

They'll Never Get Me on That Couch

For an author of Broadway and Hollywood hits to remain unpsychoanalyzed is to invite the scorn of the cognoscenti. But what can a poor rebel do?

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I guess there's nothing you can do about your genes. It's not bad enough that I was a nonconformist in the days of my youth; time is supposed to take care of that, à la measles and mumps. But not me. The reflexes grow weaker with each passing year, and the bifocals stronger, but the same old rebel blood apparently still flows in my otherwise arteriosclerotic veins. How it has managed to survive the pall of conformity (so ably exposed by such smog experts as Henry Commager and Elmer Davis) which covers the intellectual horizon of America today is a mystery, but there you are; I don't pretend to explain it any more than I can explain Dunninger.

What makes it worse is that I am basically gregarious and crave, more than I care to admit, popularity. It would be wonderful to have people cheering as I enter a room, instead of screaming "Unclean!" and fleeing as though the plague had struck. If they must go (and, alas! they must), why can't they go quietly?

Not (when you consider the list of my heresies) that you can blame them. As long ago as 1937, I was excommunicated for questioning—in spite of the testimony of Holy Writ as recorded in the *Nation* and the *New Republic*—the immaculate conception of FDR. The doubts I had about Yalta have not been removed by the recent revelations of the martyred Alger Hiss, who was present when the miracle was performed, while I was far away in California. I have attended Black Mass meetings for Joe McCarthy, and signed petitions for the Bricker Amendment. And once, in the presence of three sworn witnesses, I took a book by Howard Fast and threw it on my log-fire.

Now, obviously, conduct of this nature is not to be condoned. Each group has its laws and its mores and

it cannot view with equanimity—especially if it's a Liberal group—any constant subversion of said laws and mores (unless, of course, the subversion is of Communist origin, in which case it comes under the head of free speech: cf. Commager, Davis, Joseph Rauh, Dean Griswold, Max Lerner and Lewis Carroll). Various learned posses have been formed to study the subject and, thanks to grants from the more enlightened tax-free foundations, have been able to make recommendations. Unfortunately, because of postal regulations, most of the recommendations cannot be repeated here; though they are available, if you know the right people, for stag parties. There is, too, a minority report which does not preclude the sterner measures but suggests a thorough psychoanalysis before any vigorous action is taken.

That would seem to be eminently fair, and I don't say I haven't been tempted. But even here the genes win out, and again I balk. I remain, I suspect, the only person of either (or no) sex who has written a Broadway show or a Hollywood scenario and has never been psychoanalyzed. And don't think it hasn't been lonesome. I used to go to Dramatist Guild meetings to vote, but I could never join in afterward when the boys were talking shop. Now I just mail my vote in.

It isn't, as some people have unfairly claimed, the money; some of the shows were hits, and my royalties would have covered the analyst's fees. It isn't even that I think Freud has little to offer. It's just—well, a number of things.

For example: at a Hollywood dinner party some years ago, I was seated next to a female Freudian who inquired brightly, "And what do *you* do?" Instead of standing on the Fifth Amendment, like a dope I

said I did some writing. "What was your name again?" she asked. I came clean. She repeated my name doubtfully a couple of times, but no bell rang. Then she asked me to spell it for her; but it still meant nothing to her (and, by that time, it meant even less to me), so she regretfully shook her head, said "I handle only the big writers," and turned to the man on her left. Naturally, I got out of there as fast as I could and haven't attended another Hollywood party since. (P. S. I haven't been asked.)

Being rejected as openly as that could give even stronger men than myself an inferiority complex. Had I been better adjusted, I'd have called the lady up in the morning and asked her how much she would charge to undo the complex she had created. But I was too crushed to reason. I just retreated to the w-mb and nursed my trauma.

Three Years in a Trauma

You nurse a trauma for three years, and you're going to wind up with a pretty fair-sized trauma, believe you me. Eventually there just wasn't room for both of us, so I decided to go out into the world again. I was greeted affectionately by my family; the children—after demanding and getting their back allowances, and that can mount up in three years—hugged me, my wife reluctantly dropped the Enoch Arden divorce suit she had instituted, and the dog leaped all over me in sheer ecstasy. I felt loved, honored, needed—I was secure again.

Until, that is, the other night, when we were asked over to the Blanks. The Blanks live right around the corner and are good friends of ours—except during election campaigns. (They voted for Roosevelt the four times his name was on the ballot,

and they write it in now that it no longer appears there.) But, as long as you don't discuss religion and just stick to bridge, they are as nice a couple as you'd care to meet. How the hell was I to know they had just come into some money and gone in for analysis?

True, I did have some apprehensions as we entered, but that was only because I didn't recognize any of the other guests, and I am shy about strangers. Not sensitive, just shy. But the Blanks greeted us effusively, the butler they had hired for the occasion pressed a martini upon us, and everything seemed hunky-dory. No guardian angel (heretics have none) came to whisper in my ear that the other guests were six assorted psychiatrists and analysts—I know there's a technical difference, but don't ask me what—and their wives.

Luckily for me, I was on my third martini before I realized what had happened. I feel thoroughly secure with two martinis—with three I am invincible. The talk around me swirled with the potty habits and aggressive tendencies of siblings—which is what Freudians have instead of children—but I sat and sipped, completely unafraid. I even looked around hopefully for the lady psychiatrist who had induced my original breakdown, because I wanted to tell her a few things I had been thinking up for three years. Give me three years, if I do say so, and I can come across with some witty repartee. But she was nowhere to be seen, the coward.

I comforted myself with the realization that my stored-up wise-cracks were too good to waste on one psycho when I could have a dozen of them to appreciate me, and I waited my chance to insert them into the general conversation. But the talk was still of siblings and their unpleasant ways, and on these subjects I had nothing prepared. I bided my time and accepted another martini from the butler, a stout fellow who believed in giving an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. This time I took an olive instead of an onion.

They were mighty good olives, too—our own California brand—and I had three or four before I realized that the conversation had finally got

around, as it inevitably does here, to the movies. One of the psychiatrists was holding forth on the psychoanalytical aspects of Olivier's Hamlet, and I gathered that he approved enthusiastically. I also gathered, though he didn't actually come out and say so, that he wasn't taken in by any of the idiotic notions that Bacon or Ben Jonson or that Earl of Something-or-Other had written the plays attributed to Shakespeare; he knew who had written them: Sigmund Freud.

Serpents in Eden

Now, as a good heretic, I hold that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare and I am normally prepared to give battle for my theory. My wife, who suffers from some strange delusion that I don't know how to act at parties, rushed over with a martini. I accepted the drink, but she needn't have worried. Only people with inferiority complexes have to talk to prove they're important; and, at the moment, the only thing I was suffering from was an exquisite sense of euphoria. In my generous mood, I was even willing to listen to a theory that Rocky Graziano had written the odes of Q.H. Flaccus. One more olive, indeed, and I would have promulgated the theory myself.

Into Eden came the snake, this time in the guise of a psychoanalyst's wife. She turned to me during a lull and asked whether I had seen the Olivier

Hamlet. My wife was watching me intently, so all I said was "Yes." My wife beamed. Ah, if that had been the end of it!

But you don't know Freudians. "And how did you like it?" continued the temptress.

"Very much," I said, "though I didn't think it was as good as his Henry V. That, I thought, was brilliant."

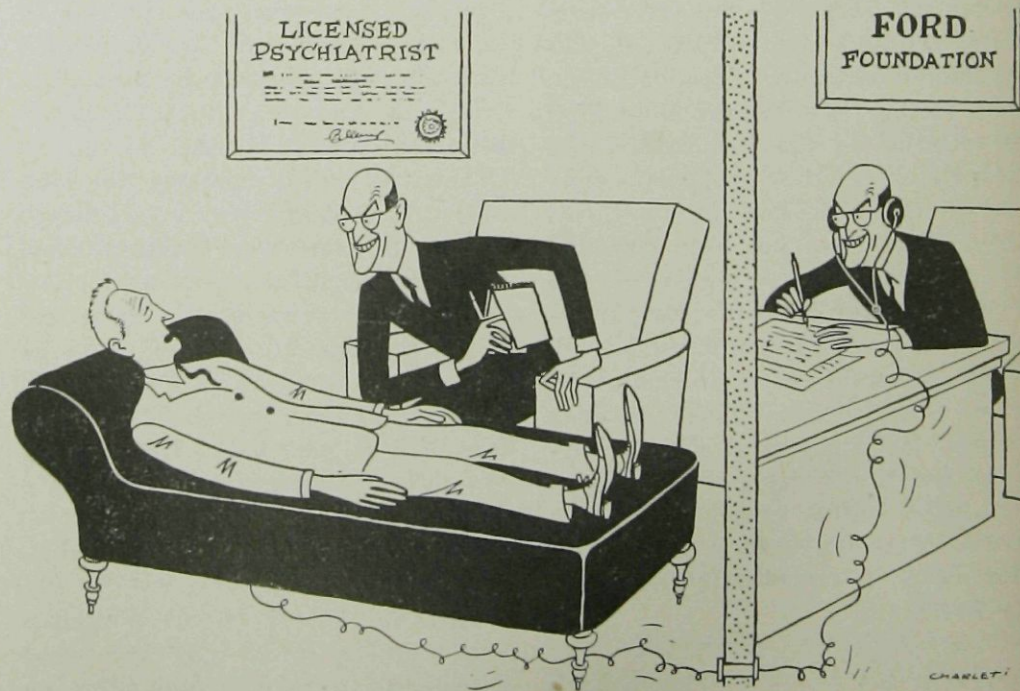
She showed her fangs. "You mean to say," she hissed, "you actually preferred his Henry to his Hamlet?" She stopped, but the hissing, strangely, continued. I looked around and saw why: other reptiles had taken on where she left off.

I don't want to overdramatize, but it was a tense moment: a dozen psychoanalysts, fangs and rattles poised, against one man armed only with a clear conscience and maybe ten martinis. This, definitely, was it. I've always wondered how I would act at the Final Curtain—pleading and sniveling like a coward, or smiling and defiant in the tradition of Nathan Hale and Alan Ladd. Let it be recorded that my boots stayed on. I said, "Yes."

"Hmph," snorted the psychobra on my left, "that's revealing!"

"Very revealing," the others chorused, and exchanged knowing looks.

For the first time that evening I was disconcerted. I didn't know what I had revealed but, from the way they were smiling at each other, I knew it was something good and dirty that



With the Doctor's Permission

had come up from my subconscious. But what? A misplaced libido? A floating id? My whole life passed before me in the twinkling of an eye, and there were some things I didn't want *anybody* to know.

My concern must have shown itself, for a boa constrictor in the corner rose from his chair, unwound himself to his full length (about eleven feet, six inches, was my hasty calculation), and pressed his advantage. "And just *what* didn't you like about it?"

"I didn't say I didn't like it," I replied. "I merely said I thought *Henry V* was better."

There were hoots of "emotional instability," "delusions of grandeur," and "anti-social tendencies." A lady asp whipped out a notebook and climbed on the lap of a psychopython who immediately began dictating his clinical observations to her.

Not Filial

They were ready for the kill, but I stood my ground. "I didn't say I didn't like it," I repeated, "but, since you ask me, I was puzzled by the kiss Hamlet gave Gertrude. It wasn't a filial kiss—it was definitely sexual."

The others hushed, but the tall one continued. "And what's puzzling about *that*?"

"Well," I said, "you don't kiss your mother like that, do you? Now, if it had been Ophelia, I'd understand. But your own mother!"

"Now *that*," said the psychobra who had started the whole thing, "is even *more* revealing. In fact, outside of Krafft-Ebing, a couple of cases recorded in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, and the last issue of *Confidential*, that's about the most revealing thing I *ever* heard."

There, I'd done it again; I had revealed myself. Lady Godiva had only one Peeping Tom, but I was surrounded by a host of them. I felt like a strip-teaser and—let's face it—I'm not the type.

And then the questions flew at me from all sides: "Didn't you ever *read Hamlet*?" "Don't you know he hated his uncle because he loved Gertrude himself?" "What do you think Shakespeare meant by the play, anyhow?" "How about another martini?" (The last question came from the butler—bless him!—as he handed me a fresh

one. This one had *both* an olive and an onion, and is known as a double martini.)

"Just a second," I said, as I took a sip. Refreshed, I returned to combat. "Now, then, let's get this right. Yes, I've read *Hamlet*! And seen it, too—from Walter Hampden on the stage to Olivier in the films. As a matter of fact, after I saw the picture I went home and reread it just to see how Olivier got the notion: and I defy you to show me one word in the text to indicate Hamlet felt thataway about his mother. I did more: I discussed the point with some Shakespearean actors—Charles Coburn, for one—and they were as puzzled as I was. Mr. Coburn achieved his first fame in Shakespearean roles, and is steeped in Shakespearean lore; he assures me Shakespeare didn't write *Hamlet* thataway, and Burbage didn't play it thataway."

"Burbage - Schmurbage!" snarled the cobra. "In Germany they've been playing it that way since the turn of the century already."

"If," said the tall one, fixing a beady eye upon me, "if Hamlet wasn't in love with his mother, why did he hate Claudius enough to want to kill him?"

"Look," I said, "his father comes back from the grave, says he's been bumped off by his brother, and asks his son to avenge him. Wouldn't any son—"

"People don't come back from the grave," he interrupted sternly, "and anybody who pretends to have gone to college should know better. That was a daydream of Hamlet's, invented by him to justify his guilt-feelings about his interest in his mother."

"But Shakespeare has him come back," I cried out.

"Shakespeare never went to college!"

Wired for Sound?

That did it. "Nuts!" I quoted a famous American general, and began to bash everything in sight. I was scotching snakes hip and thigh—and if that's revealing, make the most of it—and would have been at it yet if those cops hadn't butted in. The last thing I remember was one of the female demons saying, "Boy, would I like to analyze *him*!"

She can like all she wants, but, if she thinks she'll ever get me on that Procrustean Couch, she's crazy. I don't take that sort of treatment lying down. If certain unmentionable things are hidden in my Unconscious, that's okay with me. I'm not going to reveal another blessed thing. And, from what I've been reading, it would turn out that the couch was bugged by the Ford Foundation and that anything I said would be recorded for the University of Chicago, Robert Hutchins and, for all I know, Prof. Kinsey.

They can get themselves another boy. Me—I've had enough. I've already served the trauma with eviction papers and I am sending him to military school. I'm making another three-year retreat to the w-mb. So long, folks; see you in 1958.

THE LAW OF THE LAND

(Continued from p. 18)

tion," "assistance," "instruction," and not espionage. The Supreme Court has even forbidden trial judges to ask the jurors, until they are unanimous, how they stand on the issues. It would hardly seem that a trial judge acts judicially when he authorizes microphone operators to learn what he himself is not entitled to know even in general outline.

The liability of the judge depends on the same principle. It is settled that judges may not be sued for acts done "in the exercise of the powers with which they are clothed," no matter how outrageous, although they may be impeached. But was the judge clothed with the power—in a legal sense—to authorize this espionage?

Apparently the Department of Justice does not think that the law at present is sufficiently clear to warrant prosecution, and has recommended new legislation. Query, whether the public is not entitled to find out what liability there is under present law? That could be done only by a prosecution for contempt of court, the outcome of which would be uncertain. Surely the judge and the professors who engaged in this remarkable venture, with their passion for scientific data, would see the point. Or would they be so enthusiastic about an experiment in which they themselves were cast for the role of guinea pigs?