

Fathers and Sons, and Other Conflicts

If Freud had lived and carried on his inquiries in a country and language other than the German-Jewish milieu which supplied his patients', wrote the philosopher Hannah Arendt, 'we might never have heard of an Oedipus complex.'¹ What she meant is that thanks to the father-son tensions unleashed by the very specific conditions that prevailed among the families of some of the most materially successful Jews in Wilhelmine Germany and the Habsburg Empire in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, Freud developed a notion of patriarchal society and Oedipal struggle as natural facts about humankind. Nearly all the leading lights of the Frankfurt School – Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, Löwenthal, Pollock, Fromm, Neumann – were resistant to the *Weltanschauung* transmitted by paternal authority, and many rebelled in various ways against their fathers who had become very materially successful.

Without such Oedipal struggles, critical theory would not have developed in quite the way it did. Thomas Mann's schema of German bourgeois familial development in *Buddenbrooks* – the first generation makes the money, the second cements the family's social position, and the third withdraws into something like aesthetic malaise² – was unwittingly subverted by these Frankfurt scholars. Sceptics about the merits of the Frankfurt School and critical theory might suggest that the Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer families skipped a generation – going straight from money to aesthetic malaise, but that would arguably be unfair. Rather, if Frankfurt scholars skipped a generation, it was to turn immediately against the previous generation who had

made the money and, as a result, made their for the most part privileged sons comfortable. In so doing they were enacting not Thomas Mann, but Franz Kafka. As Peter Demetz notes in his introduction to a collection of Benjamin's essays called *Reflections*:

In many Jewish families of late nineteenth-century Europe, gifted sons turned against the commercial interests of their fathers who were largely assimilated (after moving from the provinces to the more liberal cities) to bourgeois success and, in building their counterworlds in spiritual protest, they incisively shaped the future of science, philosophy and literature.³

Even if Freud is right and every son wants to symbolically castrate his father – and must do so for the sake of his mental health and adult flourishing – the Oedipal struggles of the precocious, cultured German-speaking Jews of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Europe took a very particular turn, involving them rejecting the materialistic values their businessman fathers ostensibly espoused, values which those fathers had often adopted in their own struggles with their fathers.

One of the founders of the Institute for Social Research, the sociologist of literature Leo Löwenthal (1900-1993), recalled how this dynastic struggle and counterstruggle played out in his own life in *An Unmastered Past: The Autobiographical Reflections of Leo Löwenthal*, and in particular in a section of the book entitled 'I Never Wanted to Play Along' (which surely could have been a motto for the Frankfurt School). Leo's own father Victor wanted to be a lawyer, but his father (Leo's paternal grandfather), a strict orthodox Jew who taught at a Jewish school in Frankfurt, refused to grant his permission because he thought that might mean Victor working and writing on the Sabbath. Instead he insisted that Victor study medicine, which he obligingly did though his heart was not in it. But then, recalled Löwenthal, 'he took his revenge – either consciously or unconsciously – when he later became totally "free": not just irreligious, but decidedly antireligious.' For Leo Löwenthal, his father typified the nineteenth-century mindset against which he and his colleagues in the Frankfurt School

rebelled, what he called the 'mechanistic-materialistic, positivist way of thinking.' He recalled that the atmosphere at home was secular. 'I hardly knew anything about Judaism . . . I still remember when the teacher told the Protestants to gather in one part of the classroom, the divided us up for religious instruction in a third, I remained seated – I teacher told the Catholics I belonged to!'⁴

Later in his youth, Löwenthal learned about and appropriated his Jewish heritage, much to the disgust of his father. As a student at Marburg, he was taught by Hermann Cohen, a liberal Jew steeped in Judaism and in Jewish religious philosophy. For the intellectual German Jew of that time, there was no shortage of surrogate fathers who could give precocious sons the sustenance they could not get at home. At Heidelberg, Leo fell in with a group of left-wing Zionist students who bitterly opposed another Jewish group at the university, the Syndicate of Organisations of German Students of the Jewish Faith, an assimilationist student organisation. Löwenthal loathed the latter group because they believed in total integration into the German nation. 'Only now do I realise what I hated about that assimilationist group, Löwenthal recalled. 'Not that they as Jews wanted to be human beings like everyone else, but that their convictions were essentially capitalist.'⁵

Again and again, with members of the Frankfurt School, we see this rejection of assimilation thus conceived, a rejection of an ideology that had enabled their own fathers to do well in German society and that was contrary to their own nascent socialism. These intellectual sons revolted against the Enlightenment heritage to which their secular fathers were drawn precisely because it provided the intellectual gloss to their material success.

In 1923, Löwenthal married Golda Ginsburg, a woman from Königsberg who came from a relatively orthodox Jewish family. The couple decided to keep a kosher household, to go to synagogue, and to observe Jewish holidays. 'Of course, this had a catastrophic effect on my father, who took an immediate dislike to my wife.' Löwenthal's father disdained any Jews who lived east of the Elbe, calling them *Ostjuden* (a snobbery the established, materially successful Jews of

German cities such as Frankfurt felt towards the immigrant Jews from eastern Europe). Near the end of his own life, Löwenthal recalled his father's upset at the fact that his son chose to keep a kosher home, still remember it very well - he broke out in tears of anger. It was a terrible disappointment for him that his son, whom he, the father, now being pulled into the "nonsensical", "obscure", and "decaying" clutches of a positive religion.⁵⁶

This refusal to do what was expected, to be obedient and to earn one's father's love, was characteristic of many of the Jewish intellectuals who were members of the Frankfurt School as well as of their friends and peers. If the father was a practising Jew, the son might rebel by expressing atheism; if the father was a secular Jew steeped in religious heritage or embracing the gathering movement of political Zionism.

Ernst Bloch (1885-1977), the German Jewish writer whose esoteric utopian Marxist philosophy profoundly influenced the Frankfurt School and with whom Walter Benjamin smoked hashish in the 1920s, made his first clumsy act of rebellion against his father's religion at his bar mitzvah by declaring himself an atheist.⁵⁷ Benjamin's close friend, the German-born, Israeli philosopher and historian Gershom Scholem (1897-1982), was one of three sons who rebelled against their father Arthur, an assimilated Berlin Jew and German nationalist who ran a successful printing business. Werner Scholem became a communist, Reinhold became a member of the nationalist Deutsche Volkspartei, while Gershom rejected his father's politics and became a Zionist, learning Hebrew, studying the Talmud and any Kabbalistic writings he could find. There is even a story that a portrait of the founder of modern political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, which Gershom's mother had bought him, was hung in the same room as the Scholem's Christmas tree - a symbolic rebuke, it would seem, from a Zionist son to his assimilationist father.⁵⁸

Max Horkheimer, who, on becoming director of the Institute for Social Research in 1930, transformed it from an orthodox Marxist institution into a multidisciplinary, psychoanalytically inclined and

revisionist Marxist one, is the prototypical example of a German Jewish intellectual of this era who disappointed his father's wishes. A successful and respected businessman who owned several textile factories in Stuttgart's Zuffenhausen district, Moritz Horkheimer expected his son to follow in his footsteps. "I was intended from the very first year of my life to be my father's successor as an intellectual company," Max would write later.⁵⁹ He attended, not an industrial company, but a Realgymnasium, whose function was to prepare students for practical careers. As a result of this paternal wish, Max was taken out of school aged fifteen in 1910 to work in the family business, and later became a junior manager. His father arranged for him to work as an unpaid intern in Brussels and Manchester, in order that the young Max could learn the business as well as French and English. But these foreign trips liberated Horkheimer: freed from parental shackles and the stifling bourgeois atmosphere of Stuttgart, he wrote to a friend: "We have escaped from the world in which you suffer and our memory of it is a constant joy at being rid of it!"⁶⁰

In Brussels, he was joined by Friedrich Pollock (1894-1970). Like Max, Friedrich was the son of a rich industrialist father, and was also gaining business experience at another factory in the Belgian capital. Fritz, who became an economist and social scientist and was Horkheimer's predecessor as director of the Institute of Social Research in the late 1920s, was to become a lifelong friend, even a soulmate. "I had an ideal of having a friend with whom I could share everything that was important to me; he recalled in later life. "There was a third member of this party in what Horkheimer described as an *isle heureuse* - an intellectually, emotionally and erotically charged zone beyond the constraints of bourgeois norms - namely, Horkheimer's cousin Suze Neumeier. Max knew Suze from the annual visits her family made to Stuttgart from their home in Paris. But their relationship took a different turn as she became part of the coterie. Horkheimer visited her in Paris and she followed him to Calais. His father's plan was that, after Brussels, his son would go to Manchester to familiarise himself with the latest production techniques. Instead, Horkheimer and Pollock rented a flat in London and Suze soon joined

them there. By this stage, Max had fallen in love with his cousin and she with him: 'Je suis à vous', she wrote to Horkheimer in her cousin's 'corps et âme'. The Neumeier and Horkheimer families were scandalised and notified the British police. Suze's father packed a pistol and headed across the Channel. In London, the parents found that Pollock was already in police custody. The families broke up what Tom Abronnes calls the trio's *bateau ivre*, returning Max and Fritz to Stuttgart and Suze to Paris.¹²

Back in Stuttgart, though, Horkheimer continued to rebel against his father's authority. He started working for the family firm, but soon began another erotic relationship, this time with his father's private secretary. As far as his parents were concerned, Rose Rieckler was not a suitable woman for the Horkheimers' only son: she was eight years Max's senior, economically lower class and a gentle. She had come to the Horkheimer firm only because her own businessman father had gone bankrupt, necessitating that she take a secretarial post after graduating from trade school. But when the affair came to Max's parents' attention, she was dismissed.

From the first, Horkheimer's romantic liaison was wedded to his burgeoning social criticism – something that found expression in the novellas he wrote during the First World War. In one, entitled *Spring Village* with whom he has fallen in love. They walk to a hilltop chapel, past a vagrant whom the woman knows and fears. Inside the chapel, they try to keep thoughts about the impoverished man from ruining their romantic bliss. But he appears in the pulpit and delivers a sermon about injustice, which upsets the couple. He then approaches them and says: 'I feel sorry for you, you now know the truth . . . But it is not enough to take off the rose-tinted glasses and then to stand there confused and helpless. You have to use your eyes and learn to walk in the colder world. Intoxicate yourselves and praise every minute that you spend without being conscious, for consciousness is terrible; only Gods can possess it clear and undistorted and still smile.'¹³ The religion of his parents in which he could no longer believe, is itself insufficient in a world that is unjust.

In another novella from this time, *Leonhard Steiner*, Horkheimer imagined a rebellion against such injustice. In it, the eponymous labourer finds his girlfriend Johanna Estland in the arms of the industrial boss's son and kills him. He steals the son's money and can be "good", goes on the run with Johanna. 'If people like him can be "good", Leonhard explains to Johanna bitterly,

people whose pleasures, whose education, the very days of whose life are purchased at the cost of so much unhappiness to others, than what I did can't be evil. The difference between him and me is that I had to act and had courage and strength, while he was able to sit in comfort and enjoy himself and never discover what his pleasure was costing and that it was tainted with blood . . . Johanna, if you are not inhuman and cruel you must belong to me, just as you belonged to him!¹⁴

They spend a doomed, blissful day together, spending the murdered son's money in boutiques and restaurants before the police arrive and arrest Leonhard, who is later condemned to death.

Leonhard isn't so much a character as a type not uncommon in European fiction in the first decades of the twentieth century: an intellectually, economically and sexually frustrated worker in an intensely socially stratified capitalist system that crushes his hopes and dreams. Leonhard is a soulmate to the impoverished insurance clerk, Leonard Bast in E. M. Forster's 1910 novel *Howards End*. But, while Bast is wreathed in immobilising sadness and *ressentiment* ('I don't want your patronage. I don't want your tea. I was perfectly happy', he tells the unwittingly patronising Schlegel sisters who've invited him to their home to 'help him'¹⁵), Steiner takes action. For Leonhard at least then, the barbarity of civilisation personified by his effete rival is plain, but it is a barbarity that could be answered with courage and strength – in this case murder.

And Johanna? She reflects on the 'vague, mysterious sense of guilt' her dead lover had had and which 'she had never understood and thought was just a symptom of his illness. She considers that Leonard deserved her love no more and no less than the son of the

industrialist, and the thought made her shudder. For a moment she saw into the heart of the world - with wide, horrified eyes - she saw the insatiable, cruel greed of everything that lives, the hard inescapable fate of every creature, the obsession with desire, which burns and tortures forever, which is the source of all evils and will never be put out.¹⁶ A chastening passage that reads as though it were borrowed from Schopenhauer, whose philosophy captivated many German artists and intellectuals before Horkheimer.

It is as though behind the courageous struggle against an inhuman social order that Horkheimer is imagining here there lies a hideous spectre: the indestructible, insatiable will that governs all creatures and which necessarily expresses itself through greed and cruelty. It is that will to which we are all, Marxists or otherwise, in thrall: we are bound, thought Schopenhauer, on the wheel of fate, enduring the penal servitude of willing - from which we can escape only by artistic appreciation or through the Buddhist project of renouncing the will. But then Schopenhauer was a political reactionary, a German idealist philosopher who didn't share his contemporary Marx's belief that the purpose of philosophy was not to interpret the world but to change it, to eliminate the injustice and inequality upon which capitalism is founded.

This novella, which was only published along with others from the time in a volume called *Aus der Pubertät* (From Puberty) a year after Horkheimer's death in 1973, is intriguing since it involves the shotgun marriage of a temperamentally unsuited couple - proto-Marxist social critique and Schopenhauerian despair. Leonhard represents a critique of the capitalist values of an industrialist father and his privileged, complicit son (whose real-world analogues are Moritz and Max Horkheimer). Joanna stands for a pessimistic sense that the struggle against injustice is undone by the irredeemableness of evil and the inescapable human fate of being both possessed and demeaned by desire. It's not, you'd think, a marriage that's going to last.

But does Schopenhauerian pessimism undermine the *raison d'être* of Marxist struggle? Writing of these early novellas, Alfred Schmidt in *Max Horkheimer's Intellectual Physiognomy* argues that:

The enslavement of humanity in eternal nature and an unswerving struggle against temporal injustice are already central in his thinking. As essential as he finds it that the 'unjust distribution of goods' be abolished, he nevertheless wonders if the fulfilment of the boldest utopias would not leave the 'great torment' untouched, 'because the core of life is . . . torment and dying.'¹⁷

For all his Hegelianised Marxism, Horkheimer never did divorce himself from his dismal Schopenhauerian bride. The first philosophy he read was Schopenhauer's *Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life*, in which he picked up a copy in Brussels in 1911. In 1968, near the end of his life, he published an essay entitled 'Schopenhauer Today' in which he wrote: 'my relationship to Hegel and Marx and my desire to understand and change social reality have not extinguished my experience of his [Schopenhauer's] philosophy, despite the contradictions involved.'¹⁸ Schmidt argues that all critical theory is infected, or perhaps that should be enhanced, by this contradiction: 'Conceptual motifs from Marx and Schopenhauer, the latter standing for the *malum metaphysicum*, metaphysical evil, the former the *malum physicum*, physical evil - are played out against each other on all levels of critical theory because the "just society" is also "a goal that is always implicated with guilt", not only with a scientifically controllable total process.'¹⁹ Just as civilisation, for Benjamin, necessarily has its barbarous side, so even the utopia of a just society, for Horkheimer, is necessarily tainted with guilt.

That said, Schopenhauer's eschatology, which Horkheimer shared, is not Marx's. For Schopenhauer, there is no ultimate redemption, no punishment, no heaven, be it on or beyond Earth. There is, rather, pointlessness on a cosmic scale: 'every living thing works with the utmost exertion of its strength for something that has no value. But on closer consideration, we shall find here also that it is rather a blind urge, an impulse wholly without ground and motive.'²⁰ There is also, though, in his philosophy the notion of human compassion as motivating action that ameliorates suffering - a notion that Horkheimer found appealing. Schopenhauer thought compassion involved self-identification: 'To a certain extent I have identified myself with

the other man, and in consequence the barrier between ego and non-ego is for the moment abolished; only then do the other man's affairs, his need, distress and suffering directly become my own.²¹

This, in a sense, is what Horkheimer does with *Leonhard Steiner* and not just any man, but a man who murders the privileged, decadent son of the father-boss, who, even worse, has tried it on with one hero's beloved. To feel compassion for someone who murders you (even if the crime involves only a simulacrum of oneself being killed off in a fictional realm) is some feat of self-identification. And yet we shouldn't doubt that, for all Horkheimer's fears of the irrationality of the underclass, his guilt about his own privilege as the son of a wealthy Stuttgart businessman combined with his desire for social change: 'I want to tear down the boundaries between countries and social classes,' he wrote in his journal, 'even though I know that this struggle is insane.'²² Guilt and identification then took Max Horkheimer to the edge of madness.

In his mature philosophy, Horkheimer went beyond such self-identification, and beyond Schopenhauerian compassion: it is, he wrote in his 1933 essay 'Materialism and Metaphysics', the existence of current shared suffering that could lead to revolutionary social change.²³ But here, sharing suffering means rather more than a boss's rich son imaginatively projecting himself into the shoes of a downtrodden worker, more than the Schopenhauerian act of identification with the suffering of the other. In any event there is something much more striking in Horkheimer's adolescent fiction than proto-Marxist social criticism and Schopenhauerian gloom. There is a scarcely sublimated Oedipal complex, in which struggles with a successful capitalist father find expression in revolution, and which connects him profoundly in his formative experiences with other leading scholars of the Frankfurt School who grew up in the same era.

In another of his novellas from this time, *Work* (1916), a young factory director, Franz Lehnendorf, turns against his father who runs the firm and incites its workers to revolution because he believes 'an uprising of the people to achieve conditions of existence... would give them access to true culture.' That phrase 'true culture' suggests

that the end of revolution is a cultural rather than material one, with culture normatively conceived as we trace the history of the Frankfurt we will encounter repeatedly in Adorno's essays on the culture industry: the School, especially in the yoke of oppression, would march to the workers, once freed of the yoke of oppression, rather than wallow in the sewers of the uplands of Beethoven, rather than wallow in the sewers of the uplands of Beethoven.²⁴

Hollywood's very hard not to read these novellas as romans à clef. The gull-ridden industrialist's son of *Leonhard Steiner* or the patrician revolutionary of *Work* are projections of the author and their dramas reflections of Horkheimer's real-life troubles with his father. *Work* was dedicated to 'Maidon, the affectionate name he gave to his then lover and future wife Rose Reikehr. Rose was the love of Horkheimer's life – the couple would marry in 1926 and remain together until her death in 1969. His refusal to abandon this unsuitable lower-class gentlewoman typified Horkheimer's struggle with his parents, and with his father in particular.

Horkheimer received his call-up papers in September 1916. He was spared being drafted earlier because he was working in his father's factory. Like Pollock, he would never return to work for his father after the war, both sought intellectual training at the same three universities – Munich, Frankfurt and Freiburg. It was only in 1926, when Horkheimer completed his academic qualifications, and thus made a success of himself in a world beyond the commercial one in which his father hoped he would make his mark, that his parents were able to welcome Rose into their family. The Horkheimers' Oedipal struggle, or so it would seem, was resolved. That struggle was perhaps even an instance of a rule: 'As a rule, Hannah Arendt argues, these conflicts were resolved by the sons' laying claim to being geniuses, or, in the case of numerous Communists from well to do homes, to being devoted to the welfare of mankind – in any case, to aspiring to things higher than making money – and the fathers were more willing to grant that this was a valid excuse for not making a living.'²⁵

The case of Walter Benjamin demonstrates this point. He repeatedly refused to take a job in the business world that had made Emil Benjamin rich, fulfilled, and respected by many. Benjamin demanded

money from his parents when he was well into his thirties, and in letters said that their insistence that he work for a living was 'unbearable'. After the First World War, however, the Benjamin family went into rapid decline. Emil urged his son to take up a career only if he and his young family agreed to support Walter's academic aspirations at home. The result was a disaster: Walter claimed that living with his parents amounted to 'a long awful period of depression'. He, his wife Dora and their young son fled the home to live in the friend's house. On his departure he was given a one-time payment of 30,000 marks against his inheritance and a further 10,000 marks in support themselves. Through her translating work Dora became the primary breadwinner. Instead of earning a living, Benjamin behaved as if his parents owed him one and relied on a monthly stipend from Emil and Pauline while he remained functionally unemployed. It is difficult not to think of him as ludicrously mollycoddled and entitled, not least when one learns that he blamed his ostensibly overbearing mother for the fact that, aged forty, he was unable to make a cup of coffee.²⁶

Benjamin's unresolved Oedipal conflict was prefigured by that of Franz Kafka. Benjamin was one of Kafka's most sensitive early readers and his sensitivity was highly attuned to the father-son struggles in the stories, as if they were allegories of his own. Franz's father Hermann was the fourth son of a *shochet* or ritual slaughterer in a village with a large Jewish population in southern Bohemia. He had worked as a travelling sales representative, and eventually became a fancy goods and clothing retailer employing fifteen people in Prague, where he and his wife Julie had six children, of whom Franz was the eldest. 'You have often reproved me', wrote the thirty-six-year-old Franz in his famous 100-page 'Letter to his Father',

for living in peace and quiet, warmth and abundance, lacking for nothing, thanks to your hard work. I think here of remarks that must positively have worn grooves in my brain like: 'When I was only seven I had to push the barrow from village to village'. We had to sleep in one

room. 'We were glad when we got potatoes'. For years I had open sores on my legs from not having enough clothes to wear in the winter. . . . But for all that, Father was always Father to me. Ah, nobody knows what that means these days. What do these children know of these things? Nobody's been through that!²⁷

Near the end of the letter, Kafka imagines what his father would say in reply to his son's unenthusiastic evisceration of his character. 'You are unfit for life; but in order to be able to settle down in it comfortably, without worries and without self-reproaches, you prove that I have deprived you of all your fitness for life and put it into my pockets. What does it matter now if you are unfit for life, now it is my responsibility, but you calmly lay down and let yourself be hauled along through life, physically and mentally, by me.'²⁸ This was the abiding worry in Kafka's writings and one that Benjamin might well have found personally relevant - that in the Oedipal struggle between father and son, the son was not what he should be, while the potency of the father remained undimmed. Kafka described his father as 'a true Kafka in strength, health, appetite, loudness of voice, eloquence, self-satisfaction, worldly dominance, endurance, presence of mind, [and] knowledge of human nature.'²⁹ These were the kinds of virtues, if one can call them virtues, that the fathers sought to pass on to their sons; they were, though, for the most part the worldly ones that the sons either disclaimed or were too weak to acquire. Bookish, neurotic, ill-adapted to the Social Darwinist ethos that had made their fathers successful businessmen, sons like Franz Kafka and Walter Benjamin were unfit for life, at least for life as it needed to be lived in the modern capitalist world. Hence, in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa, the son who turns into a giant insect who disgraces the family home and is incapable of earning a living. Hence, too, Kafka's first great short story, *The Judgment*, which drew Benjamin's critical attention, about another father-son relationship. At the end the Oedipal story is turned against the natural order as the ostensibly decrepit, toothless, senile old father hurls off his bedclothes, stands on the bed and sentences his son to death. In his 1934 essay for the *Jüdische Rundschau* commemorating the tenth anniversary of Kafka's death, Benjamin

quoted this passage at length as if he was transfixed by the full weakling of a son and his own struggles with Emil Benjamin, but I'm not all covered up yet, says father to son, I know, my little seam, albeit with the abject tragicomedy customary of Kafka, the expected phallic power that had been lurking, earlier, in his dressing gown. And even if this is all the strength I have left, it is enough for you, too much for you . . . But thank goodness I have left, it is enough to be taught to see through his son.²⁹

One senses Benjamin both appalled and compelled as he writes about this scene: 'He has to set cosmic ages in motion in order to write the age-old father-son relationship into a living and consequential thing. But what consequences! He sentences the son to death by drowning. The father is the one who punishes; guilt attracts him as it does the court officials.'³¹ The parallel Benjamin makes here is stark: the patriarchal bureaucratic state punishes, like its prototype, the Georg flees from the room, down the stairs, jumps from a bridge and drowns himself.

The natural order, whereby father yields to son, had been overturned, the cosmic wheels set in reverse - or at least Kafka imagined as much in this disturbing, uncanny story: It is a tale for its times, a tale of vigorous, worldly fathers refusing their destinies, of hypersensitive, critically astute, dialectically imaginative sons frozen by guilt, hobbled by their powers of projection. That's the problem with sensitive geniuses: they are hardly ever men of action. The leading lights of the Frankfurt School all had this problem; a problem that, looked at another way, is part of their allure.

It's hard, though, not to be sympathetic to their excoriated, Mammnon-fixated fathers. All they wanted (conceived of in one way) was the best for their precocious, privileged, one might even say bratty sons. The magnanimity of father to son often figures in the biographies of members of the Frankfurt School. Herbert Marcuse was just such a son. After military service in the First World War

(captivatingly recalled by his grandson Harold³² as involving no combat but rather, this being the pre-automobile age, 'wiping horses' for the infantry in Berlin), and participating in the 1918 German Revolution, he graduated with a PhD in German literature from the University of Freiburg in 1922, and then worked for six years as a bookseller in Berlin. But what is significant is that Marcuse's father provided him with an apartment and a share in a publishing and antiquarian book business.³³

Such paternal magnanimity and indulgence comes out most clearly in the case of Theodor Adorno. Without the materially secure family home in Frankfurt that his father provided, even as the world beyond its walls turned upside down, Teddie would most likely not have become a bracingly self-confident intellectual. Even Marcuse, with something like awe, recalled late in life (during a late 1970s TV broadcast) the way in which Adorno would speak in sentences so finished you could send them straight to the printers.³⁴ Adorno's father, Oscar Alexander Wiesengrund, was a Jewish wine merchant in Frankfurt who had fought his own battles against parental expectation by marrying a singer who not only had the sensational name Maria Cavalli-Adorno della Piana, but was also Catholic. Oscar disowned his Jewish identity and indeed was hostile to it, a hostility that expressed itself in his feelings towards the eastern European Jews who had fled the pogroms of Russia and Poland and settled in the eastern districts of Frankfurt. For the socially affluent, Anglophile businessman Oscar, as for Leo Löwenthal's father, these newly arrived Jews with their long beards and kaffans were an affront. As Siegfried Kracauer (1889-1966), who would become one of Theodor Adorno's intellectual mentors, put it in his novel *Ginster*: 'They were Jews who looked so authentic, you thought they must be imitations.'³⁵

The snobbery in Germany among the successful, westernised Jews towards the newly immigrated *Ostjuden* was acutely recognised by Adorno who, in the Frankfurt School's key text, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, co-authored with Max Horkheimer, wrote: 'The enlightened self-control with which the assimilated Jews managed to forget the painful domination by others (a second circumcision, so to speak) led them straight from their own, long-suffering community

into the modern bourgeoisie, which was moving inexorably to repression and reorganisation as pure "race."³⁶ For Adorno the hopes of safety sought by the likes of Oscar Alexander Wiesengrund in German bourgeois society were dangerous delusions. Certainly, the newly immigrated eastern European Jews who had escaped the pogroms were a visible reminder of what Jews like Oscar Alexander wanted to forget about their ancestral sufferings.

Given this context, it is not surprising that his first son, Theodor Ludwig Wiesengrund Adorno, was not raised as a Jew but baptised Catholic. The name evoked, argued Adorno's biographer, his two heritages: on the one hand, his father's search for material security with its reliance on the virtues of persistence and calculation; on the other hand, there was his mother's gift for empathy with its emphasis on the creativity and spontaneity of art.³⁷ Indeed, Oscar's role could be readily reduced to fulfilling the function of securing the economic foundations of his family's upper-middle-class standard of living, so that the more musical and creative maternal side of family life that nourished his beloved son could flourish.

Adorno's emotional and material security was crucial for his adult personality. It is a personality that contrasts with that of his intellectual mentor, Walter Benjamin. Benjamin conceived of himself, and was thought of by others, as a bungler, prone to bad luck and incapable of making his way in the world. 'Like Proust', wrote Arendt, he was wholly incapable of changing his life's conditions even when they were about to crush him.³⁸ Adorno was the antithesis of a bungler, who, if no more brilliant than Benjamin, was able to use the qualities he had acquired as a privileged child – his industry, impertinence and self-confidence – to parlay that brilliance into getting where he wanted to go. Thus, he established himself in academia with dissertations on Husserl and Kierkegaard; thus, too, he breezed into the epicentre of musical modernism by studying composition with Alban Berg in Vienna in the 1920s.

Not all of this was due to his upbringing, but the circumstances of Adorno's secure youth were hardly incidental to either his personality or his achievements. Leo Löwenthal described the eighteen-year-old

Adorno as 'the pampered young gentleman from a well-to-do family',³⁹ and other friends noted that, while Germany in general and the commercial centre of Frankfurt in particular collapsed into poverty and misery during the hyperinflation of 1922, when the purchasing power of the mark was falling not just from week to week but from hour to hour, Adorno and his family could afford trips to Italy and continued to live in relatively lavish style. Much of this was due to the acumen of Oscar Wiesengrund, who invested part of his fortune in material assets and thereby avoided the bankruptcies and financial ruin that hit so many others, notably Emil Benjamin. Teddie, too, benefited from being an only son, and thus the main beneficiary of the relative prosperity of the family.

This is not to say that he didn't have his own troubles with his father. As an adolescent he regarded his father as an embodiment of bourgeois values, and saw the businessman's interest in efficiency and profit as inimical to his own concerns, but there is, nonetheless, no suggestion that he didn't respect Oscar or recognise his achievements.⁴⁰

But arguably his primary family relationship was not with his father but with the two women who dominated his early life, his mother Maria and her younger sister Agathe, whom he spoke of as a second mother. His mother was an opera singer, his aunt a pianist. Reading his biography, one has the sense of Adorno as a child prodigy who never grew up (because he didn't need to) and, paradoxically, as a man who, unlike Benjamin, could function well in the adult world. He could establish a successful academic career, remain solvent, even reinvent himself in exile after an estrangement from his homeland and culture with a confidence inimical to the older man.

Adorno, then, did not experience as much of the bitterness of Oedipal struggle as did his future colleagues at the Institute for Social Research. Strikingly, it fell to one of those Frankfurt scholars who had been embroiled in a struggle with his own father, the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, to rebel against Freudian orthodoxy (itself an Oedipal struggle against the authority of the father of psychoanalysis) and ones, were quite so prone to these struggles. Fromm indeed in his

formative years in Frankfurt was alienated by the commercial spirit of his native city in general and his father's work as a salesman in particular, and was drawn to the iconoclastic, spiritual and studious young man, young Erich to the riches of high European culture, and great and Ludwig, who introduced the young boy to the joys of Falstaffic study.

As an adult, Fromm became steeped in the work of the nineteenth-century Swiss Lutheran jurist Johann Jacob Bachofen, whose 1861 book *Mother Right and the Origins of Religion* provided the first challenge to the prevailing orthodoxy that patriarchal society represented a natural state of affairs and thereby validated capitalist oppression and male hegemony, as Fromm's biographer Lawrence Friedman argues. Reading Bachofen also encouraged Fromm to reflect that the mother-child bond was the root of social life and that in a matriarchal society there was no strife, conflict or even private property, reflections that were decisive for his developing socialism and humanism. In Bachofen's description of matriarchal societies they functioned as what Fromm called 'primitive socialist democracies' in which sociability, generosity, tenderness, religiosity and egalitarianism prevailed.

But then something terrible happened. According to Fromm's extrapolation of Bachofen, patriarchy was unleashed by women. Women invented monogamous marriages to free themselves from the irksomeness of multiple partners and unbridled sensual demands. Soon patriarchal societies emerged in which men fought for domination over women and the needy. Where maternal love for the newborn had been free and unconditional, and thus enhanced the child's self-confidence, in patriarchy fatherly love was contingent on the fulfilment of duties, and as the child came up short in this regard, he became psychically insecure. Rationality, private property, abstract juridical concepts and the power of the state replaced patriarchal society's priorities of sensuality, emotion, pleasure and happiness. As a result, society became fraught with conflict, emotionally repressed and guilt ridden.

The German sociologist Max Weber's 1904 book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* recapitulated much of Bachofen's

perspective. For Weber, the Protestant work ethic was what made capitalism possible. For him Protestantism provided the conditions under which many in northern Europe could set up their own enterprises and accumulate wealth for investment. The result was the growth of modern capitalism and rapid industrialisation in several northern European countries. But the increasing technological development that took place in capitalist societies alienated worker from nature and served to subjugate the weak. The guilt-hobbled son of patriarchal culture who could never quite measure up to his father's wishes became as it were emblematic of the nature of the capitalist societies that emerged in Europe – his guilt, alienation, self-alienation, propensity for conflict and emotional repression all useful fuels that ensured the efficient running of capitalism.

With patriarchy the Oedipal struggle between father and son emerged. In *The Art of Loving*, Fromm wrote: 'When private property came into existence, and when private property could be inherited by one of his sons, father began to look to that son to whom he could leave his property . . . As a result, argued Fromm, fatherly love, unlike motherly love, is conditional – and it has a negative and a positive aspect.

The negative aspect is the very fact that fatherly love has to be deserved, that it can be lost if one does not do what is expected. In the nature of fatherly love lies the fact that obedience becomes the main virtue, that disobedience is the main sin – and its punishment the withdrawal of fatherly love. The positive side is equally important. Since his love is conditioned, I can do something to acquire it. I can work for it; his love is not outside my control as motherly love is.⁴²

But this aspect is only positive for those raised under the spirit of capitalism according to the Protestant work ethic. For them, fatherly love was a wage that could be earned through work. To refuse to work for that love was to break the contract of one's employment. To yearn instead for the paradise of unconditional motherly love was inimical to the zeitgeist, against the patriarchal law, the stuff of utopian dreams. It's no surprise that two members of the Frankfurt School

Fromm and Adorno, for all their differences, dreamed of such a utopia.

Did the Oedipal struggle play out in the way Fromm describes here in his own conflict with his father Naphthal? Not quite. Fromm withdrew from a father whom he regarded as neurotic and weak, suffering under the influence of a pathologically anxious father who overwhelmed me with anxiety; at the same time giving no guidance and having no positive influence on my education.⁵³ Instead, he looked elsewhere for an ego ideal, for a surrogate father. He found one such figure in his uncle Emmanuel and told his cousin Gertrud that he preferred her father to his own.

Not all the Frankfurt scholars had such struggles with their fathers. For example, the father of the Marxist economist and political leader Henryk Grossman died at the age of fifty-four when Henryk was fifteen, and one is tempted to say that any struggles he had with his archy took the form of youthful political action against patriarchal fathers – the patriarchal Habsburg empire, and the conservative Zionist elders of his native Galicia. But then his life was different from the Frankfurt School norm. Born in the Galician city of Krakow, Grossman led an early life of political activism so racy that the first part of his biography by Rick Kuhn could easily be made into a political thriller.⁵⁴ As a young man, he organised Jewish workers' strikes, led the Jewish Social Democratic Party, boasted of having girlfriends who were gun runners for the Bolsheviks and who hid their weapons in their silk underwear, while also theorising in greater detail the Marxist shibboleth disclaimed by his future colleagues in Frankfurt – namely the tendency of the rate of profit to fall under capitalism.

Grossman was a tough Jew who scorned Zionism as a bourgeois distraction. He had the intellectual self-confidence of Adorno, and was willing to test his theories against the fists of other Jews and by his socialist principles in manner alien to other Frankfurt scholars. If capitalism was the economic manifestation of patriarchal society, and the European empires (the Russian, Habsburg and German in particular) its last dismal hurrah, then Grossman was a masterless man, a fatherless revolutionary who bowed to no authority but that of Marxist theory, one refracted through the writings of Lenin and

Luckács. One incident typifies Grossman. In 1906, he went to speak at Chrnażów, a small town in what is today south-west Poland, where his Jewish Social Democratic Party sought to encourage what was then a mostly Jewish population into organising socialist associations and trade unions in the face of opposition from Krakow and his didn't go well. The middle-class law student from Krakow and his sober-suited associates stuck out in the shtetel like sore thumbs. 'Khasidic zealots', writes Kuhn, incited a large crowd to beat him up and throw him and his comrades out of town. 'The money lenders and capitalists of Chrnażów had defamed the socialists as wanting to organise pogroms, as in Russia.' And Grossman's party leaflet, distributed in town, claimed: 'We only want to improve the situation of the workers, to make them aware and educate them.'

The matter wasn't over. Grossman's party warned: 'We will see who is stronger, hundreds and thousands of organised workers or a band of cheats and money lenders.'⁵⁵ Eleven months after he was beaten up, Grossman successfully sued his attackers before a magistrate in Chrnażów. The story demonstrates that Grossman was an oddity in the Frankfurt School, an organic intellectual of the working class and one who fought for socialism on the streets and for the well-being of Jews – even if that meant taking on other Jews.

Grossman shared something of the background of Carl Grünberg (1861–1940), the Romanian-born Marxist philosopher who, as we will see in the next chapter, in 1924 became the first director of the Institute for Social Research. Both were fatherless Jewish men from the outer reaches of the Habsburg empire. Both were significantly older than their colleagues at Frankfurt who would go on to develop the multidisciplinary intellectual movement called critical theory, to which neither of these scientifically inclined Marxists were temperamentally amenable. Grünberg had converted to Catholicism in part in order to secure his post as professor of law and political science at the University of Vienna, and while Grossman never firmly repudiated his Jewish religion, both men were of a materialist outlook and hostile to spiritual beliefs. Arguably, Grünberg became a surrogate father to Grossman, and certainly an ego ideal since he was the first avowedly Marxist professor at a German-speaking university. He showed the

Younger man that there was a possibility of a respectable academic career. When Grünberg had been a junior professor in Vienna, 1906, the young Grossman had attended his seminars. Later, Grünberg became Grossman's academic patron, supporting and advising him in his choice of subject for the higher doctorate. Habilitation that would provide his entrée into academia. (They were late as 1925 when Grossman, by then a forty-four-year-old professor in Warsaw, needed to flee Poland, where he found it difficult to do academic work for fear of political persecution, it was Grünberg who arranged for him to become a research associate at the apogee of the young Marxist-leaning Institute in Frankfurt. Grünberg did become the head of the Frankfurt School the year before.)

But if Grossman's earlier street-fighting years make him sound like a hero of the revolution, what he did during the First World War undermines that story. The man with hitherto unimpeachable radical credentials became a functionary of the imperial Habsburg state. Having been trying to build his academic career in Vienna, he was conscripted into the Austrian Army's 5th Field Artillery regiment in February 1915 and was involved in fighting against Russian forces the following year. In the flat, forested, swamp-ridden region of Volhynia, now in Ukraine, his unit was involved in rebuffing the Russian offensive. Grossman's biographer reckons that the Austro-Hungarians lost one million men in that Russian campaign. (Grossman was not one of them.)

Valued more for his intellectual than martial skills, he was recalled from the front line and assigned to a military think-tank in the war ministry, rising to become a lieutenant responsible for writing reports on the co-ordination of the war economy. He calculated, for instance, how much it cost for the Austro-Hungarian empire to maintain its prisoners of war and how much it cost other countries to maintain Habsburg POWs. The Marxist economist also helped prepare briefs for Count Czernin, the Habsburg imperial foreign secretary, for peace negotiations at Brest Litovsk when he faced the Bolshevik delegation led by Leon Trotsky and Karl Radek. For all his radical credentials, then, Grossman was working for the wrong side, and there is no evidence that he took part in the failed Austrian Revolution of 1918.

He returned to active communist politics only on his return to Warsaw the following year.⁴⁶

Many other members of what within a few years would become the Frankfurt School were for the most part too young, too lucky or too canny to serve in the war in any capacity. Adorno, for instance, was only fifteen when the war ended; during it he collected models of different warships from his school's stationery shop, read the Pocket Guide to the World's Navies, and dreamt of captaining a warship. His Jewish father Oscar, by contrast, received his call-up papers and was later honoured for his war service – an honour that counted for nothing to the Nazis who drove him into exile in the 1930s.⁴⁷

Horkheimer was exempted the draft until 1916, but even then was never sent to the front. Which is probably just as well because by that stage he was a pacifist, disabused by travel of the nationalist fervour of many of his compatriots. 'I had been in London and Paris so I could never believe that the people there were more for war than our "peace-loving" Kaiser,' he wrote later. 'I could not see that they were worse human beings than I and that therefore now I have to shoot them... My faith in the childhood teachings of the German Reich was shaken. I had the distinct feeling that something horrible had happened to Europe and could not be reversed.' In 1914, he wrote: 'I hate the armies that are on the march to protect property... Bestial movies guide their arms – motives that must be overcome in our drive for enlightenment and have to be destroyed if we want to become human beings.' In a short story called *Jochai* he imagined a private running from battle: 'The deep resentment compelled him, the Jew, not to kill but to vent his desperation, the desperation of all slaves, in a piercing scream that would reach the ears of the masters and destroy their contended indifference and help to destroy the consciousness-betraying facade of their world; in this way he chose intellectual victory.'⁴⁸ Horkheimer never fled screaming from battle, but it is hard not to read this passage as anything but his imaginative projection of himself into the madness of a war against which he distanced himself by any means necessary.

Horkheimer's thoughts here chime with the scepticism on the German left in 1914 about the war. The German Social Democratic

Party (SPD), which was the leading force in the country's labour movement and the largest political party, organised anti-war demonstrations in the wake of the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in July 1914. But the following month, after Germany declared war on the Russian empire, the SPD was caught up in the national enthusiasm for war. In December, Karl Liebknecht, the long-time deputy to oppose war bonds, was prevented from speaking in the Reichstag chamber to explain his vote, so instead circulated a leaflet arguing that German soldiers should turn their weapons against their own government and overthrow it. 'It is an imperialist war', Liebknecht wrote, 'a war for capitalist control of the world market, for the political domination of huge territories and to give scope to industrial and banking capital'.⁴⁹ He was jailed for high treason as, later, was Rosa Luxemburg, the socialist with whom he would lead the failed German Revolution of 1918-19.

The twenty-three-year-old student Walter Benjamin shared Liebknecht and Luxemburg's socialist analysis of the war and, as a result, decided to dodge the draft. In October 1915, Benjamin and Gershom Scholem cemented their friendship by staying up all night drinking vast quantities of black coffee until 6 am. The coffee drinking, if not the conversation (which touched on the Kabbalah, Judaism and philosophy), was a practice then followed by many young men prior to their military physicals. Scholem wrote in his memoir, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*:⁵⁰ 'The trick was to simulate a weak heart – and it worked. Later that day Benjamin presented himself for a medical examination and his call-up was deferred.'

Like Horkheimer, Benjamin could not share the nationalist mood in his homeland. Indeed, at the outset of the war, Benjamin had broken painfully with one of his first intellectual mentors, the educational reformer Gustav Wymken, precisely because of the latter's support for the war. Wymken had taught the young Benjamin at a private progressive boarding school called Haubinda in Thuringia in 1905. There the young Walter had become captivated by Wymken's doctrine of Youth Culture, which held that the young were morally superior to the old. From Wymken he learned that youth, the coming humanity, could be

educated as knights to protect 'geist', the spiritual values of art. What Walter's father, presumably representing for Wymken the old, corrupted order, thought when he had to pick up the bill for this education is not recorded, nor are his views on his son's later forays into student politics that were premised on the notion of youth as the 'holiest work of humanity'. But when the war began, Benjamin quit Wymken's Free School Association over his former teacher's essay 'War and Youth' which argued that war would afford an ethical experience to the young. Benjamin wrote to Wymken accusing him of sacrificing youth on the altar of the state. The following year, at Scholem's instigation, he was reading the theoretical journal of the Marxist philosopher, *Die Internationale*. He was moving from *Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis des Marxismus*. He was moving from being a devotee of ethical youth culture towards his mature, if eclectic, Marxist philosophy.⁵¹

For some of the leading lights of the Frankfurt School, then, it was as though the First World War was a storm glimpsed from a safe distance, rather in the manner that Kant described the experience of the sublime. After dodging the draft Benjamin headed for Munich. 'At my last army physical, I was given a year's deferment and, in spite of having little hope that the war will be over in a year', he wrote to Scholem in October 1915, 'I am planning to be able to work in peace, at least for a few months, in Munich'. Later he was to spend the remainder of the war in Switzerland, studying for his doctorate at the University of Bern.⁵²

Contrast Benjamin's war with that of another German-speaking Jewish philosopher of a mystical temperament. Ludwig Wittgenstein was working on his great philosophical text the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* while serving as a volunteer in 1916 on the eastern front for the Austrian Army, and was thus an unwitting comrade of Henryk Grossman. As he sat in his observation post, Wittgenstein wrote that he felt 'like the prince in an enchanted castle, awaiting the night's shelling with anticipation. The following morning he reported: 'From time to time I was afraid. That is the fault of a false view of life.'⁵³ None of the Frankfurt School thinkers who we've been considering could have written such sentences: for most of them, the war was not an

exciting adventure that would test one's resolve and personal philosophy, but a disaster to be avoided at all costs.

As for Herbert Marcuse, the future radical student hero's experience was limited.⁵⁴ He had been conscripted into a reserve division in 1916 after finishing his last exam at gymnasium, but remained while in the Zeppelin Reserves he was able to attend lectures. Nevertheless, he claimed to have been politically educated by his experiences in the army and during the German Revolution in 1918. Certainly in 1917 he joined the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in protest against the war - an odd decision, since in that year the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) had been formed precisely in opposition to the SPD's pro-war stance; nor did Marcuse think to join Luxembourg and Liebknecht's Spartacist faction.

Only late in 1918, did the young Marcuse begin to be radicalised. Germany's rapidly collapsing military situation and the growing incidence of strikes raised the possibility of a German revolution akin to the Bolshevik one of the previous autumn. In October, sailors in Kiel rebelled; a Soviet-style socialist republic was, albeit briefly, established in Bavaria which, as Rolf Wiggerhaus puts it, Horkheimer and Pollock observed 'from a rather dignified distance'.⁵⁵ The revolutionary energy spread to Berlin where Marcuse had joined a soldiers' council in November. Liebknecht and Luxemburg were released from jail and one day later, proclaimed Berlin to be a Free Socialist Republic. Marcuse was caught up in the revolutionary fervour and became a member of the city's communist civilian defence force. One day he found himself in Alexanderplatz, charged with shooting right wing snipers who themselves were targeting left-wing demonstrators and revolutionary agitators.

In the last days of 1918, the Spartacist League, the USPD, and the International Communists of Germany (IKD), held a congress that led to the founding of the Communist Party of Germany, on New Year's Day 1919, under Luxemburg and Liebknecht's leadership. On that day, Luxemburg said: 'Today we can seriously set about destroying capitalism once and for all. Nay, more; not merely are we today in a position to perform this task, nor merely is its performance a duty

toward the proletariat, but our solution offers the only means of saving human society from destruction.'⁵⁶

But these hopes were quickly crushed. The SPD leader Ebert called on right-wing military war veterans to destroy the revolution, and on January 15 the decisive blow was struck. Luxemburg and Liebknecht were captured and murdered. Luxemburg's body was thrown by the *Freikorps* into Berlin's Landwehr Canal. In his poem 'Epitaph 1919', Brecht wrote:

Red Rosa now has vanished too,
Where she lies is hid from view.
She told the poor what life is about
And so the rich have rubbed her out.⁵⁷

Marcuse quit the SPD after the murders. For him, as for many other left-leaning Germans at the time, the Social Democrats had betrayed socialist hopes for the new post-war Germany and instead connived with the Prussian military establishment, allowing the latter to keep its hierarchies in place under Ebert's new government. The Weimar republic, then, was born from the blood of socialist martyrs.

But what is striking about Marcuse, and his experience is emblematic of the Frankfurt School, is that following the failure of the revolution he immersed himself in books, trying to work out why the Russian Revolution that had excited him had not been repeated in Germany. Years later he was asked why he hadn't joined the Communist Party, as had fellow Marxists György Lukács and Karl Korsch. 'I don't know', he told an interviewer in 1972:

By 1919, when I went from Berlin to Freiburg [where he was to study with the future Nazi-supporting philosopher Martin Heidegger], life was completely unpolitical. . . . Nevertheless I became more and more politicised during this period. It was evident that fascism was coming, and that led me to an intensive study of Marx and Hegel. Freud came somewhat later. All this I did with the aim of understanding just why, at a time when authentic conditions for revolution were present, the revolution had collapsed or been defeated, the old forces had come back to

power and the whole business was beginning all over again in democratic form.⁵⁸

DECADES LATER, there was to be a poignant coda to these Oedipal struggles of the leading Frankfurt scholars. For all that many of these men rebelled against paternal authority, they came to regret its death, and what they saw as the destruction in totalitarian society of the bourgeois family under the Nazis. In 1941, writing from American exile at the moment the Nazis were at the height of their power in Europe, Horkheimer wrote:

During the heyday of the family, the father represented the authority of society to the child, and puberty was inevitable conflict between the two. Today, however, the child stands face to face with society and the conflict is resolved before it even arises. The world is so possessed by the power of what is and the efforts of adjustment to it, that the adolescent's rebellion, which once fought the father because his practices contradicted his own ideology, can no longer crop up.⁵⁹

Viewed thus, the patriarchal father who had once been a servant of the Protestant capitalist state, ensuring its values were instilled in the coming generation, was no longer necessary. Father and family had been the gatekeepers to capitalist culture, rather like the way in which monastic scribes had power because they had a monopoly on transmitting the word of God. But just as the advent of printing made the scribes obsolete, so the rise of totalitarian society made the father's power and the family institution redundant. Thus, the Oedipal struggles that Freud saw as natural facts about human society could be given a use-by date. Erich Fromm had suspected that the Oedipal struggle had a beginning, and now Horkheimer was positing its end. 'Since Freud the relation between father and son has been reversed,' he wrote. 'The child not the father stands for reality. The awe which the Hitler youth enjoys from his parents is but the political expression of a universal state of affairs.'⁶⁰

These melancholy, regretful, very nearly conservative thoughts were taken up by Adorno a few years later in *Minima Moralia*, written

FATHERS AND SONS, AND OTHER CONFLICTS 1945, at a

to celebrate Horkheimer's fiftieth birthday on 14 February 1945, at a time when both men and the Institute for Social Research itself were in American exile. In an early section of the book, he wrote: 'Our relationship to parents is beginning to undergo a sad, shadowy transformation. Through their economic impotence they have lost their awesomeness. Once we rebelled against their insistence on the reality principle, the sobriety forever prone to become wrath against those less ready to renounce.'⁶¹ That remark recalls the guilt of the wretched son in Kafka's *The Judgment*, hoping for his father's potency to return (if not quite recalling the Kafkaesque nightmare that ensues when his hope is fulfilled).

The reality principle invoked here by Adorno was defined by Freud in his *Civilisation and its Discontents* in opposition to the pleasure principle. The latter, Freud thought, is what guides us through childhood - we follow our id in satisfying our urges for pleasure. The force principle is the adult corrective to this youthful indulgence, the ego that ensures we behave in ways that are socially acceptable and that therefore involves the renunciation - or repression - describes. Freud envisaged civilisation involving an increasing repression from which there seems to be no escape. As we will see, Marcuse responded to this pessimism in his 1955 book *Eros and Civilisation*: A *Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, arguing that liberation entailed a freeing up of the repressed pleasure principle. For Marcuse, in an analysis that married Marx and Freud, freeing up the pleasure principle meant undermining the reality principle. 'Men do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions,' he wrote. 'While they work, they do not fulfill their own needs and faculties but work in alienation.'⁶²

But Marcuse's cocktail of Marx and Freud was for the future, as one theoretical underpinning of the libidinous sixties' radical rebellion against repressive straight society - in other words 'the Man', or the power of the symbolic Father. In the 1940s when he wrote *Minima Moralia*, Adorno was not concerned with patriarchal power so much as with parental impotence, an impotence brought about by the undermining of the social role of the family in collectivist societies in general and Nazi Germany in particular. Yes, the death of the father's

patriarchal power was, or at least had once been, a consuming devotion to be wished. But not like this. Even the network of humanly achieved, in comparison to pathic health, infatigable, sons' fond sensibility towards his beloved parents and contrary social control established by the Nazis.

Pathic health? Normative infantilism? It's here hard not to think Hitler Youth in short trousers or of Leni Riefenstahl's body beauty aesthetic fascism. By the time he wrote this, Adorno's and Agathe's efforts to get them out of Nazi Germany, living in New York, were reminders of an idyllic childhood and of a world before the Nazis. The title of this section of *Minima Moralia*, 'Criss-cross, like to a well-known German song: "The dearest spot I have on earth is the grass spot by my parents' grave". Filled piety had replaced the killing of the very old. Such a climate fosters a late, hard-earned hug with our parents, as between the condemned, married only by the fear that we, powerless ourselves, might now be unable to care for them as well as they cared for us when they possessed something.⁵⁵

In such circumstances, perhaps, we can forgive Adorno his delicate converting children into workers for capitalism, namely the family. For now, he was suggesting that the family, far from being an institution against which rebellion was necessary, was the seat of resistance to totalitarian society.

With the family there parents away, while the system lasts, not only the most effective agency of the bourgeoisie, but also the resistance, which through representing the individual, also strengthened, perhaps even produced him. The end of the family parades the forces of opposition. The fading coffee table under a mockery of a classless one together with the bourgeoisie it legitimates the people that once drew sustenance from motherly love.⁵⁶

That invocation of motherly love is salutary. It invokes, not just the lost paradise of Adorno's childhood, but the pre-patriarchal, pre-capitalist utopia that Fromm described. Would humanity ever be able to realise such a utopia? It seemed unlikely or at least cosmically distant. Instead, life would be more difficult and the intellectual task more demanding than utopian day dreaming. As Adorno's biographer writes:

Adorno's expectation of living in a humane world based on mutual respect and solidarity was frequently disappointed in the course of his life without his ever having armed himself against potential disillusionment. On the contrary, his thought was influenced from the outset by the perceived need to face up to reality without illusions and to anticipate its constraints.⁵⁶

That was the task, too, of his colleagues at the Institute of Social Research. Instead of utopian dreaming, the Frankfurt School had to face up to a reality more terrible than they, as children or as young Marxists in the 1920s, could have imagined possible.