

may have broken off the relationship because his wife resented his intense involvement with the fascinating young woman. Abruptly, he discontinued a course of treatment which had involved prolonged, almost daily meetings with his patient over a period of two years. The sudden termination provoked a crisis not only for the patient, who had to be hospitalized, but apparently also for the doctor, who was appalled at the realization that his patient had become passionately attached to him. He left his final session with Anna O in a "cold sweat."³⁴

Though Breuer later collaborated with Freud in publishing this extraordinary case, he was a reluctant and doubting explorer. In particular, Breuer was troubled by the repeated findings of sexual experiences at the source of hysterical symptoms. As Freud complained to his confidant, Wilhelm Fliess: "Not long ago, Breuer made a big speech to the physician's society about me, putting himself forward as a convert to belief in sexual aetiology. When I thanked him privately for this, he spoiled my pleasure by saying, 'But all the same, I don't believe it.'"³⁵

Freud's investigations led the furthest of all into the unrecognized reality of women's lives. His discovery of childhood sexual exploitation at the roots of hysteria crossed the outer limits of social credibility and brought him to a position of total ostracism within his profession. The publication of *The Aetiology of Hysteria*, which he had expected to bring him glory, was met with a stony and universal silence among his elders and peers. As he wrote to Fliess shortly afterward, "I am as isolated as you could wish me to be: the word has been given out to abandon me, and a void is forming around me."³⁶

Freud's subsequent retreat from the study of psychological trauma has come to be viewed as a matter of scandal.³⁷ His recantation has been vilified as an act of personal cowardice.³⁸ Yet to engage in this kind of ad hominem attack seems like a curious relic of Freud's own era, in which advances in knowledge were understood as Promethean acts of solitary male genius. No matter how cogent his arguments or how valid his observations, Freud's discovery could not gain acceptance in the absence of a political and social context that would support the investigation of hysteria, wherever it might lead. Such a context had never existed in Vienna and was fast disappearing in France. Freud's rival Janet, who never abandoned his traumatic theory of hysteria and who never retreated from his hysterical patients, lived to see his works forgotten and his ideas neglected.

Over time, Freud's repudiation of the traumatic theory of hysteria did take on a peculiarly dogmatic quality. The man who had pursued the

investigation the furthest and grasped its implications the most completely retreated in later life into the most rigid denial. In the process, he disavowed his female patients. Though he continued to focus on his patients' sexual lives, he no longer acknowledged the exploitative nature of women's real experiences. With a stubborn persistence that drove him into ever greater convolutions of theory, he insisted that women imagined and longed for the abusive sexual encounters of which they complained.

Perhaps the sweeping character of Freud's recantation is understandable, given the extremity of the challenge he faced. To hold fast to his theory would have been to recognize the depths of sexual oppression of women and children. The only potential source of intellectual validation and support for this position was the nascent feminist movement, which threatened Freud's cherished patriarchal values. To ally himself with such a movement was unthinkable for a man of Freud's political beliefs and professional ambitions. Protesting too much, he dissociated himself at once from the study of psychological trauma and from women. He went on to develop a theory of human development in which the inferiority and mendacity of women are fundamental points of doctrine.³⁹ In an antifeminist political climate, this theory prospered and thrived.

The only one of the early investigators who carried the exploration of hysteria to its logical conclusion was Breuer's patient Anna O. After Breuer abandoned her, she apparently remained ill for several years. And then she recovered. The mute hysteric who had invented the "talking cure" found her voice, and her sanity, in the women's liberation movement. Under a pseudonym, Paul Berthold, she translated into German the classic treatise by Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, and authored a play, *Women's Rights*. Under her own name, Bertha Pappenheim became a prominent feminist social worker, intellectual, and organizer. In the course of a long and fruitful career she directed an orphanage for girls, founded a feminist organization for Jewish women, and traveled throughout Europe and the Middle East to campaign against the sexual exploitation of women and children. Her dedication, energy, and commitment were legendary. In the words of a colleague, "A volcano lived in this woman. . . . Her fight against the abuse of women and children was almost a physically felt pain for her."⁴⁰ At her death, the philosopher Martin Buber commemorated her: "I not only admired her but loved her, and will love her until the day I die. There are people of spirit and there are people of passion, both less common than one might think. Rarer still are the people of spirit and passion. But rarest of all is a passionate spirit. Bertha Pappenheim was a woman with just such a