

as accidental. Even before Freud's day if Mr. Smith forgot Miss Jones' name, or called her Miss Robinson "by mistake," Miss Jones would ordinarily react to it as to an *intentional* slight or sign of disinterest, and Mr. Smith would be unlikely to be looked upon with favor by her. To go a step further, if a subject "forgot" a rule of etiquette in addressing his royal master, he was punished despite his plea that the forgetting was accidental. The authority in question *attributed* intent to his actions even though he himself was unaware of any. In quite the same way, some 300 years ago, when a Bible was printed in which one of the commandments of the decalogue was accidentally printed, "Thou shalt . . .," instead of "Thou shalt not . . .," the printer was as severely punished as though he had consciously intended to be sacrilegious. However, by and large, such phenomena were attributed either to chance or, by those who were superstitious, to the influence of evil and malicious spirits, like the printers' devils, who took type that the printer had set correctly and tormented the poor man by mixing it up and introducing all kinds of mistakes into it. It was Freud who first seriously and consistently maintained the view that slips and related phenomena are the result of a purposeful and intentional action of the individual involved, although the intent is unknown to the actor himself, or, in other words, is unconscious.

The simplest to understand of these slips, or parapraxes, as they are sometimes called, is that of forgetting. Such slips are most often the direct consequence of repression, which the reader will remember is one of the defense mechanisms of the ego which were discussed in Chapter IV. One can observe it in its most simple and obvious form on occasion during the course of a psychoanalysis; when it sometimes happens that a patient forgets from one minute to the next something which he considers important and which he consciously wants to remember. In such cases the motive for forgetting may also be apparent. Though the specific details of motivation may vary

PARAPRAXES AND WIT

In this chapter and in the two which follow it we shall apply to certain of the phenomena of human mental life the knowledge of the functioning of the mind which we have gained from our discussions so far. The phenomena which we have chosen for this purpose are, first, the slips, mistakes, omissions and memory lapses with which all of us are familiar and which Freud (1904) grouped together as the psychopathology of everyday life; second, wit; third, dreams; and fourth and last, the psychoneuroses. These topics have been selected because they are among what might be called the classic topics of psychoanalytic theory. They have been the objects of study for many years, first by Freud and later by other psychoanalysts, with the result that our knowledge about them is reasonably extensive and reliable. In addition, the subject of the psychoneuroses is of very great practical importance, since these mental illnesses are the principal object of psychoanalytic therapy.

We shall start with the *psychopathology of everyday life*. This includes slips of the tongue, slips of the pen, slips of memory, and many of the mishaps of life which we ordinarily attribute to chance and call accidents. Even before Freud's systematic investigations of these phenomena there was some vague awareness in the popular mind that they were purposeful, rather than chance occurrences. For example, there is an old proverb which says, "A slip of the tongue betrays the true state of the mind." Moreover, not all such slips were *treated*

from case to case, it is basically the same in all such cases, that is, to prevent the possibility of the development of anxiety or guilt, or both.

As an example, it had just been made clear to an analytic patient that he had for years kept himself from feeling frightened and ashamed of certain aspects of his sexual behavior with the help of an elaborate system of rationalizations. At the same time the patient became aware of how much fear and shame were really associated with his sexual behavior in his own mind, although he did not by any means experience these emotions fully or even very strongly at that time. He was very much impressed by this new insight, which he felt was of great importance in the understanding of his neurotic symptoms, as indeed it was. A minute or two later, as he was talking about how valuable this insight was, he suddenly realized that he could no longer remember what it was and that all that had been said during the previous five minutes had been forgotten!

This example illustrates rather dramatically the usually unsuspected capacity of the human mind for forgetting, or, more precisely, for repressing. It is clear that the same forces within the patient's mind which had successfully prevented the emergence of shame and fear over his sexual behavior during the course of many years were also responsible for the prompt repression of his newly won insight that his behavior really did frighten and shame him. We might add that in this case the ego's repressive counterathemes were directed rather against the superego than against the id. That is, the patient's ego repressed the recent auditory memories and thoughts which it feared would lead to the further emergence of feelings of shame and of the fear of being sexually abnormal. In other cases, of course, the counterathemes are directed primarily against the id.

It may seem to the reader that the example we have just given is exceptional rather than typical and that "ordinary"

cases of forgetting to do something one had intended to do or of forgetting a familiar name or face may be quite different. It is easy to see why the patient in our example forgot what he did, but why should one forget something that there is "no reason" to forget?

The answer is that the reason in most cases is an unconscious one. It can usually be discovered only by means of the psychoanalytic technique, that is, with the full cooperation of the person who did the forgetting. If his cooperation can be enlisted and if he is able to say freely and without conscious selection or editing all of the thoughts which occur to him in connection with the slip, then we shall be in a position to reconstruct its intent and motivation. Otherwise we must depend on chance to put us in possession of enough of the facts to permit us to guess more or less accurately at the "meaning" of the slip, that is, at the unconscious motives which produced it.

For instance, a patient could not think of the name of an acquaintance who was quite familiar to him when the two met in a social gathering. This episode of forgetting would have been quite impossible to understand without the patient's own associations to it. As he talked about it, it developed that the name of his acquaintance was the same as that of another man whom he knew and toward whom he had strong feelings of hatred which made him feel very guilty as he spoke about them. In addition he mentioned that the acquaintance was crippled, which reminded him of some of his wishes to hurt and injure the namesake whom he hated. With this information from the patient's associations, it was possible to reconstruct what had happened when his memory had failed him. The sight of his crippled acquaintance had unconsciously reminded him of the other man who bore the same name and whom he hated and wished to maim or injure. In order to avoid becoming conscious of his destructive fantasies, which would have made him feel guilty, he repressed the name which

would have made the connection between the two. In this case, therefore, repression was instituted to prevent the entrance into consciousness of destructive fantasies which constituted a part of the id and which would have led to guilt had they become conscious.

In the examples which we have just given the disturbance or "slip" of memory was the consequence of the operation of a defense mechanism, namely repression. Since the motivation of the repression, as well as its actual operation, were both unconscious, the subject was himself at a loss to account for his lapse of memory and could only attribute it to ill luck, fatigue, or whatever other excuse he might prefer. Other slips may be the consequence of somewhat different mental mechanisms. The causation of all of them is similar, however, in the respect that it is *unconscious*.

For example, a slip of the tongue or slip of the pen is often the consequence of a *failure* to repress completely some unconscious thought or wish. In such cases the speaker or writer expresses what he would have unconsciously liked to say or write, despite his attempt to keep it hidden. Sometimes the hidden meaning is openly expressed in the slip, that is to say, it is clearly intelligible to the listener or reader. On other occasions the result of the lapse is not intelligible and the hidden meaning can only be discovered from the associations of the person who made the slip.

As an illustration of a slip whose meaning is clear we may cite the following. An attorney was boasting of the confidences he received from his clients and wished to say that they told him "their most intimate troubles." Instead, however, what he actually said was, "their most interminable troubles." By making the slip he revealed to his listener what he was desirous of hiding, that is the fact that sometimes what his clients told him of their troubles bored him and made him wish that they would talk less about themselves and not take up so much of his time.

The reader may perhaps conclude from this example that if the meaning of a slip is clear, the unconscious thought or wish that it reveals is one which is not very strenuously repressed and, on the contrary, that it was only temporarily unconscious in the speaker's mind and could be admitted to consciousness by him with relatively little disturbance in the way of fear or guilt. In fact, this is by no means the case. For instance, a patient may unwittingly call his wife his mother during the first interview with his therapist. When confronted with this slip he can make nothing of it. Indeed he points out at length and in detail how unlike his mother his wife actually is. It is only after many months of analysis that the patient is able to admit to consciousness that in fantasy his wife represents the mother whom he longed to marry at the height of his oedipus complex many years before. In such a case a slip reveals clearly an id content against which the ego has for many years maintained an extremely strong countercathexis.

We should add that no matter how clear a slip may *seem* to be, the listener's or reader's interpretation of its unconscious meaning can never be more than a conjecture as long as it remains unsupported by the associations of the person who himself made the slip. To be sure, the conjecture may be so solidly buttressed by confirmatory evidence, such as knowledge of the circumstances in which the slip occurred and of the subject's personality and life situation, as to seem irrefutable. Nevertheless, in principle the meaning of any slip can be firmly established only by the subject's associations.

This dependence on the subject's associations is obvious and absolute in the case of those written or spoken slips which are *not* immediately intelligible. In them, an unconscious mental process interferes with what the subject wishes to say or write in such a way as to result in the omission, insertion, or distortion of one or more syllables or words with an apparently senseless result. Among those who are neither wholly ignorant nor completely informed concerning Freud's explanation of

these phenomena, such slips are often considered to be exceptions to his statement that slips have a meaning. Such people speak of intelligible slips as "Freudian" ones and of unintelligible slips as "non-Freudian" ones. In fact, however, the use of the proper technique of investigation, that is, of the psychoanalytic method, will reveal the nature and significance of the unconscious mental processes underlying an unintelligible slip as well as it does those which underlie an intelligible one.

The occurrence of slips of the tongue or pen is often attributed to fatigue, inattention, haste, excitement, or the like. The reader may ask whether such factors were considered by Freud to play any role in the causation of slips. The answer to this question is that he assigned to them a purely accessory or adjuvant part in the process. He considered that such factors might, in certain instances, facilitate the interference of unconscious processes with the conscious intent to say or write a particular word or phrase, with the result that a slip then occurs which would not have occurred if the subject had not been tired, inattentive, in a hurry, etc. He believed that the main role in the production of a slip is played by the subject's unconscious mental processes, however. To illustrate his point he used the following analogy. If a man was held up and robbed on a dark and lonely street, we should not say that he was robbed by the darkness and loneliness. He was robbed by a robber, who was, however, helped by darkness and loneliness. In this analogy the robber corresponds to the unconscious mental processes which were responsible for the slip, while the darkness and loneliness correspond to such factors as fatigue, inattention, etc. If we wish to use more formal language, we may say that the unconscious mental processes in question constitute the necessary condition for a slip in all cases. In some cases they may be a sufficient condition as well, while in other cases they may be insufficient in themselves and may perhaps require the assistance of such general factors as we have been discussing in order to interfere with the sub-

ject's conscious intent to a sufficient degree to produce a slip.

No discussion of slips of the tongue or pen would be complete without some mention of the part played in their construction by the operation of the primary process. For instance, in talking about the interest which he had had as a youth in physical culture, a patient made a slip and said, "physible culture," instead. When his attention was called to his mistake, it occurred to him that "physible" sounded like "visible." From there his associations led to the unconscious wish to show his naked body to others as well as his wish to see them naked in turn. These wishes had been an important, though unconscious factor in his interest in physical culture. However, the point to which we wish to call particular attention at the moment is the *form* of the slip which was produced by the momentary interference of the patient's unconscious exhibitionistic and voyeuristic wishes with his conscious intent to say the word, "physical." What resulted was a sort of hybrid word that combined "physical" and "visible." The two words were condensed into one, contrary to all the linguistic rules which characterize secondary process thinking.

The reader will remember, from our discussion in Chapter III of the modes of thought that we called the primary and secondary processes, that one of the characteristics of primary process thinking is the tendency to condensation. It is just this characteristic which we consider to be responsible for the combination of "physical" and "visible" into "physible."

In other slips one will find evidence of the other characteristics of primary process thinking: displacement, representation of the whole by a part, or vice versa, representation by analogy, representation by the opposite, and symbolism in the psychoanalytic sense. Any one of these characteristics, or several of them at once may determine the form of a slip.

We should add at this point that the participation or operation of primary process thinking is by no means limited to slips of the tongue or pen. Although it is likely to be most

obvious in these, it occurs as often and is as important in the other parapraxes as well. For example, in the case of the man who forgot the name of his acquaintance, which we cited on page 143, the reader will remember that one reason for the lapse of memory was that the acquaintance was crippled, which reminded the subject of an unconscious and guilty desire to maim another man of the same name. In fact the acquaintance had an arm which was shortened and partially paralyzed as the result of an injury sustained at the time of birth. On the other hand, what the subject unconsciously wished to do to his acquaintance's namesake was to cut off his penis. In this case, therefore, the acquaintance's brachial deformity symbolized castration.

Let us now consider the class of parapraxes which are ordinarily referred to as accidental mishaps, whether the mishap occurs to oneself or to another as the result of one's own "carelessness." We must make it clear at the outset that the only accidents with which we are here concerned are those which the subject caused by his own actions, although he had, of course, no *conscious* intention to do so. A mishap which is beyond the subject's control is of no interest to us in our present discussion.

It is often easy to decide whether the subject was responsible for the mishap under consideration, but it is by no means always such a simple matter to do so. For example, if we are told that someone was struck by lightning during an electrical storm, we should ordinarily be quite confident that the mishap was truly accidental and could not possibly have been unconsciously intended by the victim. After all, who can tell where lightning will strike? However, if we learn that the victim was sitting under a tall, solitary tree next to a heavy, steel chain that dangled from one of the branches to within a few feet of the ground, then we might well begin to wonder whether the victim was or was not aware, before the accident, of the relatively great danger that a person in such a situation will in

fact be struck by lightning. If we then discover that this was well known to the victim and if, having recovered from his mishap, he honestly disclaims any conscious intent to endanger his life, we must conclude that this particular victim of lightning was deliberately, though unconsciously, trying to get it to strike him. In the same way, an automobile accident may be due to a purely mechanical failure and have nothing whatever to do with the driver's unconscious intent, or it may, on the other hand, have been either directly caused or made possible by unconsciously intentional acts of commission or omission by the driver.

The reader may ask whether we propose the view that every mishap that *could* have been caused or facilitated by an unconscious intent on the part of the subject was in fact so caused. Is there to be *no* room left for human imperfection? Are we to assume, for instance, that no one would ever have an automobile accident unless he unconsciously wanted to?

The answer to this question is, in principle, an unequivocal one. Insofar as a foreseeable mishap is caused by a "human imperfection" in the performance of some action or other, we assume that it was unconsciously intended by the performer of that action. It is true, of course, that fatigue, boredom induced by monotony, and other, similar factors may increase the frequency of such mishaps to a greater or less extent, but we are here in the same position as that which we took with respect to slips of the pen or tongue. The necessary condition for a mishap of this sort, which is often a sufficient condition as well, is an unconscious intent to produce it. Fatigue, boredom, etc., are merely accessory or adjuvant factors.

If the reader now asks how we can be so *sure* that mishaps within the control of the subject were in fact unconsciously produced by him, our answer must be that this conclusion is a generalization which has been made on the basis of those cases of such mishaps which have been accessible to direct

study. Here again, as in the case of other parapraxes, direct study means the application of the psychoanalytic technique. If the subject's cooperation can be obtained, his associations will lead to an understanding of his unconscious motives for causing the mishap that seemed at first glance to be quite accidental. It happens not infrequently that, in the course of the analysis of such a mishap, the subject recalls that he knew for a moment that the "accident" was going to happen, just *before* he performed the action that produced it. Obviously, he could know such a thing before the fact only if he intended that it should happen. This partial awareness of intent is usually repressed, that is, forgotten, during or just after the mishap and is only restored to conscious memory if the mishap is analyzed. Thus, without analysis the subject himself usually is quite convinced of the purely accidental nature of the mishap that in fact he himself intentionally caused.

Naturally it is in the course of psychoanalytic therapy that the opportunity arises most often for studying such mishaps directly, as opposed to merely speculating about them in a more or less convincing way on the basis of external, circumstantial evidence. Most of our examples will consequently be drawn from this source, though such mishaps are by no means more frequent in the lives of psychoanalytic patients than they are in the lives of other persons.

On one occasion a patient, while driving to work, was making a left turn at a fairly busy intersection. Because of the number of pedestrians who were crossing, he had slowed to a speed of about five miles an hour when he suddenly struck an elderly man with his left, front fender and knocked him to the ground. As far as the patient was aware when he first told the story of the mishap, he had not seen the man at all. Later, however, he was able to recall that he was not surprised when he felt his car hit something. In other words, he was dimly aware of his unconscious intent to strike the man with his fender at the moment of the "accident." On the basis of his

associations to the various circumstances of what had happened it was possible to discover that the chief, unconscious motive for the mishap was the patient's wish to destroy his father. In fact, his father had been dead for a number of years, but the wish was one which had been most active during the patient's oedipal phase, had been energetically repressed at that time and had lived on in his id thenceforth. We can understand that this wish was displaced in the way that is characteristic for the primary process onto an unknown, elderly man who was in the path of the patient's car and who therefore became the victim of what was apparently an accident. It is understandable also that despite the fact that the victim sustained no injuries and that the patient himself was fully insured, he nevertheless felt both frightened and guilty to a degree that was considerably out of proportion to the actually trivial nature of the accident. Knowing the unconscious motives which led to his knocking the man down, we can realize that it was these motives which were the more important sources of the patient's subsequent guilty fears. In other words, his reaction to the accident was only apparently a disproportionate one. It was quite in proportion to his repressed wish to destroy his father.

Another example, which is so trivial that it hardly deserves to be called a mishap, is one which we mentioned in Chapter I. In that case a young man, driving to his fiancée's home on the morning of his wedding, stopped at a green traffic light and was not aware of his mistake until after it had changed to red. In this case the driver's associations led to the discovery of unconscious feelings of reluctance to go ahead with his marriage which were chiefly due to the guilt and fear connected with certain unconscious sexual fantasies of a sadistic and incestuous, that is, oedipal nature.

In the first of the two examples which we have just given the mishap was due to inadequate or incomplete repression of a hostile, id impulse. The id impulse in question escaped in part

from repression, as it is often expressed in psychoanalytic writings. In the second example the parapraxis was the result of either a defense against certain id impulses or of a superego prohibition directed against them, or even, perhaps, of both, since in this instance it is not easy to distinguish with certainty between the two.

Unconscious activity of the superego frequently plays an important part in causing parapraxes of this sort. Many mishaps are unconsciously intended to result in loss or self-injury. In the motivation of such cases a large role is played by an unconscious need for punishment, for sacrifice, or for making restitution for some previous act or wish. All of these motives belong to the superego, as the reader will remember.

As an example of such motivation we may cite the following case. The patient of our first example one day drove the right front wheel of his car against the corner of a curbstone while attempting to park with such force as to tear the sidewall of the tire beyond repair. It is uncommon for an experienced driver to have such an accident and this one was all the more surprising because it occurred at the curb in front of the patient's own house, where he had parked many times before without incident. However, his association furnished the explanation. At the time of the mishap he was returning from a visit to his grandfather's house on the morning after the latter had died following an illness of several months. Unconsciously the patient felt guilty as a result of his grandfather's death because of his own hostile wishes toward the old man, wishes that were to a considerable degree the counterparts of similar, unconscious wishes toward his own father. He smashed the tire on his own car to satisfy the unconscious demand of his superego that he be punished for having, in his unconscious fantasy, willed his grandfather's death.

Sometimes such a mishap combines both the crime and the punishment. We may suspect, for instance, that in the example just given, some repressed fantasy of smashing his father

achieved a displaced or symbolic gratification in the patient's action of smashing his car against the curb. In this particular example, as it happened, the patient's associations did not point in that direction, so that we are left with no more than a suspicion or conjecture. However, in other cases, there is no doubt of the fact that crime and punishment are both contained in a single action.

For instance, a patient, while driving her husband's car, stopped so suddenly in traffic that the car behind her crumpled one of the rear fenders of the car she was in. The analysis of this mishap revealed a complicated set of unconscious motives. Apparently three different, though related ones were present. For one thing, the patient was unconsciously very angry at her husband because of the way he mistreated her. As she put it, he was always shoving her around. Smashing up his car was an unconscious expression of this anger, which she was unable to display openly and directly against him. For another thing, she felt very guilty as a result of what she unconsciously wanted to do to her husband in her rage at him and damaging his car was an excellent way to get him to punish her. As soon as the accident happened, she knew she was "in for it." For a third thing, the patient had strong sexual desires which her husband was unable to satisfy and which she herself had strongly repressed. These unconscious, sexual wishes were symbolically gratified by having a man "bang into [her] tail," as she put it.

We shall not attempt to list and illustrate all of the various types of parapraxes that might be distinguished from one another, since the causes and underlying mechanisms are the same for all, or at least are very similar. It is interesting to note that it is not easy to draw a sharp line of distinction between parapraxes and so-called normal psychic events. For instance, a slip of the tongue is certainly very different from a metaphor that has been consciously and deliberately sought for. But then there are metaphors, or other figures of speech, that ap-

pear in conversation without their having been consciously sought for. They bob up spontaneously, so to speak, sometimes to the speaker's delight, sometimes to his dismay, and sometimes without any particular reaction except that of routine acceptance by him as part of "what he wanted to say." Thus we see that although the deliberately chosen metaphor and the slip of the tongue are easy to separate, there are intermediate cases. How to separate the unwelcome metaphor which the speaker then retracts with "Oh, no. That isn't what I meant," from the slip of the tongue? In the same way, we should certainly classify it as a parapraxis if an individual took a wrong turn during a familiar walk and found himself heading away from his consciously intended destination. However, sometimes one varies a familiar walk, without consciously planning to do so, by taking a less familiar route to get to the same destination. Shall we call that a parapraxis? Or again one may find that he has changed his favorite route without any particular, conscious thought about it, so that what was once the customary way to go is now the unusual way. Where do we draw the line here between the parapractic and the normal?

The fact is that there is no sharp distinction to be drawn. The differences are of degree, not of kind. Unconscious motives and impulses which arise from the id and from the unconscious parts of the ego and of the superego play a role in producing and shaping so-called normal psychic events no less than they do in producing parapraxes. In the former case, however, the ego is able to mediate among the various unconscious influences so as to control them and to combine them in a harmonious way with one another as well as with the factors arising from the external environment with the result that what then emerges into consciousness appears to be a single, integral whole rather than what it really is, that is, a composite of many, different tendencies from several, different sources. In the case of the parapraxes, on the other hand, the ego has

not been as successful in thoroughly integrating the various mental forces which are unconsciously active at the moment when the parapraxis occurs, with the result that one or several of these forces independently achieve some degree of motor expression. The more nearly successful the ego's integrative activities, the more nearly "normal" the psychic result. Contrariwise, the less successful the integrative activities, the more obviously parapractic the result.

If we try now to summarize our understanding of the parapraxes of everyday life, we shall say that they are caused by some degree of failure of the ego to integrate into a harmonious whole the various forces which are active within the mind at a particular time. The unconscious, psychic forces which more or less resist integration and which achieve some degree of direct, independent influence over thought or behavior in a parapraxis stem sometimes from the id, sometimes from the ego, sometimes from the superego, and sometimes from two or all of these together. An observer can occasionally make a shrewdly accurate guess as to the specific nature of these unconscious forces on the basis of external evidence alone. However, in most cases the subject's active cooperation in the application of the psychoanalytic method is necessary in order to discover what unconscious forces have been at work. Moreover, even in those cases where it has been possible to make a convincing guess, it is only by the application of the psychoanalytic method that one can be sure whether his guess was correct and complete or not.

We wish to turn now to a discussion of *wit*. Like the parapraxes, wit is a familiar phenomenon of everyday life to which Freud turned his attention quite early in the course of his psychoanalytic investigations (Freud, 1905a). He succeeded in demonstrating both the nature and the importance of the unconscious mental processes that are a part of the formation and the enjoyment of witticisms and advanced a theory which

explained the source of the psychic energy which is discharged in laughter when the witticism is a "good" one.

Freud demonstrated that in every witticism primary process thinking plays an essential part. This he did by a most ingenious technique. He restated the witticism in the *language* of the secondary process without changing its content in any way, whereupon the wit had entirely disappeared. What was left after the restatement might be interesting, wise, bitter, cynical, or conventionally improper, but it was no longer witty.

For example, let us take the well-known, witty, political epigram that says, "A liberal is a man with both feet planted firmly in mid-air." It may not be apparent at first glance that primary process thinking is utilized to a high degree in this statement, but let us see what happens if we restate its content in strictly secondary process language. If we do so, our epigram becomes something like this, "A liberal tries to be firm and practical, but is really neither," which is a critical, but no longer a witty remark.

Now that we have restated our epigram in language which belongs exclusively to the mode of the secondary process, we see at once that in the original form of the epigram its serious meaning is expressed in a mode characteristic of the primary rather than the secondary process. That is to say, the original form conveys explicitly to the reader via secondary process thinking only an image or concept of a man, labeled "a liberal," who is standing firmly in mid-air. It is by way of analogy that the reader or listener understands that "a man with his feet planted firmly" means, "A firm or decisive man" and that "a man standing in the air" means "an impractical and indecisive man." In addition, the original form of the epigram lacks entirely the explanatory and connective words which appear in the restatement, namely, "tries to be" and "but is really." As the reader will remember from Chapter III, representation by analogy and the tendency toward an

extreme simplification of syntax, with the omission of connectives and explanatory words, are characteristics of primary process thinking.

Other witticisms naturally exemplify various other characteristics of primary process thinking, such as displacement, condensation, representation of the whole by a part, or vice versa, the equivalence of opposites, and symbolism in the specifically psychoanalytic sense of the word. In addition, since wit is primarily a verbal phenomenon, one sees particularly often in the analysis of witticisms the ways in which words may be used in primary process thinking. For example, parts of different words may be joined together to form a new word which then has the meaning of both the original words. This we may consider to be the process of condensation as applied to words. Again, a part of a word may be used to represent the whole, or the meaning of a word may be displaced to another word which ordinarily means something quite different from the first word, but which resembles it in sound or appearance. All of these characteristics of the primary process are included in what we call "plays on words." The best-known of such playing with words for pleasure is punning, which is proverbially referred to as the lowest form of wit. In fact, however, despite this slur on their value, puns are present in many excellent witticisms.

We may recall the fact that from a developmental point of view the primary process is the mode of thought which is characteristic of childhood and that it is only gradually displaced by the secondary mode as the individual grows older. From this point of view we may say that an activity like wit involves for *both* author and audience the partial and temporary reinstatement of the primary process as the dominant mode of thought, or, in other words, a partial and temporary ego regression. In the case of wit it is the ego itself which initiates the regression, or at least encourages it. Kris (1952) has referred to such processes as regressions in the service of

the ego and as controlled regressions, in order to differentiate them from the various types of pathological regressions which may occur in uncontrollable fashion and very much to the detriment of the ego's functional efficiency, or even of its very integrity.

To summarize our exposition thus far, we may say that the author of a witticism, by means of a partial regression, expresses an idea according to the primary process. The resulting image or concept is then put into the language of the secondary process, that is, it is expressed in words. Conversely, the audience understands the witticism by a temporary regression to primary process thinking. The reader must understand that these regressions take place quite automatically and without attracting the attention of either author or audience.

For instance, in the case of the example we used above, the author of the epigram, whoever he may have been, wished to convey in a witty way the idea that a liberal tries to be firm and practical, but is really neither. By means of a partial regression to primary process thinking this thought was expressed by the idea of a man standing in the air with his feet held firmly. This idea, expressed in words, constituted the witticism. Vice versa, the listener or reader comprehends the author's meaning via the primary process, in consequence of a partial regression of his own.

So much for the formal characteristics of wit. They constitute, as Freud showed by many examples, a necessary condition for a witticism, since if they are removed, the quality of wit disappears as well. However, as Freud also showed, these formal characteristics rarely suffice to produce the impression of very considerable wit by themselves alone, although there are exceptions to this statement. For example, complex and multiple puns may be judged witty by many people simply by reason of their technical or formal excellence. They are not "just puns," they are extremely clever puns by reason of

their form alone and hence deserve the adjective "witty." The following verse may serve as an illustration of this point.

There was a young man named Hall
Who died in the spring in the fall.
'Twould have been a sad thing
If he'd died in the spring,
But he didn't, he died in the fall.

Moreover, a remark may achieve the impression of considerable wit by virtue of the fact that the audience is very ready to be amused. As every wit or raconteur knows, once an audience is laughing heartily, almost anything will suffice to produce more laughter, even something that the same audience would have greeted without a smile if it had been in a sober mood. In the same way, the audience's alcoholic intake will often seem to increase a speaker's wit. Conversely, to a person who is "not in the mood" for it, nothing whatever appears to be witty.

However, these exceptions, if indeed the reader will agree that they are exceptions, are of but minor significance. By and large the formal characteristics which we have described are a necessary, but not in themselves a sufficient condition for wit. The content is important as well, as Freud pointed out. Characteristically the content consists of hostile or sexual thoughts which are more or less firmly defended against by the ego at the time when the witticism is either made or heard. In this connection, the word "sexual" is used in the psychoanalytic sense. That is to say, it is intended to include the oral and anal components of sexuality as well as the phallic and genital ones. The *technique* of wit generally serves to effect the release or discharge of unconscious tendencies that would otherwise not be permitted expression, or at least not as complete expression.

To illustrate this we may offer the following, very witty remark, which was current in the 1930's, when it was attribu-

ted to a famous wit of the time: "If all the girls at the Yale prom were laid end to end, I wouldn't be a bit surprised." The *content* of this witticism clearly is, "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if all the girls at the Yale prom had sexual intercourse while they were there." To express this content so directly in a social gathering would be likely to arouse some degree of superego condemnation in the minds of the audience. They would probably consider both the author and the remark vulgar and would experience no pleasure in connection with whatever sexual fantasies or wishes may have been stirred in their minds by what they heard. On the other hand, when the same content is conveyed in a witty way, superego condemnation is much more likely to be avoided and the sexual excitement is more likely to be accompanied by pleasure than by discomfort. In other words, the *technique* of wit permits a certain amount of sexual gratification that would otherwise be unattainable under the circumstances.

In the same way, if we return to our epigram about the liberal, we see that by using the technique of wit the author is able to heap more scorn on the heads of the liberals whom he despises than he would feel sure of being able to do directly with the full approval of his audience. Indeed, with the help of the primary process he is able to sound as though he were paying liberals a compliment rather than reviling them, until the very last word of his sentence. Here again, from the audience's point of view, impulses which would otherwise have been forbidden can achieve a degree of gratification or pleasurable discharge. In this case, of course, the impulses in question are hostile ones.

It is the pleasure derived from these otherwise forbidden impulses, whether they be hostile, sexual, or both, which contribute the major share to the enjoyment of a witticism. To be really good, a witticism must be more than clever, it must have a "point." Except perhaps for the connoisseur of wit, formal excellence is hardly ever a satisfactory substitute for

content or meaning. In other words, the pleasure derived from the technical part of the witticism is rarely as great as that which results from the escape of some forbidden impulse from the pressure of the ego's defenses against it.

However, despite the disparity in amount, we must recognize that in fact the pleasure of wit arises from two separate sources. The first of these is the regressive substitution of the primary for the secondary process of thinking which we have seen to be the necessary condition for wit. We may reasonably assume that the pleasure derived from this regression is a special case of the pleasure that comes in general from reverting to childish behavior and throwing off the restraints of adult life. The second source of pleasure, as we have said, is the consequence of the release or escape of impulses that would otherwise have been checked or forbidden. Of the two, the latter is the one which is the source of the greater pleasure, while the former is the one which is essential in achieving the effect which we call wit.

The reader will recognize that the theoretical discussion contained in the last few paragraphs has been formulated in subjective terms, that is to say, in terms of the experience of pleasure. In his monograph on wit, Freud tried to go a step further and to account for the laughter and pleasure which accompany wit on the basis of the discharge of psychic energy.

His formulation was as follows. The substitution of the primary for the secondary process in itself results in a certain saving of psychic energy which is then available for immediate discharge in the form of laughter. A much greater amount of psychic energy, however, is made available by the temporary abrogation of the ego's defenses as a result of which the otherwise forbidden impulses of which we spoke above are momentarily released. Freud suggested that it was specifically the energy which the ego ordinarily expended as a counteractant

against these impulses which is suddenly and temporarily freed in wit and is therefore available for discharge in laughter.

We may conclude this chapter by comparing what we have learned about wit with what we have learned about the parapraxes. That there are similarities between the two classes of phenomena is clear. In both there is a momentary emergence of otherwise unconscious tendencies and in both primary process thinking characteristically plays a significant or essential role. However, in the case of the parapraxes the emergence of an otherwise unconscious tendency is due to the temporary inability of the ego either to control it or to integrate it in normal fashion with the other psychic tendencies which are active within the mind at the same time. A parapraxis occurs *despite* the ego. In the case of wit, on the other hand, the ego either produces or willingly permits a temporary and partial regression to primary process thinking and thus encourages the momentary abrogation of its defensive activities which allows otherwise unconscious impulses to emerge. The ego *produces* or *welcomes* wit. A further difference seems to be that the unconscious tendency which emerges temporarily in a parapraxis may derive from id, ego, or super-ego, whereas in wit the emerging, hitherto unconscious tendency is regularly an id derivative.

SUGGESTED READING

FREUD, S. The Psychopathology of Everyday Life. In *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. New York: Modern Library, 1938.

FREUD, S. Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious, *ibid.*