of psychoanalysis since the end of World War I. The first chapter, "The New Psychology," shows how psychoanalysis exploded on the American scene in the 1920s, while chapter 2, "The Voodoo Religion," takes readers on the psychoanalytic roller coaster ride of the 1930s and 1940s, decades in which the ups and downs of the method tracked with those of the nation as a whole. The third chapter, "The Horizontal Hour," dives into the 1950s, when psychoanalysis hit its full stride in American culture, and chapter 4, "The Pernicious Influence," shows how psychoanalysis hit a major crossroads in America in the 1960s, its joyride of the postwar years over for good. Chapter 5, "The Impossible Profession," takes readers through the 1970s and 1980s, when psychoanalysis (and psychoanalysts) struggled to keep its sinking ship afloat, while the final chapter, "The Comeback Couch," explores events of the last twenty years, when psychoanalysis regained a good bit of the cultural currency it had lost the previous two decades. All indications are that psychoanalysis will continue to be a fascinating part of the cultural landscape, its exploration of the human condition to continue shaping and reshaping the American idea and experience.