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# The Making of John Huston's *Freud*: *The Secret Passion*

I

John Huston's terrible problems with the recalcitrant Jean-Paul Sartre and the broken-down Montgomery Clift when making *Freud: The Secret Passion* (1962) were worse than filming under fire in *The Battle of San Pietro*, the heat and disease of the jungle in *The African Queen* and *The Roots of Heaven*, the raging ocean storms in *Moby Dick*, the desert winds and wild mustangs in *The Misfits*, and the dangerous animals entering the ark in *The Bible*. As with *Moby Dick*, *The Roots of Heaven*, and *The Bible*, Huston's ambitious attempt in *Freud* was far greater than his actual achievement, and the backstory of this film is more interesting than the film itself.

The studios were always looking for the next big subject, and the 1950s saw the rise of popular and fashionable interest in the father of psychoanalysis. The challenge of making the ideas of one of the seminal thinkers of the century available to a wide audience appealed to Huston, and *Freud* was one of the earliest films with a psychoanalytic theme. He knew very little about Freud when he first considered the project, though his Aunt Margaret had sent her husband to Freud to

be analyzed and “cured” of his homosexuality.

Like Huston’s wartime documentary *Let There Be Light* (1946), *Freud* showed the effect of trauma on the human mind, offered a simplified explanation of psychological processes, and emphasized the possibility of quasi-miraculous cures through drugs and hypnosis. The mentally ill soldier who exclaims “I can see” after treatment in *Let There Be Light* resembles Freud’s patient who is cured of hysterical paralysis and declares, “I can walk.” Huston himself did not believe in the unconscious. Commenting on his own nightmares about the war, he wrote, “We really don’t know what goes on beneath the surface.” Nevertheless, he saw the dramatic potential of stories about the repression and revelation of traumatic memories. In an interview to publicize the picture, he alluded to its subtitle and thematic prologue, and melodramatically called the movie “a reminder of all unpleasant memories carefully forgotten. *Freud* is the image leading [the audience] down into the hell of their own secret passions.” Publication in 1953-57 of a major three-volume biography by Freud’s devoted disciple, Ernest Jones, renewed his interest in this subject.

Huston went right to the top when looking for a writer and sought out the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, then at the height of his fame, who (like Freud) had a profound influence on twentieth-century thought. The author of a mammoth existentialist work, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), and many novels and plays, Sartre went on to win—and refuse—the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1964. Huston was attracted to Sartre’s ethic of action and his belief that every individual is “condemned to be free,” that he is responsible for the decisions he makes, and that his choices authenticate his existence. In November 1946, after completing *Let There Be Light*, Huston directed Sartre’s play, *No Exit*, in New York, boldly introducing existentialism to America when few people had even heard of it.

Huston’s version of the play did not meet with Sartre’s approval and foreshadowed their conflicts when they began to work on *Freud*. Paul Bowles, the translator, revealed that Sartre was angry with Huston for tampering with his text and treating it like a screenplay that could be constantly revised: “Sartre was annoyed because I was unable to keep the director of *No Exit* from changing the script. . . . He sent telegrams of protest from Paris before we opened, and I was obliged to send back replies that were dictated by John Huston. His

anger should have been directed against John, not me.” In his autobiography Bowles revealed that Huston justified the changes he made to Sartre’s play, though he violently opposed the changes the studios made to *his* films:

John wanted to particularize the references made to his past life by the male character upon his arrival in hell; by substituting political for metaphysical motivations he hoped to enliven the argument for the American public, which he considered generally incapable of appreciating the play’s existentialist basis. . . . Sartre got wind of what was afoot and sent me a cable of protest from Paris. John’s opinion, however, was that Sartre was surrounded by busybodies who hoped to sabotage the American production. He believed that he was clarifying the play rather than weakening it. Very likely the drama was made more immediately interesting to a great portion of the New York public by being presented in this way. (269)

*No Exit* contains three characters who know each other all too well, trapped in an ugly hotel room. They gradually learn that they are in fact in hell, forever doomed to judge each other as well as themselves, and that, in Sartre’s famous line, “Hell is other people.” Huston’s production, with the French actor Claude Dauphin in the leading role, had a poor reception. Huston said, “The critics were confounded by it. They thought it was just another French triangle play” (*Interviews* 94). But the most influential critic, Brooks Atkinson of the *New York Times*, praised Huston’s evocative direction and the powerful acting he inspired: “Inside a vividly claustrophobic setting . . . one man and two women faced one another in hell. They were looking to one another for help. But there was no help. They were doomed to confront one another eternally. In the existential philosophy of Sartre, every person is responsible to himself and can expect nothing from other people. *No Exit* was ruthlessly staged by John Huston and acted with great vehemence and bitterness” (414). Despite the favorable reviews, the static and intellectual *succès d’estime* closed after four weeks.

## II

The failure of *No Exit* in New York did not change Huston’s mind about Sartre’s genius, and Huston did not notice that Sartre’s novels lacked

dramatic power. His first meeting with the unattractive literary lion did not shake his confidence. His lover Suzanne Flon knew Sartre from the French theater and had introduced them in Paris in 1952 when Huston was making *Moulin Rouge*. He found Sartre physically repulsive, and in his autobiography described him as “a little barrel of a man, and as ugly as a human being can be. His face was both bloated and pitted, his teeth were yellowed and he was wall-eyed” (*Open Book* 295). Sartre’s biographer called his *mésalliance* with Huston “a perfect Kafkaesque play, far more absurd than *No Exit* and *The Misfits* combined” (Cohen-Solal 387). Huston paid him twenty-five thousand dollars to write the *Freud* script, and both were completely mistaken about the other. Sartre assumed that Huston was an expert on Freud, while Huston believed that Sartre, one of the leading minds in Europe, had read deeply in psychology and was intimately acquainted with Freud’s works. In fact, Sartre was not really interested in Freud and had only a superficial knowledge of the Viennese sage.

When Sartre came to Huston’s house in Ireland for ten days in October 1959 to work on the script, they discovered another intellectual gap. Huston did not speak or read French and Sartre’s English was . . . nonexistent. Not to be outdone by Huston’s harem, Sartre brought along his Jewish-Algerian mistress, Arlette Elkaim, who was thirty years younger and served as his interpreter and secretary. (Later on, she became his legally adopted daughter and editor of his posthumous works.) After each meeting, she typed the English translation of Sartre’s notes and suggestions. The visit was brief but excruciating for both men. Sartre sent frequent reports to Simone de Beauvoir, his senior mistress and intellectual companion back in Paris, detailing his host’s bizarre behavior and his own snobbish and bewildered reaction to life in an Irish country house.

Their script conferences were interminable and unintelligible. Sartre spoke with such torrential rapidity that Huston, even with the aid of his own interpreter, could not follow what he was saying. Their failure to understand each other did not prevent Sartre from plunging ahead with astonishing energy and persistence. Contrasting his guest’s vitality with his own weariness, Huston recalled his boredom and irritation: “He did not have any discipline. He would not even listen to what people [i.e., Huston] would tell him and would keep on writing and talking without getting tired. . . . Sometimes I’d leave the

room in desperation—on the verge of exhaustion from trying to follow what he was saying; the drone of his voice followed me until I was out of earshot and, when I'd return, he wouldn't even have noticed that I'd been gone" (*Open Book* 295). But Sartre *did* notice, and thought Huston was very rude to leave suddenly and disappear for hours at a time. Huston continued his onslaught by condemning Sartre with Bogart's favorite nickname for Huston himself: "He is not in any way a joyful companion! He works with a single-mindedness that's impressive and frightening. . . . He was a bit of a *monster*, Sartre—a monster of the mind. . . . He proves unsuitable only because he has really no idea of what the film medium actually requires" (Pratley 132-33). In fact, Sartre *did* know how to write a screenplay, and in 1956 had done *Les Sorcières* [*The Witches of Salem*], an effective French version of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.

Sartre was even more of a mismatch than the unclubable Ray Bradbury had been on *Moby Dick*. Huston found him personally overbearing and intellectually secretive, more boring than brilliant. An impossible collaborator and uncongenial guest, Sartre was not, like almost everyone else, seduced by the aesthetic allure, lush landscape, and sporting life at St. Clarens. He would have agreed with Oscar Wilde that foxhunting was "the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable." His letters to de Beauvoir were savagely critical and unexpectedly funny. Not *au courant* about the sexual complexities of wives and mistresses at St. Clarens (he didn't mention Ricki Huston and their children), he scrutinized the scene with the jaded eye of a displaced *boulevardier* and isolated *flâneur*, lost in an alien landscape of endless green. He mocked Huston's choice of headgear and thought exercising his horse and pony (surely not a "prancing donkey") was a pointless and depressing activity: "My windows overlook a green prairie that seems to stretch for miles and miles. On the prairie, there are cows and a few horses, which our host, a cap on his head, rides every afternoon. He trots or gallops near his house followed by a small prancing donkey, which turns the ride into ridicule" (Cohen-Solal 386).

When Sartre's camera-eye scanned the drawing room, he zeroed in—with Waugh-like social satire—on the strange array of guests ("Hell is other people"), whom the gracious host was pleased to embarrass or ignore:

This is exactly what makes up the interior landscape of my boss, the great Huston. Ruins, abandoned houses, wastelands, marshes, a thousand traces of the human presence, but the man himself has left, I don't know where.

. . . Almost every night he invites the strangest sort of guests: the richest heir in England, a rajah who is also an innkeeper (a big hotel in Kashmir), an Irish master of fox-hounds, an American producer, an English director. And he says *nothing* [significant] to them. Arlette and I came into the drawing room at a moment when Huston was chatting languidly to the master of hounds, a broad-backed young man with a red nose, *très* gentleman farmer. We were introduced and the "major" said that he didn't know French. Huston banged him on the shoulder and said, "Well, I'll leave you to practise your French," and went off leaving us there feeling stupid. Panic-stricken, the major rolled his eyes and finally said, "Churchill is funny when he speaks French." I said "Ha, Ha" and silence fell until we were called into dinner. (Cockburn)

Huston enjoyed discomfiting people, and Sartre was bored by what he called their "shared solitude." Sartre felt existence at St. Clarens was superficially jolly but really quite moribund, and lapsed into Freudian expressions: "What a business! Dear, oh, dear! what a business! Such systematic lying here. Everyone with their complexes, ranging from masochism to savagery. But don't imagine we're in hell. More like a vast cemetery. Everybody dead, with frozen complexes. So little life—so very, very little."

The famous Huston charm failed to seduce old Jean-Paul. He ignored the art treasures in the individually named and decorated rooms, which he called "identical," and moved from the defects of the grand house to those of its imperious master. He emphasized Huston's sudden withdrawals, his vanity, his melancholy, his inability to concentrate on their work, and his lord-of-the-manor persona. Taking Huston literally, he described him as simply vacuous:

Huston used an odd expression to describe his "unconscious," when speaking of Freud: "In mine, there's nothing." And the tone made his meaning clear; nothing *any longer*, not even any old, unmentionable desires. A big void. You can just imagine how easy it is to get him to work. He shuns thought because it makes him sad. We'll all be together in some smoking-room, we'll all be

talking, and then suddenly in mid-discussion he'll disappear. Very lucky if he's seen again before lunch or dinner. . . .

Through this immensity of identical rooms, a great Romantic, melancholic and lonely, aimlessly roams. Our friend Huston is absent, aged, and literally unable to speak to his guests. . . .

Huston isn't even sad, he is empty, except for those moments of childish vanity when he wears a red tuxedo, or rides one of his horses, or reviews his paintings or orders his workers about. It is impossible to keep his attention for more than five minutes at a time: he is unable to keep on working, refuses to think. . . . His emptiness is purer than death. (Sartre viii and Cohen-Solal 386)

There clearly wasn't sufficient air in the room for these two gigantic egos who deeply loathed each other. They got on each other's nerves, built up a venomous resentment, and were headed for certain disaster.

Sartre had written a ninety-five-page synopsis that included a detailed but *de trop* discussion of the costumes, lighting, and camera angles. The film, which generally follows Sartre's outline, dramatizes Freud's discoveries from 1885 to 1890, when he was between twenty-nine and thirty-four years old, and recently married. It opens with his fateful decision to leave neurology and portrays him as a kind of Sherlock Freud—the psychiatrist as detective—who explores the theory of the unconscious and develops the techniques of psychoanalysis. But in the movie Freud himself, more like a patient than a doctor, is ill. He discovers new ideas and methods in order to resolve his own conflicts, especially his repressed hostility to his overbearing father, and to cure himself of his own neurosis. Sartre's script ridicules those who oppose Freud and transforms the scholarly doctor into an existential hero whose daring beliefs shock and threaten the medical establishment in Vienna. The validity of Freud's theories are never questioned.

Sartre then completed his script and sent it to Huston, who had it translated and suggested extensive revisions. Bradbury's original script of *Moby Dick* had been twelve hundred pages, but he reduced it to a manageable two hundred before giving it to Huston. Sartre, instead of making extensive cuts as requested, actually *expanded* it to sixteen hundred pages, which could have run to sixteen hours of film. Huston was also shocked to find many scenes with sensational

material, which in 1962 could never be included in a commercial movie: prostitution, masturbation, homosexuality, child abuse, incest, and a *mélange choisi* of sexual perversions.

In desperate need of help with this impossible script, Huston called in the fire brigade. After Wolfgang Reinhardt (older brother of Gottfried, the producer of *The Red Badge of Courage*) and Charles Kaufman (his coauthor on *Let There Be Light*) had reduced the script by seven-eighths to two hundred pages, Huston sent it to Sartre, who'd returned to Paris, and asked for still more radical changes. Sartre made some revisions, but then grew bored with the whole project. Reinhardt and Kaufman then rewrote Sartre's script. Huston, by now desperate for cash, had to sign his financial interest in the picture over to Universal International. Sartre became furious at Huston's requests for rewrites, his loss of control over the script, and the inevitable censorship.

On August 24, 1961, Sartre sent a telegram that took Huston, not used to being rejected by his coauthor, by surprise: "Am in complete disagreement with unrealized treatment and totally distorted solution. Am obliged to withdraw my name since I recognize nothing of the initial project." He followed this with a devastating seven-page letter that explained his reasons for accepting the commission and vented the grievances he'd expressed in his correspondence with de Beauvoir: "I only realized your near total ignorance of the subject in St. Clarens, when it was too late. Why did I let myself make this mistake? — because I liked you, because the subject pleased me, because I needed money. . . . You never collaborated with me, in this work, you have only destroyed and you have contributed nothing. . . . You were negative, absent, with inner resistances which gave you the appearance of laziness."

In an angry telegram to Reinhardt (not Sartre), Huston angrily condemned Sartre's abandonment of the project and blasted his former coauthor: "I am shocked at such a demonstration of irresponsibility by a foremost authority on ethics. You might inquire of him how a manuscript of some four times the length of *Ben Hur*'s could be reduced without considerable rewriting. You and I undertook to do what Sartre in all conscience should have done himself, but instead of giving us sincere thanks and an offer of his ready aid, he dismisses such obligations with a few unconscionable words." But it was surely illogical of Huston to expect a philosopher to behave more morally

than anyone else, and to be grateful for what he felt was the mutilation and ruin of his work. Though Sartre's name had little commercial value and they heartily disliked one another, it's odd that Huston regretted rather than rejoiced in his departure.

In an interview with the English playwright and critic Kenneth Tynan, Sartre acknowledged that his script was far too long and explained his ambitious attempt to dramatize Freud's exploration of the human mind:

Except in construction, the final script has little resemblance to what I wrote. The fault is partly mine, and partly Freud's. My scenario would have been impossible to shoot; it would have lasted seven or eight hours. As you know, one can make a film four hours long if it has to do with Ben Hur, but a Texas audience won't sit through four hours of complexes. Hence the script was cut down to ninety minutes or so. I haven't seen the final version, and I don't know if I shall leave my name on it; that depends on the contract. However, what we tried to do—and this is what interested Huston especially—was to show Freud not when his theories had made him famous, but at the time, around the age of thirty, when he was utterly wrong; when his ideas had led him into hopeless error. You know that at one point he seriously believed that what caused hysteria was fathers raping their daughters. We begin in that period, and follow his career up to the discovery of the Oedipus complex. That, for me, is the most enthralling time in the life of a great discoverer—where he seems muddled and lost, but has the genius to collect himself and put everything in order. (308-09)

Despite all the emotional conflict and chaos, the final script *did* follow Sartre's essential outline and interpretation. In his autobiography, Huston generously gave credit to the uncredited writer and said, "Much of what Sartre had done was in our version—in fact, it was the backbone of it. In some scenes the dialogue was left intact" (*Open Book* 298).

### III

Sartre, rather surprisingly, thought Marilyn Monroe was the finest actress alive. Despite the agonizing trouble he'd had with her in *The Misfits*, Huston was bravely willing to take her on again. After many

years of psychoanalysis (which led to her suicide rather than to her recovery), Marilyn wanted, appropriately enough, to appear as Freud's principal patient. But she withdrew when Freud's analyst-daughter Anna, the mentor of Marilyn's analyst Ralph Greenson, did not want the picture to be made. She was afraid that Freud might be portrayed negatively and that popularizing his ideas would debase them. In her magisterial condemnation of the project, Anna Freud (using the royal "we") wrote, "In our opinion neither historic nor scientific truth about the person, Sigmund Freud, or his work, can be conveyed by the film, contrary to the pretensions made by the producers" (Kass 208).

Following this commandment from on high, Marilyn regretfully told Huston, in an illogical letter, composed with stilted formality and probably dictated by Greenson, "I have it on good authority that the Freud family does not approve of anyone working on a picture of the life of Freud—so I wouldn't want to be part of it, first because of his great contribution to humanity and secondly, my personal regard for his work. Thank you for offering me the part of 'Anna O.' and I wish you the best in this and all other endeavors. Yours, Marilyn." The twenty-year-old English actress Susannah York, who'd played teenagers in three previous pictures, secured the role of Anna O., now called Cecily, and earned seventy thousand dollars. Wary of the legal minefield, Huston was very careful not to portray any living member of the Freud family, or use any material copyright by Freud or by Ernest Jones. All the characters in the movie were either fictitious or based on dead people.

Throughout his career Huston had often helped personal friends who needed money—Claud Cockburn in *Beat the Devil*, John Kilbracken in *Moby Dick*, Friedrich Lebedur in *The Roots of Heaven*—as well as actors, like John Garfield in *We Were Strangers*, who were accused of being Communists and blacklisted. He now hired Larry Parks to play Freud's sympathetic colleague Dr. Josef Breuer. After his success in *The Jolson Story* (1946) with Huston's ex-wife Evelyn Keyes, Parks had been summoned by the House Un-American Activities Committee and forced, against his will, to name names. Despite his cooperative testimony, he was blacklisted and dropped by Columbia. Parks was stiff and unconvincing as Breuer, and his undiluted American accent jarred with all the others, who seemed more central European. *Freud* was his last film. Freud's devoted wife, Martha, was played by

Susan Kohner, the daughter of Huston's agent, who often asked him, "Do you have anything suitable for my little Suzy?"

Shot in Munich and Vienna, the picture had mostly American actors, English cameramen, and German crew. It took five months to complete and cost four million dollars—double the original estimate of time and money. For the part of Freud, Huston considered Marlon Brando (often his first choice), the Australian Peter Finch, the English Albert Finney and Peter Sellers, and the Austrian Maximilian Schell. Montgomery Clift, who'd played a psychiatrist in Tennessee Williams's *Suddenly Last Summer* (1959) and had performed well in *The Misfits*, finally got the part and earned two hundred thousand dollars.

Though Huston was a sexual adventurer and sophisticated man of the world, he had a deep-rooted puritanical streak and felt uneasy with homosexuals. He could accept and work with flamboyant and obvious gays like Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams, but was deeply troubled by covert and complex, guilt-ridden and tormented homosexuals like Monty Clift. An incident that occurred when Clift was visiting St. Clerans, between finishing *The Misfits* and starting *Freud*, shocked Huston to the core and caused a rift between them. Huston once opened Clift's guest-room door without knocking and was horrified to discover Clift's French lover, Jean, in bed with him. When they met in Munich, Huston asked Reinhardt, "'Did you know this about Monty?' 'Yes, of course I knew,' Reinhardt said. 'I think it's disgusting! Why didn't you tell me?'" It's hard to believe that Huston could be so naïve, but it seems that he really was. In any case, Huston, who imported many mistresses to St. Clarens while his wife was in residence, was highly offended and felt his house had been polluted. Ignoring the fact that his wife and children were safely sequestered a half mile away in the Little House, he told Clift's biographer: "The incident seemed trashy—I felt Monty had insulted me. It was messy. I wish he'd considered my family and how I felt about it. I can't say I'm able to deal with homosexuals" (Bosworth 326).

Huston's attitude to Clift was similar to the disdain of Bogart (Sam Spade) for the effeminate Peter Lorre (Joel Cairo) in *The Maltese Falcon*, but after *Freud*, Huston became more tolerant. He sympathetically portrayed both the repressed and the affected homosexuals (played by Marlon Brando and Zorro David) in *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967) and the homosexual transvestite (George Sanders) in *The*

*Kremlin Letter* (1970). Anthony Perkins, another covert homosexual, appeared in *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* (1972). Huston later said the “funny thing about Clift [was that] he only propositioned men when he was drunk. There was nothing abnormal about him when he was sober. I found him a delight to work with, which is why I put him in *Freud*” (Tuska 290).

Huston had a lot of experience working with actors who were complete wrecks and found it difficult to remember their lines, and his film sets were partly rehab centers. Errol Flynn in *The Roots of Heaven* (1958), Marilyn in *The Misfits* (1961), and Clift in *Freud* all had grave problems with drink and drugs. But Clift had radically deteriorated since *The Misfits*, and his poor health, eye troubles, psychological problems, alcoholism, and addiction to pills caused expensive delays on *Freud*. Clift told friends that “he wasn’t afraid of working with Huston—he could take care of himself. . . . [Clift] disliked his game playing, his false heartiness; but he admired his relish for life” (Bosworth 324). But Huston, afraid that Clift’s homosexuality would affect his performance and provoke bad publicity if Freud were portrayed as gay, began to lay down impossible rules for the conduct of Clift’s private life: “Monty was not to behave in a homosexual manner, or to have any kind of homosexual relationships while he worked on the film. He was to behave in a normal manner. He was not to drink or take pills. He was not to have dependent friendships with older women” (La Guardia 235). In other words, Monty was not to be Monty.

Three important differences between *The Misfits* and *Freud* made conditions much more difficult for Clift. The close-ups of his smashed in and badly scarred face after his near-fatal car accident of 1957 were appropriate for a rodeo rider, but not—even when partly covered by a beard—for the intellectual Freud. The dialogue was also quite different in these two movies. In the contemporary western, Clift was at ease with the idiomatic talk. But Freud spoke a new scientific language with turn-of-the-century cadences. In one typical speech, an uneasy mixture of the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Calvin, Freud observes: “Cecily, you are not guilty. Or if you are, your guilt is shared by every human being. The innocent is born into a world in which it cannot help but lose its innocence. Every child is foredoomed to become a sinner. I sinned too. I dreamed of killing my father.” Lastly, neither Huston nor Clift was aware that his vision was defective.

Huston later summarized the formidable obstacles he'd faced with Clift and exonerated the actor, who'd become a battered version of his former self: "I shied away from him. He was, or had been, a wonderful actor, but I got the remnants of him, not the man himself. He was pretty shredded by the time he came to me. The troubles I had with him were not his fault. He was just not capable any more. The accident to his face had done great interior damage to him. He had been very good in *The Misfits*, but he had very few lines in it, mostly colloquialisms, and I was taken by his performance and thought he could do *Freud*" (*Open Book* 97). But he couldn't memorize the more complex and elaborate dialogue. Huston also recalled that he tried to do everything possible to help Clift remember his lines: "We had dialogue written all over the set, on the backs of doors, walls, on boards, in front of the camera. But it soon became obvious that on top of everything else Monty really *couldn't* see—it was macabre" (Bosworth 337).

When they finally discovered that Clift had cataracts that blurred his vision, he was sent to London to see his doctor and had an eye operation as soon as the movie was completed. Defending himself, Clift rightly said, "They kept changing the script on me. I'd go to bed knowing one set of lines and wake up to another whole new scene!" Other actors could deal with all these sudden changes; Clift, in his fragile condition, could not. Reinhardt agreed that "It was *terribly* hard for Monty to learn these rewrites given to him just hours before photography. Monty had already told John that he was a slow study. He was the sort of actor who needed to ponder and study; and, remember, these were complicated psychiatric terms. Some actors of Monty's stature would simply walk off the film if scripts were handed to them in that haphazard way" (La Guardia 241).

Huston's treatment of Clift during the making of *Freud*, which several observers have called sadistic, is the most contentious issue in his entire professional career. In *Freud* Clift hurt his hands, just as he had in *The Misfits* when he mistakenly started a sequence without gloves and had to hold the mustang's rope with his bare hands until they were lacerated. His biographer Patricia Bosworth stated that in the cave-dream sequence in *Freud*, in which Clift is pulled by a rope, "Huston forced Monty to pass the rope through his hands without stopping, until by the ninth take his palms were raw and bleeding and he was in obvious pain" (329). In his autobiography, Huston categorically denied

this and blamed Clift for the self-inflicted injury: "After each shot, when I called 'Cut!' Monty proceeded to slide down the rope, holding tightly. In this way, he burned his hands horribly. . . . Monty's defenders have charged that I did this to him deliberately, going so far as to demand take after take while blood from Monty's hands streamed onto the rope. Unthinkable nonsense!" (*Open Book* 302).

In later interviews Huston tried to clarify the situation and occasionally contradicted himself. He admitted that his attitude toward Clift was ambivalent but essentially hostile: "I liked him and detested him. His behavior was just so offensive. Belching and farting and, you know, stinking. He was awful, awful. I couldn't bear him." But he insisted that he was gentle rather than cruel: "I was never kinder to anybody than I was to Clift. Sometimes I spoke harshly to him, but it was an attempt to awaken something in him. The combination of drugs, drink, and being homosexual was . . . just too much" for Clift. Frustrated by the actor, Huston admitted that he adopted a risky strategy to scare him into giving a better performance. In a dramatic event, in which he played actor as well as director, he "decided to stage a fight to frighten him into shaping up. I even considered using physical violence. I wasn't trying to destroy him. I wanted to save my movie! . . . Nothing worked. Finally I decided I would get rough with him. I went to his dressing room, opened the door and slammed it behind me so hard that a mirror fell from the wall and shattered, showering glass shards all over the room. . . . I wanted him to feel my anger. . . . I was trying to scare him, thinking fear would do something" (*Open Book* 302). Though this violent and frightening treatment was anything but "kind," Huston believed that he was attempting to help Clift and save the picture, that his behavior was constructive rather than cruel.

The fractious cast and crew split into pro-Clift and pro-Huston factions. The former felt Huston was treating Clift in a brutal manner, terrifying him for not learning his lines and torturing him on the rope until his hands bled. The latter, mostly the production crew, felt it was all Clift's fault for failing to learn his lines, demanding script revisions, and destroying himself with drugs and drink. To resolve this crisis, Huston called in an eminent British psychiatrist, Sir David Stafford-Clark (future author of *What Freud Really Said*, 1967), to treat the troubled actor who played the troubled psychiatrist in the movie. As soon as he arrived, Clift's partisans bombarded him with complaints

about Huston's treatment of the actor. Despite two visits, Stafford-Clark did not offer his professional opinion and was not much help.

Robert LaGuardia, a biographer of Clift, who defended the actor and attacked Huston, wrote that "Monty's friends thought him extremely courageous in his determination to finish what was so obviously an impossible film. . . . Three or four times, he broke down completely and rushed off the set sobbing" (248, 250). Since Huston insisted on long takes and Clift couldn't remember his lines, they kept repeating this humiliating process. LaGuardia argued that Huston completely ruined Clift: "The filming of *Freud* destroyed whatever was left of Monty's life. When the five months of celluloid grotesqueries were done, Monty was a walking cadaver" (229). Speaking of Angela Allen, LaGuardia got carried away and claimed that "for years, she had been Huston's confidante and script girl, but after *Freud* she announced bitterly that she would never work with him again" (257). In fact, she *did* work with him again on two more films. Clift made only one more movie before dying of a heart attack, at the age of forty-six, in 1966.

#### IV

In a recent interview the principled, strong-minded Susannah York, who also clashed with Huston, threw some light on this controversial episode. She said that *Freud* was a big step up in her nascent career, and that she was flattered, proud, and thrilled to appear in the film. She gave Huston enormous credit for being perceptive enough to see her potential, pick her out of nowhere, and realize that she could play such a complex part. She was then unfamiliar with psychology and "afraid of making a fool of myself, and so I had to learn quickly. I had lived a sheltered life. Hypnosis was a new word to me. I didn't know anything about Freud or the dark, labyrinthine corners of the soul. I must have known them instinctively, of course, but plunging into them was another matter."

Susannah was very fond of Clift and loved acting with him. She admired his perfectionism, his passion for doing the very best work, and the way he encouraged her to realize her full potential. After dinner together, they would rehearse their scenes until very late at night. She would get up at 5:00 a.m., after only a few hours sleep, and was not vain or worried about her appearance on camera. Both she and Clift

struggled with the infinite number of rewrites, which in her view did *not* improve the film. It was especially difficult to relearn, for the second or third time, what already had been learned. As they struggled together, she became very protective, even a bit maternal, about him.

In a rare criticism of an actress, Huston called Susannah a “spoiled young lady, and I had difficulty with her.” He expected the novice to be obedient and was furious when she stood up to him. She compared Cliff to a steel rapier who could bend but still remain strong, while Huston, though an overwhelming figure, seemed like a marble column with an awful hollowness inside. Huston was completely immersed in the film and at the same time strangely detached from it: “During my scenes, John would be doodling and drawing. He didn’t seem to be focused. He’d removed himself, and I found that terribly destroying for me.” Huston preferred to listen rather than to watch, which upset many actors. Susannah thought that he was wrong, even stupid, to keep his head down during filming and not watch Cliff’s takes, not look at his work. She was puzzled and critical when Huston kept saying, for no apparent reason, “Do it again, do it again, do it again.” She was upset and angered by his bullying, believed he was unjust and sadistic, and felt that he forced people to be for or against him, which caused a lot of dissension on the set.

The breaking point for Susannah came when Huston, mocking Cliff’s defective vision, enraged her by cruelly remarking, “We’ll form a club to get a Seeing Eye dog for Monty.” Like Ray Bradbury, a short and slight person who finally exploded and punched Huston while working on the script of *Moby Dick*, Susannah suddenly went berserk, threw herself at Huston and—taking both of them by surprise—hit him with her fists. When she returned to her hotel, she found her room filled with vases and vases of red roses. She thanked Huston for the flowers but couldn’t accept his apology, couldn’t forgive the unforgivable, couldn’t like him after what had happened. She was not aggressive, but had a reactive temper. She was very much in awe of Huston and did not begin the film in a fighting mode, but she was forced into it by the fearful and disruptive conditions he’d created.

Huston believed that “tearing down an actor’s ego doesn’t work.” Why, then, would he alienate half the cast and crew, as well as the leading actors, by bullying and frightening the fragile and vulnerable Cliff? Susannah answered, “Why, indeed? I do not know.” In response

to Huston's assertion that he was trying to get a good performance out of Clift, she said he could have gotten a fine performance [as he had with Marilyn] without being cruel. She was adamant that Huston's defense was untrue: there were too many instances of his unnecessary cruelty. He would not allow Clift to wear gloves, and she herself saw that his hands were torn and bleeding. But there was no doubt in her mind that Huston and Clift "perversely played to each other's dark side." Both director and actor were complicit: Huston's sadism was a perfect match for Clift's masochism. Huston wanted to punish Clift for his homosexuality, and Clift felt he deserved punishment for being a homosexual. Like Bogart in *The African Queen*, Gregory Peck in *Moby Dick*, and Robert Mitchum in *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison*, who were all treated roughly, Clift also wanted to show Huston that he could take it. In some bizarre, inexplicable way, Huston's strategy succeeded. His rough treatment of Clift *did* make his eyes more expressive and produced a superb performance. As another British psychiatrist observed, Clift's Freud broke with the traditional portrayal of doctors in fiction and film. He "is not mature, reassuring and paternal, but instead [like the patients he's trying to cure] neurotic, jittery and curmudgeonly."

Susannah said there was an awful lot of suffering on the set, but she wouldn't have missed that tense, disturbing experience. She later recalled, "I was shattered at the end of *Freud*. It took me more than a year to recover my nerve, and I'm not sure I've really done so yet. *Freud* was an incredible experience, though. And it did more to make me understand myself—as a person and as an actress—than anything I have ever done. At times I really hated it. After violent arguments with John Huston, I would [like Clift] go to my dressing room in floods of tears." After considering this episode, Huston disingenuously concluded, "Apart from Montgomery Clift and—through association—Susannah York, I don't think I've ever had a conflict with an artist—certainly not an important conflict, or one that persisted" (*Open Book* 303). Huston certainly got on well with most of the greatest actors of his time, from Bogart to Brando, but he did have serious conflicts with John Wayne in *The Barbarian and the Geisha*, Burt Lancaster in *The Unforgiven*, and Marilyn in *The Misfits*, and he would clash with George C. Scott and Michael Parks in *The Bible*, Sylvester Stallone in *Victory*, and Anthony Andrews in *Under the*

*Volcano*. His conflict with Clift was more subtle and complex, more traumatic and disturbing, more destructive but also more positive, than those he had with stronger stars.

V

*Freud* opens with a rather pedantic prologue spoken by Huston, whose voiceover continues throughout the film to express Freud's thoughts when he makes a startling discovery. Like the old man in Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," Freud is "with those acquainted with the dark." Alluding to Christ's harrowing of hell and the description of Christ in Matthew 5:14 as "the light of the world," Huston and Reinhardt state, this is "the story of Freud's descent into a region almost as black as hell itself—man's unconscious—and how he let in the light." When Freud faces fierce opposition from his medical colleagues, Dr. Theodore Meynert publicly ridicules him after his lecture and tells him that the unconscious, like the symbolic scorpions that Meynert keeps confined in a box in his office, "must be kept locked up in darkness." The film's narrative technique, alternating conventional interiors with exotic dream sequences, maintains the contrast between dark and light, unconscious and conscious.

The script is surprisingly forthright about Freud's theories of infant sexuality. At the same time, the major speeches convey their meaning through many intellectual allusions, whose heavyweight style is more like Sartre's and Reinhardt's than like Huston's lean, fast-paced scripts. After first opposing Freud, Meynert later becomes an ally, calls him to his deathbed, and urges him to continue his bold research. In his brief but densely packed speech—whose allusions are far beyond the comprehension of the movie's audience—Meynert hints at Joseph Conrad, St. George, Faust, Virgil, and Dante: "Go to the heart of our darkness and hunt out the dragon. . . . If you lack the strength, make a pact with the devil. What a splendid thing to descend to hell and light your torch from its fires."

Susannah York plays Cecily Koertner, a composite portrait based on Freud's famous patient Anna O. Cecily suffers at various times from a variety of psychosomatic illnesses: hysterical paralysis, false pregnancy, and temporary blindness. Tense and sickly, she believes that her father has sexually molested her. She is jung and easily

freudened, and plays Beethoven's *Appassionata* sonata when Freud visits her. In one of the most effective scenes, Cecily dreams she's in a hospital in which whores are dressed in nurses' uniforms (though Catholic hospitals in Austria would have nuns, not lay nurses) and sit in suggestive poses with their legs spread apart. Policemen, who seem to be investigating venereal diseases, take the place of doctors. Freud's hypnosis reveals two of Cecily's suppressed memories: the sight of her beloved father soliciting prostitutes and the revelation that he did not die in a hospital, but in a brothel. (Cecily's father likes to go driving, but puts the whores before the cart.) After several visits, Freud discovers that Cecily's symptoms were caused by the guilt she feels about her repressed sexual desires. Toward the end of the picture, Freud tells his wife that his patient has transferred her own anguished feelings to her father: "Cecily claimed that her father seduced her! False! It was she who wanted him! And it was not a memory that she had repressed! No! It was a fantasy!"

In the final thematic sequence, Freud once again lectures a hostile audience—a pedantic way of explaining his basic psychological principles in the movie. He compares benighted mankind to the aged Oedipus in *Colonus* at the end of Sophocles' trilogy: "It is in the Oedipus complex, the child's fixation on the parent of the opposite sex, that infantile eroticism reaches its climax. Each human being is confronted with the task of overcoming this complex within himself. If he succeeds, he will be a whole individual; if he fails, he will become a neurotic and himself wander forever, blind and homeless."

The film closes with Freud's visit to his father's grave. After acknowledging and accepting his own sexual jealousy about his mother, Freud is finally reconciled with him. His speech begins with a classical Greek maxim and alludes to both *Apocalypse* 6:17 ("the beginning of wisdom") and *Ecclesiastes* 1:2 ("all is vanity"): "Know thyself. Two thousand years ago these words were carved on the temple at Delphi: Know thyself. They're the beginning of wisdom. In them lies the single hope of victory over man's oldest enemy: his vanity. This knowledge is now within our grasp. Will we use it? Let us hope." Freud finally performs a son's duty to his father—"the eyes shall be closed"—at the same time that he opens the eyes of the living to the mysteries of the mind.

## VI

In *Freud* Huston also used visual allusions to paintings and films in order to represent the abstract principles of psychology. To achieve this aesthetic effect in the sequences portraying Freud's studies in Paris, Huston carefully reproduced the appearance, costumes, and *mise en scène* of the figures in Pierre-André Brouillet's painting *A Clinical Lecture at the Salpêtrière* (1887). In this home for aged and mentally afflicted women, Freud's teacher, Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot—surrounded by students, interns, hospital staff, journalists, and politicians—demonstrates that the symptoms of hysteria are as real as those of organic disease. His patient is the classically hysterical Blanche, her blouse lowered in a striking *décolletage*, swooning into the arms of an astonished doctor. The black-and-white photography and heavy, murky Biedermeyer interiors suggest the oppressive conventions that Freud's work contravened.

The cinematographer Douglas Slocombe revealed that Huston also enhanced the mood by combining two distinct photographic modes. Huston wanted “an overall style, and within that two separate styles, one for the dreams and one for the flashbacks, which would be so different that the audience always knew where they were. I used very sharp photography for the main part of the film, to give the clarity of steel etchings, and help the period feeling. For flashbacks I shot through a glass plate, treated to fuzz out all the details” (Leyda 517). The dream scenes were influenced by German Expressionist films of the 1920s, by Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) and by Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957). The philosopher Roger Scruton gave a fine description of Bergman's dreamlike techniques, which Huston adopted in *Freud*: “The images, often grainy, with sharply foregrounded details, leave many objects lingering like ghosts in the out-of-focus hinterland. Things, like people, are saturated with the psychic states of their observers, drawn into the drama by the camera which endows each detail with a consciousness of its own” (104).

After finishing the film, Huston faced still more difficulties with the censors, the studio, and the critics. The censors, with a comic attempt at repression that Freud himself would have appreciated, told Universal International that the picture was “too clinically lurid” and insisted they “reduce the words ‘sexual’ and ‘sexuality’ to avoid the

impression that the treatment of this theme is somehow saturated with sex.” Huston cut half an hour, reducing it to two hours and fifty minutes, and felt he had vastly improved it. Considering the intellectual content, pedantic speeches, and lack of drama, the preview was surprisingly favorable. More than 200 out of 226 responses were “good,” “very good” or “excellent.” Nevertheless, the studio panicked and cut Huston’s version by another half hour, to two hours twenty minutes, without regard for either logic or continuity.

The critics who saw the studio’s cut were more severe than the preview audience. The habitually caustic John Simon was restrained but discouraging. Noting the film’s ponderous quality, he said, “Huston and his scenarists have made conscientious efforts in the direction of integrity. . . . The film is respectful and, Lord knows, serious” (46). *Newsweek* unkindly compared it to “a movie about Bach with a musical score by Dimitri Tiomkin.” The more highbrow *Films and Filming*, alluding to Huston’s screenplay about another pioneering Germanic physician, *Dr. Ehrlich’s Magic Bullet*, called it “a period piece in every sense of the word. . . . [It] looks and sounds exactly like a belated addition to the Warner waxworks of the late thirties.”

When the picture was completed, the Fireman’s Insurance company paid Universal \$373,500 for the cost of Clift’s illnesses and absences. He was responsible for \$112,500, or 30 percent of this payment—more than half his original fee. Huston, ever the gambling man, had changed his deal with the studio from a safe percentage of the gross to a risky share of the future profits. But he was always unlucky with money, and after the drastic cuts and poor reviews, he lost his bet.

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