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## Sources of Assistance

### French Theory and Psychoanalysis

To repeat, then: this book's primary purpose is to treat the intellectual and scholarly projects of Bloom, Cavell, and Bercovitch in the light of the fact that they are all second-generation immigrant sons whose work reveals the aspirations and anxieties of ongoing attempts to locate themselves within their adoptive culture. Their readings and theories, I claim, can be viewed as tactics of integration, indeed, as *transferential* strategies, part of the ongoing Jewish attempt—still complex and ambivalent in their generation, their manifest success stories notwithstanding—to find a place and a home in America. No cultural project of this kind is ever a simple one, or one for which external criteria are a sufficient measure; moreover, the mere application of such overused shorthand sociological terms as assimilation, and acculturation, or even, for that matter, psychological ones like adjustment and adaptation, does not provide anything like a complete account of such processes. The relations of these newcomers with the dominant American culture and their intellectual attitudes toward it are *always* at least two-fold, the trick being not merely to find a place *within* the new world, but to do so by way of a critical perspective and *without* entirely surrendering the specific identities associated with the old. These have been central concerns of immigrant communities to America since at least as far back as the Puritans, and it is a dynamic, one might add, introduced to the incipient modern Western world even earlier by the uncanny conjunction of *two* major events of Western history marked by the 1992 quincentennial: the voyage of Columbus and the banishment of the Jews from Spain.

But before returning to Europe, so to speak, for some psychoanalytic assistance—as we will be doing in this chapter—let me pause here to cite a provocative statement of Harold Bloom's, which I take from one of his numerous brief introductions in the Chelsea House series, this time, appropriately, to a collection of essays on none other

than Sigmund Freud himself: "It is Jewish, and not Greek, to vacillate between the need to be everything in oneself and the anxiety of being nothing in oneself."<sup>1</sup> This is, not atypically for Bloom, a very self-revealing statement, and it is not controversial—certainly not as far as a psychoanalytic perspective is concerned—to suggest that these very primary-sounding feelings of "need" and "anxiety" are later, or secondarily, likely to become attached to and associated with such a self's more abstract pursuits. Thus, though with requisite caution, one may perhaps also consider the intellectual and academic career within which Bloom has ensconced himself as a symbolic self-space, to be understood as having metaphoric extension, occupying a certain area.

Extrapolating further, one might say that the generic entities or disciplinary categories ambiguously represented and embodied, not just by Bloom—who, as often, provides what is only the most explicit or "largest writ" instance—but also by Cavell and Bercovitch, that is, the textual vessels called poetic criticism, philosophy, and literary history, and the critical systems and schemata of meaning that each scholar has developed, adapted, and applied, can also be seen to "behave" in this fashion, to have the "elastic" tendencies that Bloom characterizes as Jewish. In other words, they may usefully be thought of as regions circumvented and sealed more or less hermetically, protected more or less adequately, by either borders, walls, membranes, mechanisms of defense, or strategies of scholarship, argumentation, and persuasion. Hence, intellectual achievement or success is always also something "like" (has an equivalent in, has bearing on, pertains to) the fluctuations of psychic or egoistic identity and bodily or corporeal integrity—perhaps even of familial or domestic stability and cultural or ethnic belonging.

Returning to Bloom's words, moreover, the "need to be everything in oneself," on the one hand, must presumably be congruent with the self-perception that one is indeed possessed of a capacious (mental or intellectual) space, capable of *containing* objects worthy of assimilation, and indeed of *digesting* them, that is, breaking them down within one's own system, so as to remake them as part of the structure of an identity. The "anxiety of being nothing in oneself," on the other hand (though it is also the *obverse* of the same), designates this same space as painfully empty, lacking, and incomplete, while it also expresses doubts about any object's ability—as other—to fill, succor, palliate, and pacify it. Hence, the price of regarding oneself as large enough to encompass everything is that one is also rendered more "open"—to nostalgic discontents, perhaps, but also, and more crucially, to the threat of annihilation, the possibility that one has, or is, nothing.

Now, if these scholars' chosen genres or disciplines also have this capacity to expand and become spacious interiors, they too must seem

at times to hold and contain all things of value, while in other moods they must appear relatively empty, housing only a meager or irrelevant array of signifiers in grave danger of complete dissolution or extinction. It would perhaps be politic to at least *begin* testing how these speculations may be applied to Bloom, Cavell, and Bercovitch, and to bring the subtlety of distinction into what might be starting to sound a little overgeneralized. I would, in any case, not want to postpone *all* commentary on their work to the later individual chapters, and thus to neglect their differences entirely at this stage.

So, as far as these respective disciplines are concerned, we may start with Bloom's wish to embody the capacious but separatist spirit of poetry or poetics. Literary texts do indeed seem to have liberal, profligate, self-perpetuating habits of procreation and proliferation, breeding plentiful rereadings and rewritings—creative and critical—as they go. But if—as Bloom's *exclusions* would have it—the poetical and critical canon need maintain only “strong” figures who can withstand the inexorable erosions of historic selection, or survive their ultimately unassailable precursory giants or angels, then literature may also be seen as self-limiting and in decline, though it moves toward its own demise gradually and parabolically.

It would be difficult to construe Cavell's identification with—and understanding of—philosophy in the same way; the picture is rather what one might call equal and opposite. At first glance, Cavell's emphasis is on the way philosophy appears determined to empty itself out, and regards itself as always imperiled by its own potential disappearance, as it asks questions the answers to which might issue in a last word that would remove its very *raison d'être* and bring about its demise. But, conversely again, philosophy precisely *does* in fact continue to perpetuate itself, *via* these self-reflexive debates themselves; furthermore, Cavell's own sometime readiness to carry these debates into the *literary* camp may well give his philosophy new textual sustenance and thus an even longer lease on life.

Bercovitch—literary historian and anatomist of American culture's all-too-rhetorical self-aggrandizing and self-deflating gestures that he is—may prefer to view these generic vacillations from something of a distance. He has not, at least until recently, sought to implicate himself in theoretical interdisciplinary debates that he may see as doing little more than mirroring, within the American *academy*, those larger cultural procedures and “phantom” effects that he sees at work in America at large. Of course, his own vision is *itself* an extremely encompassing, all-inclusive one, but it is still in keeping with Bercovitch's commitment to a less mystifying and idealizing, and more historicizing, approach to American texts and institutions, that he should search for a “neutral” point outside of these dynamics of inclu-

sion (or consent) and exclusion (or dissent), so as to show how they cannot but require each other. Hence his own preference for standing outside of the “psychomachic” contests in which both Bloom and Cavell are more openly ready to engage.

However, there are also “unconscious” resistances, and thus paradoxical tendencies, inherent in these institutional positions, and they may also be instructive here. One may suggest, for example, that it is the “natural” abundance of literature that makes it necessary and possible for Bloom to practice his selective, hieratic, elitist criticism that agonistically casts out as much as—if not more than—it encompasses, while it is philosophy’s stricter, contracting inclination, on the contrary, that provokes Cavell’s theories into being more expansive and conciliatory, into recognizing, acknowledging, and making room for the literary, the ordinary, and the other. Similarly, Bercovitch’s nonhierarchical, democratic cleaving to historical and anthropological approaches also has another side, or underside, as it were; just as psychoanalysis is conspicuous by its absence from his work, so too might his insistence on the nonpartisan, uncommitted view be a disguise for what is in fact a strong and deep desire to join the fray and be part of these self-affirming, if also self-risking, struggles.

I will be saying much more about all of this later, but it is already evident that—despite considerable differences in these scholars’ textual and institutional tactics, as well as in their relative investment in “professional” roles—the spatial terms and metaphors I have resorted to are useful for locating and juxtaposing their intellectual scholarship. I would go a step further and propose that, given their respective obsessions with belatedness, mourning, and the fall into history, the American academic careers of Bloom, Cavell, and Bercovitch can also be seen to both mask and manifest a Jewish longing for plenitude, for an ancient first Voice or at least for the Holy Writ of Scripture that, according to the Jewish tradition, replaced it, and to seek, in the secular *American promise* of plenty, the substitute for a real or imagined *originary Jewish* fullness or presence.

But—to echo both Winnicott and Wallace Stevens—can such choices ever come to be *good enough*, will they ever *suffice*? Do these scholarly ears really detect, somewhere in the cadences of American sounds, a first Jewish lullaby? And will such Jewish minds ever be satisfied in or by the vast expanses of a land and a culture that *seems* to offer immediate and abundant gratifications, but that in so doing perhaps fills these particular subjects only with the blank emptiness of a boundless desire? Remaining with this conception of psychic and mental spaces, one may perhaps invoke even more primary oral and alimentary metaphors in order to describe Cavell, Bercovitch, and Bloom—Jewish sons, though considerably estranged and alienated

from a more thoroughgoing Jewishness—as experiencing a powerful unconscious *hunger* for the sustaining sources of an original culture, for the parental milk and honey of a once all-encompassing Judaism, now lost and gone.

As is the case in many a psychic reconstruction, it is of little consequence whether these origins were withdrawn from them or rejected by them or, indeed, whether such sources were ever really “present” at all; what matters more is the resultant feeling of attenuation and deprivation, and the longing to fill vacant spaces, to replenish what is in any case absent, by seeking new supplies of nourishment. An appetite that was once fed and sated by a rich and diverse tradition of laws and customs—and this may be even truer of an appetite that has *never* been thus fed, and only wishes or imagines that it had been—may be well-nigh insatiable; it will take its substitutes wherever it can find them and devour them keenly, greedily, fiercely.

Still setting many differences and nuances aside for now, Bloom, Cavell, and Bercovitch can all be seen as scholarly “swallowers,” as ingesters and digesters of texts “alter-native” to what, under other circumstances, might have been a staple (and *kosher*!) diet of biblical and Talmudic fare. Secular circumstances and personal choices have seen to it that such traditional morsels are now partaken of only tentatively and as occasional supplementary treats—though perhaps more occasions for doing so have been cropping up lately for these scholars than used to be the case. Both these sometime recurrences and the vehemence and thoroughness with which the surrogate culture has been ransacked for the best of what it has to offer signify, as I suggest, a voracious hunger of primordial dimensions.

These have perhaps been overly dramatic and rhetorical ways of reiterating that the academic agendas of Bercovitch, Cavell, and Bloom are to be read as elaborate coping mechanisms or negotiations of the problems of identity and relation. However, such figurative configurations are both so ubiquitous and so subtle that one may well rather *need* to dramatize their presence and lend some baroque exaggeration to their effects before they can be seen at all. These intellectuals’ texts are in fact both pervaded and driven by an entire thematics, a veritable t(r)opology, of inclusion and exclusion, and an entire range of concomitant variants and corollaries. Seen by these particular metaphorical lights, such tropes and topoi signify not only these scholars’ situation or placement either inside or outside of American culture, their acceptance or rejection *by* it, but also their own readiness—in turn—either to welcome, consume, digest, or to reject, eschew, spew out the cultural tidbits proffered by America and partaken of (in discriminating fashion) for the sake of internalizing and constituting new self-definitions. And it is in the interests of taking these interpretive

fantasies a little further that I will now turn my attention to some traditional psychoanalytic terms, and some contemporary—and specifically French—psychoanalytic theoreticians, for some much-needed conceptual and practical help.

### *The Devouring Subject*

At this point—that is, while we are considering the cultural appropriations of Bercovitch, Cavell, and Bloom in terms of orality and the filling of internal spaces—I would like to introduce two relevant psychoanalytic concepts to the discussion, namely, *introjection* and *incorporation*. Freud first made systematic use of these concepts in *Mourning and Melancholia*;<sup>2</sup> taken together, they are often intimately related to certain other psychoanalytic terms—namely, *projection* and Melanie Klein’s coinage, *projective identification*—which bespeak equal-but-opposite strategies and are thus also relevant to present concerns. I wish, however, to concentrate on the former two mechanisms, and to draw attention to the way in which they seem to divide themselves into an oppositional bipolar.

Introjection is most often viewed as the desirable, so-called normal process of identification by means of which the healthy ego not only deals with the loss of a libidinal object but actually strengthens and even continues to constitute itself through assimilating a more abstract or ideational version of that object; as Laplanche and Pontalis put it: “in phantasy, the subject transposes objects and their inherent qualities from the ‘outside’ to the ‘inside’ of himself.” Although, as they go on to say, “it is close in meaning to incorporation, which indeed provides it with its bodily model...it does not necessarily imply any reference to the body’s real boundaries.” Incorporation, by contrast, is a far more primitive and “literal” process, “whereby the subject, more or less on the level of phantasy, has an object penetrate his body and keeps it ‘inside.’”<sup>3</sup> Though Freud himself did not elaborate or clarify the distinction sufficiently, incorporation is sometimes taken to be a way of evading loss, a paradoxical attempt to both preserve and destroy the object by a more primary, oral, “reptilian” swallowing-whole which seals, “encrypts,” or buries it alive in an enclave within the self. One might say that by certain accounts, introjection accepts and puts into effect the digestive changes that the internalized object must undergo, while incorporation tries to deny the organic realities and secondary operations that ingestion entails.

Though their original context is by no means duplicated by the one at hand, it is not hard to see how the terms *introjection* and *incorporation* might be made relevant to a critic’s attempt to apply himself

or herself to a text, author, or culture, especially when, as I am claiming, the object in question is experienced as crucial, but at the same time foreign, to the establishment of an identity, and thus where mastery is contingent upon an all-the-more-powerful need to include it. It appears to be incorporation that gives the clearer—because starker—picture of this conflictual state of affairs; its nonadaptive desire is to “have it both ways” rather than resort to introjection’s dialectical, and therapeutic, compromises. The fantasy of incorporation

transforms the oral metaphor presiding over introjection into a *reality*; it refuses to accept (or finds itself prohibiting), along with introjection, the metaphor of the substitutive supplement, and actually introduces an *object* into the body. But the fantasy involves eating the object (through the mouth or otherwise) in order *not* to introject it, in order to vomit it, in a way, into the inside, into the pocket of a cyst. The metaphor is taken *literally* in order to refuse its introjective effectiveness....In order for the introjective metaphor to be taken literally, the limit prohibiting introjection has to be situated in the mouth—as the very paradigm of introjection. No longer able to articulate certain forbidden words, the mouth takes in—as a fantasy, that is—the unnamable thing.

As one might suspect from its linguistic turn at the end, the above source for these distinctions is not the original Freudian text, but Jacques Derrida’s “*Fors*,” the foreword to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok’s *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word*.<sup>4</sup> This book is itself a fascinating linguistic re-analysis of one of Freud’s most famous cases, the one he was working on while writing *Mourning and Melancholia* and recorded shortly thereafter, in *The History of an Infantile Neurosis*.<sup>5</sup> Present purposes unfortunately preclude an account of the historical and theoretical complexities governing the case and the series of texts that deal with it. I must, however, note both the irony and the aptness of the fact that it is *Derrida’s* belated, tertiary version of the Wolf Man’s incorporative copings with the traumatic events of his life that comes to be useful and valuable for my particular purposes. Derrida, I would claim, has had his own experience of the dynamics of Jewish immigration, having transferred from his “diaspora,” Sephardic North Africa, to France (his equivalent, if you will, of the move from Ashkenazic Eastern Europe to America). These effects are especially evident in his recent preoccupation with intertextual relations between Jewish and European intellectual traditions.<sup>6</sup>

They are, in fact, also latently discernible in an even more contemporary text by Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s*

*Europe*; the book is ostensibly a reflection on the general question of European cultural identity in the wake of recent and continuing political upheavals, particularly in *Eastern Europe*. Early in the first essay, he identifies his personal connection to this subject by confiding a certain “feeling”:

It is the somewhat weary feeling of an old European. More precisely, of someone who, not quite European by birth, since I come from the southern coast of the Mediterranean, considers himself, and more and more so with age, to be a sort of over-aculturated, over-colonized hybrid.... In short, it is, perhaps, the feeling of someone who, as early as grade school in French Algeria, must have tried to capitalize, and capitalize upon, the old age of Europe, while at the same time keeping a little of the indifferent and impassive youth of the other shore. Keeping, in truth, all the marks of an ingenuity still incapable of this other old age from which French culture had, from very early on, separated him.<sup>7</sup>

Though it is conspicuously absent from the double or “hybrid” identity and the “feeling” that Derrida is *explicit* about here, one is tempted to say—given his famous preoccupations with both absence and difference—that such absence is precisely the mark or place of another difference, an additional “other shore,” a third venerable identity from which he feels separated by French culture and European “old age.” I refer, of course, to the *Jewish* part of Derrida’s identity, at odds with *both* his European *and* his North African, or “south Mediterranean,” self. Two pages later, he formulates an axiom or law that appears to confirm this speculation, stating that “*what is proper to a culture is not to be identical to itself*. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say ‘me’ or ‘we’; to be able to take the form of the subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in difference with itself [*avec soi*]. There is no cultural identity without this difference *with itself*” (p. 9).

It can be argued that Derrida, like our *Jewish American* theorists and like many another *Jewish* outsider, is both generalizing and valorizing a feature of cultural identity that is even *more* specific to his personal experience of having a split, ambivalent, or otherwise unstable identity than he is prepared to say out loud here: He is making, one might say, a universal virtue of a very particular necessity. For who, other than a secular, intellectual, post-Enlightenment, “over-aculturated, over-colonized” member of a *Jewish* minority in France and Europe, might better appreciate that “what is proper to a culture



is not to be identical to itself?" Still, it is with this deconstructive caution at his disposal, en route to introducing an essay by Valéry, the main author around whose texts his discussion is wrought, that Derrida goes on to stage and pose his principal questions about *European* identity:

This can be said, inversely and reciprocally, of all identity or all identification: there is no self-relation, no relation to oneself, no identification with oneself, without culture, but a culture of oneself *as* a culture *of* the other, a culture of the double genitive and of the *difference to oneself*. The grammar of the double genitive also signals that a culture never has a single origin. Monogenealogy would always be a mystification in the history of culture.

Will the Europe of yesterday, of tomorrow, and of today have been merely an example of this law? One example among others? Or will it have been the exemplary possibility of this law? Is one more faithful to the heritage of a culture by cultivating the difference-to-oneself (*with oneself*) that constitutes identity or by confining oneself to an identity wherein this difference remains *gathered*? This question can have the most disquieting effects on all discourses and politics of cultural identity. (Pp. 10–11)

And again, shortly hereafter: "for what 'cultural identity' must we be responsible? And responsible before whom? Before what memory? Before what promise?" (p. 13). These are surely all questions of a very similar kind to the ones we have already asked, and will continue to ask here (from a Jewish—and psychoanalytic—point of view), about our three Jewish readers and about American, rather than European, exemplarity.

Returning now to his "*Fors*" and his own psychoanalytic reflections, we might well expect that Derrida is not going to be content merely to outline the difference between introjection and incorporation and to allow a comfortable and reassuring bipolar distinction to stand; and, indeed, it turns out that the choice is not and cannot be quite so absolute. Derrida problematizes and deconstructs this pair, showing that its terms are inextricably bound up with and mutually implicated in one another:

The question could of course be raised as to whether or not "normal" mourning preserves the object *as other* (a living person dead) inside me. This question...can always be

raised as the deciding factor, but does it not at the same time blur the very line it draws between introjection and incorporation, through an essential and irreducible ambiguity?...Like the *conceptual* boundary line, the *topographical* divider separating introjection from incorporation is rigorous in principle, but in fact does not rule out all sorts of original compromises....Although it is kept secret, the fantasy of incorporation can and even must “signify” in its own way, the introjection it is incapable of: its impossibility, its simulacrum, its displacement. (Pp. xvii-xviii)

Derrida reminds us here that incorporation never ceases to resemble introjection insofar as the former is also an attempt, however abortive, to come to terms with death or loss or otherness. But this prompts one to ask what a successfully achieved introjection might look like: Can one assume that it is ever possible to come fully to terms with these afflictions, to mourn death, overcome loss, or accept otherness completely? And this in turn suggests that incorporation, in the graphic and dramatic obviousness of its inadequacies, is the very model—and provides the primary exemplum—of all such failures of closure and conclusion:

It is not the other that the process of incorporation preserves, but a certain topography it keeps safe, intact, untouched by the very relationship with the other to which, paradoxically enough, introjection is more open. Nevertheless, it remains that the otherness of the other installs within any process of appropriation (even before any opposition between introjecting and incorporating) a “contradiction,” or better, or worse, if contradiction always carries with it the *telos* of an *Aufhebung*, let us call it an undecidable irresolution that forever prevents the two from closing over their *rightful, ideal, proper* coherence, in other words and at any rate, over *their death* (“their” corpse). (Pp. xxi-xxii)

It is by learning from Derrida to pay subtle heed to both similarity and difference that one may avoid judgments and solutions that are too facile and too final. Thus we are alerted to the necessary hardship, ambivalence, and incompleteness of any internalization, whether, for example, of a local culture and its exemplary artifacts by a newcomer faced with their foreignness or, inversely and in turn, of the outsider by the culture to which the former may appear no less strange.

I do not, of course, wish to *overstate* the extent to which Bercovitch, Bloom, and Cavell are beset by feelings of estrangement—such emphasis would no doubt have rather more to do with personal feelings about my own new environs and circumstances. Still, the energies of their critical enterprises and the forms that they take do appear to bear significant relation to the problematics that Derrida has helped us to outline here. Incorporation and introjection are useful terms for analyzing these critics' simultaneous determination and refusal to be part of the game of integration and assimilation. The psychosocial dilemmas of these three theorists—symptomatically manifest in the apparent vacillation between playing by the standard rules and joining the club, on the one hand, and inventing new rules (or new games) and remaining separate and different, on the other—may be better understood when one considers that the gap between (more adaptive) introjective and (more resistant) incorporative tactics is usually significantly narrower than is commonly realized. Insofar as it is beneficial to bring this psychoanalytic perspective to bear at all, one would be well advised not to regard the strategies of internalization of Bloom, Cavell, and Bercovitch as occupying extreme and definite positions, but rather as points on a continuum which is itself only provisional and always shifting.

*“Jewish Science” and/or “Jouissance”?*

It is one of the unique features of psychoanalysis, as it figures in modern intellectual history and makes its way down a handful of generations to us, that it has retained, and is primarily sustained by, its *therapeutic* component. Unlike most of its companion modern and postmodern cultural discourses, systems, and theories, psychoanalysis does not content itself with diagnosis and critique; it also offers more positive prospects of (as well as techniques for) healing and cure, and commits itself not only to the alleviation of psychic pain, but to assisting individuals in their quests for self-discovery and a more authentic private and public existence. Such are the possibilities that it holds out to those willing to stay the distance on a long and arduous journey to an uncertain end; in this respect, both the promise and price of psychoanalysis are not a little like those associated with the process of immigration itself. The vexed issue of price and cost notwithstanding, it is also my hope and conviction that the prospect of psychoanalytic healing is not, or at least need not forever remain, a strictly personal matter, akin to a previous age's long sojourn at the spa or the asylum, a “cure” offered only to privileged and ailing persons of a certain

socioeconomic class or race or gender. On the contrary, the wisdom and powers of Freud's "science" and its application have been bequeathed to the entire culture and thus there is a need to make its dividend known and available in forms appropriate to all of its beneficiaries.

The inclination in recent years within the American mental health community to close ranks against and shrug off a psychoanalytic ethos (largely in favor of psychopharmacological and other "quick-fix" solutions) is an unfortunate development, to say the least. But this precisely does *not* imply that psychoanalysis should continue to be dominated by, or remain within the exclusive province or domain of, the medical, or even the psychology and social work, establishment. Shifts *away* from the circumscription of psychoanalysis within narrowly defined disciplines and institutions which refuse to pay the requisite attention to philosophical, literary, historical, political, and generally speaking *cultural* matters are for the most part positive ones and it is my personal hope that this trend continue. Freud himself arguably felt more or less this way, even about the training of psychoanalysts; he not only dedicated his best textual energies to cultural issues from midcareer onward, but regarded his own medical education as a mere detour *en route* to those other, and truer, interests.

But why is any of this important here? Some may adjudge this concern with psychoanalysis as praxis too obliquely related to the primary tasks of this project, and because it is probably quite evident that this is also an independent interest of mine, it may be worth indicating more precisely what the specific nature of the connections with *this* book are. At least *one* aspect of this interest has to do with whether Freud's conceptual and practical discovery—the now century-long phenomenon or movement called psychoanalysis—has a potential future and will continue to be culturally relevant. I wish to ask what the prospects are of its influence growing rather than shrinking and, particularly, whether recent theoretical developments, and their pragmatic implications, are likely to increase or decrease such possibilities of survival or extension.

It is of course evident that rather similar sounding questions are also being asked here about the present conditions and future prospects of secular Jewish intellectual culture in America; and indeed, one exemplar of that culture, and subject of this study, Stanley Cavell, provides the following precise and handy formulation for the above concerns about psychoanalysis: "What is at stake is whether psychoanalysis is inheritable—one may say repeatable—as science is inheritable, our modern paradigm for the teachable....But the matter goes beyond this question. If psychoanalysis is not exactly (what we mean by) a science, then its intellectual achievement may be lost to

humankind.”<sup>8</sup> And Cavell goes on to link the prospect of *this* loss to *his* perennial concerns about the loss of philosophy. It is intriguing that Cavell’s sentiments here are also echoed, more allusively and poetically, by the title and first sentence of yet another recent text by that other psychoanalytically inclined Jewish philosopher invoked in the previous section: “Let us not forget psychoanalysis,” enjoins Derrida—lest, one may surmise, we incur those dire consequences for the hand and the tongue (associated with the forgetting of *Jerusalem*) which the psalmist warns of while adding the tears of exile to the waters of Babylon.<sup>9</sup>

As Cavell might be the first to admit, there are crucial differences between America and France when it comes to intellectual climate and, more specifically, the cultural receptivity to statements about the future of psychoanalysis. Indeed, one reason for including the present chapter here is that there can be little doubt that France—in spite, or perhaps because, of an initial reticence toward the advent of psychoanalysis—has become the locus of the most intellectually challenging developments within psychoanalytic theory in recent decades. Thus Derrida is by no means the only, or even the most influential, French intellectual in this realm, and of course no attempt to draw on psychoanalytic developments in France would be complete without at least some attempt to place and assess the contributions of Jacques Lacan.

Typically, France has provided an ideal arena for the playing out of the obvious and quite public sibling rivalry between these two major intellectuals; it has made a virtual spectator sport of the contest between Derrida, the deconstructive (and psychoanalytic) thinker, and Lacan, the practicing psychoanalyst proper (though “improper” might well be the more appropriate term).<sup>10</sup> This distinction has hardly prevented Lacan from having just as much of an influence on the growing rapprochement between psychoanalysis and culture as Derrida, and *both* are to be applauded for this outcome—which has had important secondary effects in the United States. And yet, having said this much, I will risk the suggestion that there are also certain negative consequences of the recent cultural dominance—of Lacanian conceptions of psychoanalysis in particular—*especially* as these have immigrated and become ensconced where most French theory comes home to roost in America, namely, in academic literature departments. I would claim further that this is at least partially the result of this trend leading psychoanalysis too far afield from the everyday and ordinary ways in which it “helps us to live our lives”—a phrase applied by Wallace Stevens to the function of poetry<sup>11</sup>—and that this is, in turn, significantly related to another, perhaps more inadvertent tendency, namely, that of ignoring or eliding the specific and peculiar cultural connec-

tions among psychoanalysis, Jewishness, and the dynamics of immigration.

In spite of the heading that I give to this section, however, I certainly would not wish to be held either to the facile opinion that psychoanalysis is primarily a “Jewish science,” or to the equally absurd implication that Lacan’s highly complex version of it merely *reduces* to “*jouissance*.” I am in fact not really concerned here with the actual content of these concepts, and will address neither of them specifically; their presence and conjunction here is almost wholly attention getting and rhetorical, perhaps in unnecessary mimicry or parody of (as well as homage to) the punning predilections of both Derrida and Lacan. In any case no real “choice” is represented by these terms, not least because—though it may be implicit that we have here yet another example of the Gentile West’s exasperating two-thousand-year-old typological habit of borrowing or appropriating Jewish cultural contributions without acknowledging them qua Jewish—the losses consequent on the above-mentioned elision are no longer only, or even primarily, Jewish ones. As far as psychoanalytic prospects are concerned, the cultural price that may come to be exacted by such distortions or revisions are, I would contend, far wider; they run the risk of rendering psychoanalysis even *less* relevant to an increasingly democratizing, pluralistic, diverse, and multicultural world than its present reputation would grant.

It seems to me that Lacan’s arcane, often obscure, reworkings of the Freudian text, in conjunction with his peculiar disdain for all so-called “American,” or Anglo-Saxon, versions of psychoanalysis (ego-psychology, object relations, self-psychology), have a tendency to reestablish and reinscribe a hieratic, elitist, and intellectualist attitude within psychoanalytic theory and praxis. Thus what has latterly been underscored by Lacanian theory in the United States—that is, what purveyors and distributors of that particular order of high-cultural produce have wished to emphasize overwhelmingly about psychoanalysis—are its possibilities for textual commentary and the analysis of cultural “symptoms.” Though there is much to be thankful for in this, and though my own psychoanalytic applications would of course make it ludicrous for me to gainsay this in *absolute* terms, a serious problem *does* arise when it appears that these developments take place, to some considerable extent, at the expense or neglect of the existential as well as cultural healing potential of psychoanalysis.

Lacan’s own clearly brilliant and invaluable readings of Freud have encouraged these shifts, which have thus occurred substantially, though not exclusively, under his aegis and influence. And, while *some* of the cultural consequences of Lacan’s work have already been extremely important and arguably yielded not merely diagnostic, but

also therapeutic results (especially, for example, for feminism<sup>12</sup>), the growing popularity and dissemination of Lacanian ideas still harbor potential dangers, including the possible institution of a more existentially circumscribed—because *overly* abstract—therapeutics which would hold in contempt, declare facile, and render invalid the more everyday kinds of help or cure that *other* versions of psychoanalytic theory and therapy attempt to provide.

Though this may at first seem counterintuitive, Lacan at times quite explicitly disdains “culturalist” perspectives on behalf of a psychoanalysis capable of greater philosophical and theoretical generalization, linguistic and literary sophistication, and mathematical and scientific abstraction.<sup>13</sup> One result of this is that he bypasses altogether, and seems unable to appreciate in his vaunted “return to Freud,”<sup>14</sup> the specific historical urgency and timeliness of the cultural function of psychoanalytic theory and practice, both at first, in its inception in Jewish Vienna in the late nineteenth century, and later, as it emigrates with its survivor-Jews, and must translate itself, from pre- and post-Holocaust Europe to mid-twentieth-century America. (These matters will be treated in considerably more detail in the next chapter.)

Attention to these originating cultural functions of psychoanalysis, the social as well as psychological purposes that it served for its inventor and its first practitioners and patients (if you will, the complex, multiple desires and anxieties it helped cope with), can have the simultaneous effect of demystifying and enhancing its efficacy, and of thereby making its goods more readily available, especially to those who, for one reason or another and to whatever extent, lead the lives of outsiders or sometimes experience their lives *from* the outside.

However, Lacan’s aggressive opposition to psychoanalysis becoming an “adjustment psychology” or offering a “cure,” and thus having what he sees as its project of radical decentering (of the self, the subject, and psychoanalysis itself) corrupted and co-opted, as well as his combative stance vis-à-vis American psychoanalysis and particularly the ego psychology of Hartmann, Kris, and Loewenstein (who were all Jewish immigrants, the last having been, not incidentally of course, his own analyst), causes him to disdain, ignore, or miss these implications entirely.<sup>15</sup>

It cannot be incidental—and may indeed have been inevitable—that, instead, someone as *at home*, as steeped and ensconced in his still-Christian French culture as Lacan so clearly was, should have had what one might call “Pauline effects” on psychoanalysis. His reinterpretations and innovations—for example, the “trinity” of symbolic, imaginary, and real—bear something analogous to a typological, “new testamentary” relation to Freud’s original theories. They come replete with a simultaneously more ethereal, purist, and hieratical, *and* a

more dissenting, reformist, revolutionary, even apocalyptic, doctrine; they claim truth to Freud in the spirit of interpretation if not quite in the letter of the text, while bestowing primacy on the symbolic order of language and the hallowed goal of “full speech,”<sup>16</sup> and imbuing these with more arcane passion and mystery than the more down-to-earth Freud is likely to have been at ease with.

In an important book, Elizabeth Roudinesco discusses Lacan’s work in the context of the quite curious circumstance of *pre*-Lacanian French psychoanalysis having already been pervaded and influenced by powerful right-wing Christian elements, and also notes the personal importance to his enterprise of Lacan’s Catholic background:

Perhaps in France, for reasons of historical and political circumstances surrounding the implantation of Freudianism, only a non-Jew—an atheist, but culturally a Catholic—could occupy the place of a founder analogous to Freud’s in the first Viennese Society.... One thing was common, in any event, to Freud and to Lacan and in part determined their position with respect to the universality of the unconscious: Neither one renounced the religion of his ancestors, but in taking his distance from the faith that religion mediated, each sought sustenance in a culture capable of nourishing his doctrine. Freud partook of the Talmud as Lacan partook of the Gospels: nothing more, nothing less.<sup>17</sup>

This rather dismissive and evasive “nothing more, nothing less” is, however, less than satisfying. Delicate as the subject is, to stop short at merely *specifying* the different theological backdrops against which Freud and Lacan worked, is to say conspicuously too little about the ways those two religious cultures have traditionally been juxtaposed against one another. And if it is true that both of these figures inherit something—in fact, a great deal—from their respective cultural backgrounds, then the fraught historical *relations* between these backgrounds must surely also enter as part of the contemporary legacy.

In this context, one cannot neglect to note the work of Roudinesco’s translator, Jeffrey Mehlman, who has courageously explored Lacan’s own intriguing and convoluted rhetorical associations with certain writers and thinkers of the French protofascist and anti-Semitic right, though in an appropriately tentative way.<sup>18</sup> It would, of course, be absurd to *dismiss* Lacan’s work on any such grounds—and clearly neither Roudinesco nor Mehlman do so; both are also careful to state, moreover, that there was *nothing* anti-Semitic about Lacan himself. (I concur entirely with this judgment, and have neither need nor reason to contend otherwise. In fact, it is well known that Lacan boldly



and courageously demanded and secured the release of his own Jewish wife from the custody of the Nazis after she had been arrested in Paris during the war.)

There are, in fact, many paradoxes here; the place of Lacan in this drama is complicated by the willfulness and determination with which he appeared at times to *seek* the outsider's position and by the fact that he *ended up* such a maverick in the psychoanalytic world. The security of his own place within French and European culture notwithstanding, he was himself thoroughly intrigued by and inexorably drawn to marginality, and it is no accident that he chose not only Freud, but also Spinoza, as a cultural and intellectual hero. He frames the entire proceedings of Book 11 of his *Seminar* with references to this identification with the figure of Spinoza, the apostate Jew ostracized and excommunicated for his ideas.<sup>19</sup> Lacan's fascination with Spinoza has been remarked by others, including Roudinesco,<sup>20</sup> and must also be seen in the light of Freud's "equal and opposite" identification with such *non-Jewish* rebels as Hannibal, Cromwell and, so ironically in this context, Moses the *Egyptian*.

I would also direct attention to a number of significant and complex moments in Book 2 of Lacan's *Seminar*, where some of these issues emerge to the surface—symptomatically, as it were—in the interactions with the seminar's participants. On one occasion, for example, Serge Leclaire is called "a little idolator" (for unabashedly maintaining that it is inevitable that one "entify" or hypostasize, and thus idolize, the subject) by a Lacan who then adds: "I come down from Sinai and break the Tables of the Law." He had begun that day's proceedings in similar vein, alluding, in typically ironic and cryptic fashion, to his own role as that of a reluctant Moses vis-à-vis Freud's text, which is itself figured as part Golden Calf and part Holy Writ. Later the same year, Lacan begins another session by formulating a "fundamental law" for "a reading of Freud which tries to apply to the work itself the rules of comprehension and understanding which it formulates." Though, as he says, this law has "quite general application," the writers he adduces as providing a precedent for this self-reflexive, self-referential approach to texts are again none other than Spinoza and Maimonides, two of the most famous *Jewish* philosophers of all time. And finally, in the last meeting of the year, Lacan engages in an apparently heated, if rather confusing, debate with a certain "X" (whose gender appears to undergo mysterious shifts) on the role of the "Word" in the Old and New Testament myths of origin: the relations between the Greek *logos*, as used in the Gospel According to John, and some of its cognates, especially the Hebrew *dabar*.<sup>21</sup>

These are highly charged moments, certainly requiring more careful attention than I can devote to them here. This last, concerning

linguistic origins, is especially crucial, given Lacan's preoccupations with speech and language. Without wishing to enter too deeply into rather murky waters, I will only suggest that, for all of his own emphasis on and respect for language, Freud's Hebraic bias would in all likelihood have predisposed him rather more to *dabar* (which denotes not only "word" but "thing") than to *logos* (at least in its Johannine inflection). He was fond, in fact, of quoting Goethe's "in the beginning was the *deed*," and on at least two occasions did so at rather significant textual junctures: a mere page or two into *The Question of Lay Analysis*, and as the very last words of a text as relevant to all of these issues as *Totem and Taboo*.<sup>22</sup>

Thus it seems obvious that what is implicit, inherent, and at stake here are the age-old, chiasitic complications inherent in the relations between Judaism and Christianity. They might, of course, alert us to similarities as well as differences between Freudian and Lacanian conceptions of psychoanalysis; either way, they surely have important bearing on the ways in which Freud's massive originality intersects and interacts with Lacan's strenuous attempts to inherit his legacy. They lead one to speculate, for instance, that Lacan's early attempts to *re-decenter* both the psychoanalytic subject and psychoanalysis itself qua subject (showing, as they do, that a certain decenteredness is always already the case) might well have served as the very means whereby to fulfill the valuable function of recalling the original cultural decenteredness of Freud and his personal *dilemmas* of adjustment and acculturation, for the resolution of which psychoanalysis was, at least in part, conceived in the first place. And this, by extension, might also have made Lacan's work more positively relevant to *this* project, instead of having to serve primarily negative purposes here.

But, ironically and paradoxically, it is precisely by exhibiting an *a priori* disdain for all efforts at—not to mention possibilities of—resolution, and going on to forget or repress these needs at the cultural root of psychoanalysis, that Lacan and his followers succumb too easily to what might be called a high-cultural, intellectualist, and rather cynical, world-weary attitude. For all their return to the unconscious in Freud, in this regard they seem to pay attention only to conscious desires and *données* when they "ascend" *far too quickly* to the seductive level of the general, sophisticated, and abstract, not to say *universal*, relevance of psychoanalysis without keeping a vigilant eye on the historical, political, and social specificity of its cultural origins. Such elevating and flattening deprive not only Jewish culture, but other cultures—not to mention the many individuals who might look to it for everyday help for the living of difficult lives—of the best uses of Freud's discovery.

Lacan's apparently quite deliberate "scientific" obscurantism and linguistic equivocation became more pronounced as his career proceeded; in the face of his repudiation by the psychoanalytic "authorities," these tactics eventually helped him to create his own hegemony and institute a revised form of eclecticism whereby he could confer chosenness on those already saved beforehand by their devotion to this new, insistently self-aggrandizing master. The chaotic psychoanalytic goings-on in Paris, especially during the last years of Lacan's life and in the decade or so since his death, provide enough evidence of this and more than enough cause for concern as far as the institutional future of French—or rather Lacanian—psychoanalysis is concerned.<sup>23</sup> If the morass of legal proceedings and recriminations swirling around psychoanalysis in Paris, and the attitudes and behavior of Jacques-Alain Miller, Lacan's son-in-law and the reigning heir of Lacanianism, are anything to go by, if they bear any relation to the master's own impatient, sardonic, and autocratic personal style, then unfortunately—the substance of Lacan's psychoanalytic contributions to this extent aside—the tradition thus instituted, the example of inheritance which Lacan thereby provided, is a very problematic one for the future of psychoanalysis.

Even some of Lacan's previously most faithful adherents, like François Roustang, have recently begun investigating his leadership and their allegiance to him in this light, asking questions like: "Why did we follow him for so long?"<sup>24</sup> One need look no further, however, than the far more sympathetic Catherine Clément who refused to add hers to the cacophony of voices denouncing Lacan toward the end of his life. Her account of Lacan's career manages to be both compassionate and erudite, both admiring, even loving, and admirably balanced; it is also honest and faithful to the spirit of her subject in that it locates his career firmly within the ambiance of a cultural Catholicism. There is one particular sentence in her book that resonates crucially in the present context; in summary of Lacan's language and style, Clément declares: "In him there is not the least bit of the émigré."<sup>25</sup>

I will now turn to the work of another French psychoanalyst-theorist, Julia Kristeva, who, though she has by no means ignored Lacan, and has in fact gleaned a great deal from him, seems nonetheless to have distanced herself from the stridency and obscurity of his positions—perhaps not least because (like Derrida and unlike Lacan) she *is* an émigré and is therefore *not* as entrenched within or limited by an apparently intransigent Frenchness. One may perhaps see my own appeal to her, and to the other French theorists discussed here (including Lacan), as just one more instance of a more general tendency of American scholarship to look to France as its primary resource for theoretical assistance, as, if you will, yet another transference

requisition made to that virtually irresistible intellectual culture that once so generously and helpfully presented America with the conceptual and concrete gift of *la liberté!* Notwithstanding Jacques Lacan's disparagements of both American culture and American versions of psychoanalysis (and, indeed, it must be acknowledged that he was not unlike Freud in this regard!), such transatlantic exchanges seem destined to continue.

### *The Counterdepressants of Strangers*

It is one of Julia Kristeva's recent books in particular, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*,<sup>26</sup> that provides some extremely useful tools for our understanding of the trials and dilemmas of the three contemporary Jewish critics and theorists of American literature who are the subjects of this study. Indeed, noting just her title for the moment, I have already alluded to the possibility that we may be able to postulate or surmise, with some corroboration from their more personal writings, the need to overcome a certain *cultural melancholy*, a kind of belated *postimmigration depression*, as psychosocially at work behind the productions of these scholars.

Kristeva devotes the opening two chapters of her book to constructing a theory of melancholy with the help of Freud, Lacan, and Melanie Klein (among others),<sup>27</sup> before proceeding to a powerful section on "Feminine Depression" and to her more specific readings of works by Holbein, Nerval, Dostoyevsky, and Duras. As is her wont, she is not long in arriving at a discussion of language and its relations to the depressive predicament, and applies her own important contributions to the psycholinguistic theory of signification to this purpose. She draws on some of her own earlier formulations—for example, the crucial distinction between the *semiotic* and the *symbolic*<sup>28</sup>—in an attempt to show how discourses of literary creation might both give expression to and carry their authors beyond the debilitating affective experiences of sadness, sorrow, and desperation suffered by melancholic persons, though she also indicates why such solutions are so difficult to adopt when depressive circumstances are indicated.

Agreeing with Freud and others that the original source of these afflictions is the "*impossible mourning for the maternal object*" (p. 9), Kristeva associates this failure or refusal to mourn with disturbances in the capacity to compensate for the lost object by sustaining what she calls "*signifying bonds*"; the melancholic, in other words, is characterized by both "*intolerance for object loss and the signifier's failure to insure a way out of the withdrawal in which the subject takes refuge*" (p. 10). Later she will reformulate this inability, using the Freudian terms *negation* and *denial*: