Psychology and History

The recent appearance of a biography, or perhaps rather a psycho-biography, of Woodrow Wilson by Freud and Bullitt has revived interest in the application of psychoanalysis to biography. The work has not been well-received; historians such as Hofstadter and A. J. P. Taylor, psychologists such as Philip Rieff and even that pioneer of psychoanalytic biography, Erik Erikson, have considered it biased, unconvincing and badly written. Moreover, the central theme of the work — that Wilson's failures at Princeton, Versailles and Washington were due to a repressed hatred of his father — has already been treated more subtly in A. L. and J. L. George, Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House.

Freud and Bullitt seem to have added an insight or two into Wilson's marriages and into the results of the birth of his younger brother, but little else. It cannot be doubted, however, that the reception accorded the book has not helped 'the cause' — that the theories and findings of psychoanalysis can be of help to the historian, and particularly to the biographer. Whether it has suffered justly or not may be questioned. It is generally agreed that Freud's part in the writing or even the formulation of the work seems on the evidence

This article is a revised version of a paper delivered to the inaugural conference of New Zealand historians at Palmerston North, July 1967. I am greatly indebted to Mr. Russell Stone of Auckland University for his assistance in the task of attempting to transform the spoken into the written word. For psychoanalytic advice I am grateful to Mrs. Eva Fischman of Auckland.


2 Some of the points contained in this article have also been dealt with by Marcus Cunliffe in a review of Freud and Bullitt in Encounter, XXIX (July 1967), 86-90; similar conclusions on my part were arrived at independently before I saw this review.


4 I have used the revised edition, New York, 1964.
to have been limited. In any case, Freud was no historian, nor to be fair to him did he ever claim to be; his studies of da Vinci, of Moses, even of civilization, are tentative and modest and show an appreciation of the limits of the usefulness of psychoanalysis that one would do well to heed. Bullitt we may dismiss as an envenomed man whose hoped-for revenge on Wilson has, perhaps properly, damaged Bullitt more than his selected victim.

Nevertheless, one cannot so easily shrug off the blow. Non-historians who attempt to apply psychoanalysis to history seem basically to lack the grammar of the historian; they fail to assess, they sometimes fail to check their sources, they guess, they schematize rigidly, and they display a ready tendency to utilise that dangerous phrase 'he must have'. Contrariwise, historians are prone, when they attempt to use Freud, to lapse into parlour-psychology and into a glib use of technical terms that add spurious knowingness, not knowledge.

About ten years ago an eminent diplomatic historian addressed the American Historical Association on the subject of the possible future value of psychological knowledge to the historian. William L. Langer entitled his paper "The Next Assignment." After some prefatory remarks, he concentrated on his own particular interest — the psychological effects on the population of the later middle ages of the enormous death-rate due to the plague. I, too, following that distinguished precedent, wish to narrow the field of this article.

I intend to deal with the application of psychoanalytical theory to biography with especial reference to Sir Oswald Mosley. I am aware, of course, that there are other areas where psychology and history have already been joined together: the psychoanalytic interpretations of western civilization as a whole that form the basis of the work of Norman O. Brown and of F. Marcuse, or G. Rattray Taylor's treatment of a more limited period, 1750-1850, in The Angel Makers. The tortuous symbolism, the straining after effect and the excessive generality of these works do not commend them to me. Difficulties arise, too, in the matter of applying psychoanalytic theory to group psychology, in the use of concepts such as the collective unconscious, the community superego and the like. The psychology of crowds or groups is certainly a subject for study; but I should guess that better

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6 Geoffrey Gorer in a review in the Observer (reprinted in International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, XLVIII (1967), 468-70) gives a detailed account of the writing of the book. He claims that Freud wrote only the introduction and had a hand in the first three chapters. The rest, save for 'traces' of Freud's thought in three paragraphs, was written by Bullitt. Freud refused, says Gorer, to allow publication of the book on its completion in 1932 and only gave permission for publication (after the second Mrs. Wilson's death) in 1938 out of gratitude for Bullitt's part in enabling Freud and his family to escape from Vienna. See also Erik Erikson's review.


work could be done if each individual in the group could be taken and analysed separately, admittedly an enormous task which poses great problems. As soon as psychoanalytic techniques are applied to groups difficulties arise. On the one hand there is a desire for validity or statistical significance that demands large numbers, on the other hand psychoanalysis is an individual-oriented process that needs time to be properly done. Too frequently the resolution of this conflict results in superficial findings. Far better work is done if the sample is kept small, it is treated in depth and no generalisations (other than those concerning the usefulness of the method itself) are made. One might cite A. F. Davies's recent study of only five individuals' political outlooks, Private Politics,\(^8\) also the case-histories in Lasswell's Psychopathology and Politics.\(^9\) Well done as these are though, their scope is severely and admittedly limited.

Psychoanalysis, its concepts and its terminology, is to my mind a biographer's weapon. It is based on and concerned with the individual experience and should be confined, even in its wider applications, to individuals. If, in time, large samples can be thoroughly and individually treated, then group categorising may follow. This happened to some extent in The Authoritarian Personality\(^10\) where initial sorting on the basis of questionnaire response was followed up by interviews of selected persons. I consider the value of the work to be more in the results of the 'Larry' and 'Mack' interviews than in the statistics based on the cruder findings of the questionnaire. The tools of social psychology are the only ones heavy enough to deal with groups and civilizations; psychoanalysis is not for chopping wood. I have therefore chosen to concentrate on psychoanalysis and biography.

As I have already suggested, the problem is that two separate and extensive disciplines, history and psychoanalysis, are involved. Great care has to be taken to guard against facile error that springs from insufficient knowledge of either. This is a particularly relevant problem because, although the disciplines are separate, they are similar in many respects. Both are restricted by the fact that only limited material is available; furthermore, both are selective in their treatment of that material; both are retrospective in method; and both are forced to make patterns of connexion from inference. It is in the relationship of technique to material that the closest similarity exists. The historian and the psychoanalyst exist on scraps. Both, acting separately, must be careful; the psychoanalytic historian must be doubly so.

An example of the dangers involved in the application of psychoanalytic theory to biography is evident in an article written by an analyst, Gertrud M. Kurth, on 'the Jew and Adolf Hitler'.\(^11\) The principal object of this study is to explain Hitler's vehement and

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\(^8\) Melbourne, 1966.  
\(^10\) T. W. Adorno et al., The Authoritarian Personality, New York, 1950.  
virtually life-long anti-semitism. No one would deny the strength of this feeling in Hitler (A. J. P. Taylor in fact has gone so far as to claim it was Hitler’s one consistent, deeply-felt idea);¹² nor would anyone deny its importance in relation to Nazi policies. The historian is therefore justified in seeking to explain it, and he does so largely by reference to Hitler’s experiences in the pre-war Vienna of Dr. Karl Lueger, and to an existing, exploitable anti-semitism in Weimar Germany. The historian would also, I think, be prepared to admit, on the evidence of Mein Kampf, that Hitler’s personal anti-semitism betrays many of the characteristics of ‘projection’, whereby unwelcome feelings are rendered less guilt-inducing by being visited upon another individual or group which then becomes the object of vilification that the self would find intolerable. So far, so good, and indeed Dr. Kurth herself devotes much of her article to the demonstration of ‘projection’ in Hitler.

But she goes further. Projection and even the Viennese ambience are insufficient, in her view, to explain the depth of Hitler’s obsession. She suggests that Hitler’s projection of blonde-defiling lust upon Jews is linked with his guilty knowledge of incestual relationships within the Hitler household (the mother and father were reputedly second cousins) and Hitler’s own incestual desires — initially for his sister, and later for his niece, Geli. Here the evidence, though tenuous, is suggestive. Even so, it is only evidence of guilt-feelings that have been sharpened and intensified when they are projected upon the Jew; it is still of a piece with the projection syndrome, not a new factor. It was necessary, therefore, to find something else. Kurth finds it in the events surrounding the death of Hitler’s mother. Hitler’s father died when he was eleven, thus leaving unresolved, says Kurth, the pubertal phase of the Oedipal relationship. But later in adolescence a father substitute was to emerge, a Dr. Eduard Bloch, who claimed, in 1941, to have been the family doctor. He was a Jew. Kurth, on the evidence of Bloch’s statements, says that this doctor attended Klara Hitler during her last illness, cancer of the breast. It was he who operated on the breast, then treated with drugs the effects of the recrudescence of the growth during her last months. The dying woman was also constantly watched over by a doting Adolf, then eighteen. Subsequently, alleges Kurth, Hitler came to identify the cutting, hypodermic-inserting doctor with his father, allegedly a brutal alcoholic while he lived. Hence the race of the doctor became for Hitler the race of those who had inflicted injury and suffering upon a dearly-loved mother. Moreover, the doctor, as a surrogate father, took over the incestuous aspect. Hence, argues Kurth, the deep anti-semitism of Hitler. To convey the full flavour of the analysis one must quote:

This idyll [Hitler’s home life, with father gone] was harshly interrupted when Dr. Bloch had to inform the children that their mother

was suffering from cancer of the breast. ‘Adolf Hitler’s reaction to this news was touching. [Dr Bloch is being quoted now.] His long sallow face was contorted. Tears flowed from his eyes. Did his mother, he asked, have no chance? Only then did I recognise the magnitude of the attachment [Kurth’s italics] that existed between mother and son . . . ‘An operation was decided upon and performed.

After the operation Frau Hitler’s strength steadily ebbed away. ‘During this period Adolf spent most of his time around the house to which his mother had returned. He slept in a tiny bedroom adjoining that of his mother so that he could be summoned at any time during the night. During the day he hovered about the large bed in which she lay . . . ‘ Frau Hitler suffered terribly from pain. ‘She bore her burden well’, says Dr. Bloch, ‘ . . . But it seemed to torture her son. An anguished grimace would come over him when he saw pain contract her face . . . ’ After her death, ‘Adolf sat beside his mother. In order to preserve a last impression, he had sketched her as she lay on her deathbed. In all my career I have never seen anyone so prostrate with grief as Adolf Hitler.’ The atmosphere of physical intimacy this description conveys, particularly if considered in conjunction with the immediately preceding [sic] successful ‘father-murder’, makes an intense revival of the oedipus, and its attendant feelings of guilt appear more than likely.13

And so on. It is an intriguing explanation, but a highly speculative one. And it bears little relation to the facts. First, Kurth gets the year of the death wrong. Secondly, the events of 1907 were as follows. Klara was operated on early in the year, but not by Dr. Bloch. She recovered temporarily to the extent that she was even able to go shopping in the town for a while and Adolf left Linz early in September to go to Vienna. Klara Hitler took to her bed for the last time that autumn and died on 21 December. Hitler had to be summoned from Vienna by telegram and he arrived just in time for the funeral.14 The haunting images of sickroom, of scalpel and of pencil-sketch, of pale suffering, of Jewish ministration and of filial devotion are myths, the product of an old exile’s fading memory (a weakness which Kurth herself concedes).

Anyone can make a mistake. History is full of the destruction of legend by the discovery of new evidence, and it was not until the appearance of Franz Jetzinger’s book Hitler’s Youth in 1958 that the facts emerged. Dr. Kurth, writing in 1947, had some excuse for basing her interpretation on falsehoods, although one must regret her inexactitude over dates. For two recent commentators there is no excuse, however. Bruce Mazlish, writing in the Times Literary Supplement of 28 July 1966, says: ‘The physician — Jewish incidentally — to Hitler’s mother, Dr. Eduard Bloch, wrote about “My Patient, Hitler” in Collier’s Magazine (March 15, 1941), and this article served, in turn, for a fascinating analysis in the Psychoanalytic

13 Kurth, pp. 22-23.
Until very recently, however, this article has been passed over by historians in silence and neglect.’ He then goes on to criticise Alan Bullock as an exemplar of such neglect. Norman Cohn, in his latest book, *Warrant for Genocide*, writes this: ‘Another psychoanalyst, delving into Hitler’s youth and family background, has found strong grounds for thinking that he unconsciously identified his own father with a particular Jewish doctor and so with Jews as a collectivity.’ Such statements only bring their authors, and the cause they seek to further, into disrepute. Most of us would consider it of importance that the motivation of Adolf Hitler be known as fully as possible. But here we are seeing the growth of a legend, occurring because psychoanalytically-oriented historians, in their eagerness, have not bothered to be efficient historians. I feel it is worth expanding on this point which may seem to be a petty one — worth a smart footnote but no more. To do so I must range more widely. It is generally agreed that the psychological study of the historical personage is not, nor can it ever be, a psychoanalysis of the subject. As Freud and Bullitt put it in their introduction (generally agreed to have been written by Freud):

We shall never be able to achieve a full analysis of his character. About many parts of his life and nature we know nothing . . . . All the facts we should like to know could be discovered only if he were alive and would submit to psycho-analysis. He is dead. No one will ever know these facts . . . . We cannot, consequently, call this work a psychoanalysis of Wilson. It is a psychoanalytical study based upon such material as is now available, nothing more.

On the other hand, we do not wish to underestimate the evidence we possess. We know much about many aspects of Wilson’s life and character . . . we know enough about him to justify the hope that we may be able to trace the main path of his development. To the facts we know about him as an individual we shall add the facts that psychoanalysis has found to be true with regard to all human beings.

Similarly the Georges:

It has often been noted that there exists a gap, which can never be bridged, between the range of data available to the psychoanalyst

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15 In fact in Bullock’s book, by correctly indicating that Adolf Hitler was absent during his mother’s terminal illness, should have enjoined caution on Mazlish.


17 That a psychoanalyst can bring balanced understanding to Hitler is, however, shown by Dr Norbert Bromberg who, in two papers read to Annual Meetings of the American Psychoanalytic Association, explores the relationship of Hitler to his father and makes the interesting and, to my mind fertile, suggestion that Hitler’s exploitation, as it were, of his weaknesses was of great assistance to him in his career. (‘The Psychotic Character as Political Leader. I. A Psychoanalytic Study of Adolf Hitler’, read Chicago, May 1961, and ‘II. Hitler as Leader of Germany’, read Toronto, May 1962). I am indebted to Dr Bromberg for making available to me transcripts of these papers, as yet unpublished.

18 Freud and Bullitt, pp. 31-32.
and that available to the biographer. For this reason, some have concluded that biographers cannot make effective use of psychoanalysis.

The analyst has the opportunity of learning in detail from the patient himself the unconscious feelings, wishes and fantasies which are the well-spring of his behaviour. He has the object of his inquiry on his couch, providing the necessary material in the form of descriptions of his life experience, transference reactions, dreams and free associations.

The biographer, on the other hand, has no such access to his subject's intimate thoughts through personal contact. In those rare cases in which his subject is alive and willing to provide him information, the biographer who ventured to ask for the sort of personal revelation which the analyst routinely requires of his patient doubtless, and understandably, would be given short shrift indeed. Almost always even when his subject is alive and always when he is dead, the biographer is at the mercy of a finite and distressingly incomplete body of information.

The force of this argument cannot be denied. It must be admitted that no biographer can 'psychoanalyze' his subject's unconscious without which psycho-analysis in the classical sense is not possible. However, those who rely on this obvious point to substantiate the argument that psychoanalysis is therefore of no use in the biographer's enterprise overlook two important facts. They overlook, first, that 'psychoanalysis' refers not only to a therapy for personality disorders: it also denotes a theoretical system of psychology, based on empirical clinical observation, which accounts for the structure, functioning and development of human personality. They overlook, second, that there is a crucial difference in the respective tasks of the psychoanalyst and the biographer, a difference which makes it possible for the biographer to work effectively on the basis of data which would not suffice for the purposes of the psychoanalyst.

The psychoanalyst is bent upon a therapeutic result with his patient, upon a reawakening in the analytic situation of unresolved conflicts with a view to providing the patient an opportunity to achieve more satisfactory solutions than those he originally adopted. The biographer, on the other hand, is spared the difficult task of attempting to alter his subject's personality. He wishes only to comprehend it and to transmit his comprehension to an audience of readers by means of a written narrative. These two facts are of paramount importance in the controversy about the feasibility of applying psychoanalytic theory to biographical material.19

They later make a further comparison between analyst and biographer:

For his part, the analyst has in most instances long since known what ails his patient. Their intensive work together is not primarily to provide material for the analyst's diagnosis — although undoubtedly his diagnosis becomes more exact as the material unfolds — but to enable the patient to grow and change . . . .

19 George and George, pp. v-vi.
A biographer, unless he is singularly unfortunate (in which case even a conventional biography will prove difficult), usually has considerable data about the way his subject feels and reacts to the problems of life, and he has even more detailed knowledge about his subject’s actions in various situations. Indeed, he has available to him material which the analyst customarily does not have relating to the actual impact of his subject on other people, and he has more accurate evidence of how his subject actually interacts with others in reality since his materials include not only his subject’s impressions of certain sequences of events but those of other people as well. In short, he often has at his disposal considerable data of a character which is meaningful in terms of psychoanalytic hypotheses, and these can be an invaluable aid to interpretation.\footnote{ibid., pp. vii, viii.}

One must concede the validity of these claims. The concern of psychoanalysis is diagnosis and therapy. It is likely that the trained and experienced analyst will know, quite early, what, in general terms, are the causes of the neurosis he is treating; but his primary function is to effect a cure, to help the patient understand. The biographer is not in any way a therapist: his task is to understand and to explain.

With certain reservations, therefore, I would be prepared to defend the validity and the usefulness of the technique of applying psychoanalysis to biography, my reservations being principally concerned with the need for basic historical rigour than with the possible fallaciousness of the method. It is apparent that psychoanalytic biography is not psychoanalysis, but much of the material that both historian and therapist use is the same. This enjoins the need for care, but it does not mean that merely because one cannot know everything about a subject’s infancy nor stretch him out on a couch, one has therefore to abandon the quest for fuller understanding that a knowledge of the findings of psychoanalysis can give. But that knowledge must be applied with an almost pedantic concern for factual exactitude if the structure is to be strong enough to sustain the weight of two disciplines.

The historian’s task in utilising psychoanalysis to help him in his work has been rendered easier by recent developments in the latter field. Psychotherapy, particularly in its most uncompromising form, psychoanalysis, relied very heavily upon discovering all that it was possible to know about the first few years of life. This would naturally prove a stumbling-block to a biographer faced with scanty information about a figure possibly long dead. Several shifts of emphasis have occurred, however, that enable the historian to apply the changed techniques to the sort of material he is likely to have at his disposal. First, there is the development of ego psychology. Although originating largely in the work of a child analyst, Anna Freud, ego psychology is now principally concerned with the adult operation of the organised components of the personality (the ego as opposed to the highly instinctual id and the partly conditioned superego). With
its emphasis on defence mechanisms and on the varying adjustments to reality as seen in adult practice, ego psychology would seem to be of great use to the biographer. Origins and causation are not neglected, of course, but the concentration is more on the developed personality; hence the historian, even in the absence of detailed childhood material and the couch, can still utilise the work of Hartmann and Anna Freud as he deals with an historical figure about whose adolescence or maturity there is certain to be more plentiful information. An example of such utilisation is to be found in Erikson’s Young Man Luther where the author, although postulating a series of speculations about Luther’s childhood, is nevertheless able, because of his use of the ideas of ego psychology and of his own refinement of them contained in his ‘identity crisis’ theory, to say sensible and illuminating things about his subject. He is in fact more concerned with Luther’s adolescent crises than he is with any Oedipal or anal phase of infancy. He does try to reconstruct what might have happened to cause the crisis of identity he deals with (and one would guess that Erikson’s extensive clinical experience would add soundness to his speculations), but the weight of the book falls on episodes of Luther’s life where material is fuller and of the sort that the historian is used to dealing with.

Secondly, there has also been, even more recently, a development in psychoanalytic practice that holds usefulness for the historian; that is, a reassessment of Freudian psychology as an exercise in semantics: ‘not the scientific [procedure] of elucidating causes, but the semantic one of making sense of it’. The analyst, on this basis, makes his excursions into the past in order to understand the present difficulty, but it is present contact and present performance that are at the centre of things. The analyst is able to draw upon his training, his experience and his knowledge of the literature, and he has a convenient store of shorthand symbols. He can, therefore, categorise and he can also have a shrewd idea of the causation in the case, but it is once again the developed personality that is the major concern. This has led, for instance, to R. D. Laing’s fresh approach to schizophrenia in which ‘pathogenic influences being exerted by the family in the present’ are shown to be of greater relevance than a ‘faulty mother-infant set-up’. To some this development seems only recognition of Jung’s ideas: he wrote, ‘I no longer find the cause of neurosis

in the past, but in the present. I ask what is the necessary task which the patient will not accomplish."

The mode of treatment is, however, highly descriptive; the importance of words, of 'naming', is stressed as a key to understanding. As with the development of ego psychology, the value to the historian lies in the fact that this emphasis on categorisation is principally concerned with mature performance. Under great pressure from behaviourist psychology the Freudians have retreated somewhat from positions of utter confidence that they are right, but from their redrawn lines of defence their claim that description and labelling can have its own intrinsic value offers to the historian, describer and labeller that he is, some very useful conceptual tools.

The third development relevant for the historian is the growing eclecticism of psychotherapeutic practice. Today an increasing number of therapists, recognising that there is much of value in the work of Horney, Sullivan, Adler, Jung and so on, take the useful parts of that work. The historian can do the same. He is not committed to any particular school. The literature is there, like a language to be learned. Whether knowledge of the literature is quite sufficient is a moot point, however. A full analysis for the historian is perhaps unnecessary: he is unlikely to face transference problems with a dead man (although the relationship between biographers and even their long dead subjects is often a matter for wonder). It may be, though, that fully to exploit the advantages to be gained from this approach he would be advised to take a 'training analysis' as some historians are apparently doing in the United States.

The more recent practice of psychoanalysis is therefore, I suggest, more than ever akin to the methods and concerns of the historian; he ought not to find it too strange a world to enter.

The case of Sir Oswald Mosley may be adduced as an example of the use to which psychoanalytic theory may be put in trying to explain the life and actions of a controversial figure. Much of my recent work has been concerned with Mosley and his British Union of Fascists, but this is the first tentative effort to offer an explanation of his conduct in psychoanalytic terms. It must also be remembered that Mosley's still being alive places inevitable restrictions upon the author.

Sir Oswald Mosley's career in brief is as follows: he was born in

26 See, e.g., John Rowan Wilson, 'How to Choose your Psychiatrist', *Spectator*, 20 January 1967, p. 68.
27 A. F. Davies in his 'Criteria for the Political Life History', *Historical Studies*, XIII (October 1967), 79, suggests, however, that 'counter-transference' on the part of the biographer is possible.
1896, educated at Winchester and Sandhurst; he served in the first world war both as army officer and RFC pilot, but he sustained an injury to his leg that put him out of active service. He became a Lloyd George-Unionist MP for Harrow in 1918, retained the seat as an independent Conservative in the elections of 1922 and 1923, but in 1924 he joined the Labour Party, resigned his seat and had to wait until a by-election in 1926 to return to the House. He became a minister in Labour’s 1929 administration, but by 1931 had left both the government and the party to form first the New Party, then, in 1932, the British Union of Fascists which he led until his internment in 1940. Since the war he has formed a further minority right-wing party that has had conspicuous lack of success. For a man of his undoubted talent, and this has now been recognised, his has been a story of changeability, of failure, of waste. Can psychoanalytic theory help to explain it? I think it can.

The crucial factor seems to have been the relationship with his father. This was a poor one, culminating in the nineteen-twenties with the father attacking his son in biting and denigratory terms, to which Mosley replied with cold dignity; then he excluded Mosley from his personal will (the estates were of course entailed). Mosley’s father had separated from his wife in 1901 after some years of strain, and the boy lived principally with his mother or his grandfather (who, incidentally, bequeathed his personal property to Mosley) and at public school. There are indications that Mosley’s father thought his son to be weak. Of some importance, too, is the fact that Mosley’s father left when the boy was only four, at the height of the Oedipal phase. The resolution of the conflict was therefore a dramatic one in psychological terms: the father left. It was almost as if the father had died, for by all accounts he remained aloof from home and family for a long time thereafter, coming back to life, as it were, only to criticise his son and punish him by cutting him out of his will.

It is suggested that two results flowed from these events. In Mosley’s conduct thereafter there was a pronounced assertiveness of strength and individuality; there was also the development of strong guilt feelings consequent upon so manifest a ‘victory’ as the dismissal of the father during the Oedipal phase. To take first the individuality. The boy, and later the man, sought attention, sought to prove bravery, sought to stand out from the ruck. At school, it is alleged, he was unpopular, his arrogance leading to his being set upon, and possibly physically persecuted. He took up, and continued through life, the highly individualised and martial sport of fencing, at which he became very successful, representing England in the nineteen-thirties. During the war his volunteering for service as a
pilot is a further indication of his courage and his desire to assert himself as an individual, this time powerfully above his opponents. Individual conduct again marked, of course, his political career — no party, save his own, could contain him long. There are other glimpses of the attitude. Robert Boothby recalls that Mosley, when swimming, often broke away from the group, to commune with himself, isolated, in deep water;\(^30\) in the House he took on Churchill, already a formidable parliamentarian; he proved he could fight and win Harrow, on his own; while a minister he prepared his own memorandum on unemployment remedies, bypassing his two joint committee members, then attacking in turn those pillars of the Labour leadership, Thomas, Snowden and MacDonald.\(^31\) His oratorical imagery at this time was full of battle metaphors, of individual knights, of crusades. The son was asserting his masculinity, he was demanding notice of his courage, his strength, indeed of himself from a father who was no longer alive, save in Mosley's mind. On this interpretation, the role of a nineteen-thirties Fascist leader was tailor-made for Mosley: the leadership principle, the lone figure dramatically clad who marches to spotlight rostrum and dominates from it a loyal audience, any members of which who turn out not to be loyal being beaten by tough masculine extensions of the leader. Mosley under physical attack, too, proved brave and unflinching — men shrank back from his giant frame and giant spirit, and it was even asserted in a Fascist newspaper of the thirties that a stone that struck Mosley's head flew apart at the impact.\(^32\)

All these manifestations of strength did not, however, enable Mosley to escape the consequences of his childhood. As we have noted, Mosley frequently drew upon martial imagery in his oratory, but as one reads his speeches and articles, particularly those of the nineteen-thirties, one cannot help noticing their curious defeatism. For instance, in 1930 he spoke of fighting England's economic decline on the field of battle, perhaps to die, but with certain hope of immortality;\(^33\) in 1931, in his last speech in the House of Commons, he stated he would prefer to die fighting and facing the enemy rather than to turn his face to the wall and pass away like an old woman.\(^34\) When he formed the New Party the appeal was made to those who preferred failure and obscurity to shameful acquiescence — an atmosphere of death-wish hung heavily about the group.\(^35\) Nor was the approach to the formation of the British Union of Fascists greatly different. We will fight, he said, win victory, or return upon our shields.\(^36\) Time and again throughout the thirties rallying calls for

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31 Mandle, 'Sir Oswald Mosley's Resignation from the Labour Government', and 'Sir Oswald Leaves the Labour Party'.
32 _Action_, 6 November 1937.
34 _House of Commons Debates_, 8 September 1931, col. 83.
35 Mandle, 'The New Party'.
36 Cross, p. 53.
action and voiced aspirations to victory were modified or flawed by statements that anticipated death or defeat by overwhelming forces that a brave challenge would not necessarily overcome — 'Lead us, we fearlessly follow, to victory and freedom, or else to death', ran a Fascist song.\textsuperscript{37} The theme of challenge thrown out to malign and powerful forces, is of course, part of Fascism, but it is rare in Fascism to find such a well-marked anticipation of defeat. Mosley was always inclined, however, to rationalise his failures by externalising the causes of them. For instance, when his memorandum on unemployment policy was rejected in 1930 and he far too hastily resigned his office, he came to terms with his error by blaming the old men of the Cabinet. When, later that year, he bid too speedily and crudely for a following, he blamed party hacks and the selfishness of party politics. When his New Party went down to shattering defeat in October 1931 he blamed ill-health, the timing of the election and in ill-informed electorate. Not once does he admit the personal errors of timing, policy and judgment which were in fact largely responsible for his defeats. A similar process took place with regard to the failure consequent upon Mosley’s taking up antisemitism in the thirties. The failure to make headway as a Fascist party, the gradual falling-off of powerful supporters such as Rothermere and Nuffield, he came to attribute to a vast powerful Jewish conspiracy that suborned the wealthy to betray him, and paid the poor to attack his Blackshirts — all because the Jews recognised the threat to their continued world domination that lay in a Fascist movement. Again such an attitude is typical of the Fascist personality, but again Mosley charged his interpretation with anticipation of defeat — Jewry was probably too powerful to vanquish. We have, therefore, a defeatist Fascist before us, who became in fact a defeated Fascist — blundering into error time and again as if bent on trying to bring about his own destruction.

It seems clear that in general terms the phenomenon could be described as reflecting the operation of his superego. Freud has clearly stated that the superego is largely the inheritor of the father’s place in the make-up of the personality — it acts generally as a punishing agent, diminishing and hounding the ego with feelings of guilt and pressures of conscience.\textsuperscript{38} Mosley’s superego is clearly very powerful indeed, in that the ego is conditioned, I would suggest, to act in such a way as to expect, even welcome, defeat — only in that way can the avenging superego that represents the punishing, rejecting father of childhood be assuaged. This is the source of Mosley’s moral masochism. He is what Freud would call an obsessional type: ‘distinguished by the predominance of the superego, which is separated from the ego under great tension. People of this type are dominated by fear of their conscience . . . [but] they develop a high

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Daily Herald}, 24 April 1934.

degree of self-reliance.' Also, as with most moral masochists, there is a combination of sado-masochistic drives within him — he is both aggressive and passive, he both inflicts pain and experiences it. A proper adjustment has not been made in Mosley. The experiences of his childhood, adolescence and even early manhood have led him to over-assert his individuality and strength, yet at the same time fashion his life in order to submit to the punitive power of his superego.

There is, however, a further point to be made here, and I must digress for a moment into a discussion about anti-semitism. Norman Cohn, in his recent book, Warrant for Genocide, has attempted, in his closing chapter, to make a psychoanalytically-oriented explanation of anti-semitism. It is, I think, true to say that explanations of anti-semitism must rest, in part, on psychological grounds. No one who writes on this subject today will be able to ignore discussion of such things as projection, by which instincts and feelings too disturbing to the individual to be admitted as existing within him are purged by being visited on another person, or another group. And, as a universal minority, Jews are particularly susceptible to such a process. Nor can the unusually high incidence of instability in the make-up of the more active anti-semite be ignored: he needs either the artificial discipline of the para-military side of Fascism to control it, or the licence to waywardness that comes from leadership of a group, however small. The anti-semite's sense of disaster is well-attested, so too his paranoia, his aggressiveness, and so on. Anti-semitism is also a variety of racism: many of the traditional components of the anti-semitic syndrome are readily translatable into anti-negro or anti-coloured terms. Just as the Jew is regarded as conspiratorial, hostile, menacing (even though in a minority), so is the Asian or African immigrant. Just as Jews are grudgingly admired for skill at despised things (financial wizardry, bargaining expertise) so too are Negroes — they dance well, have a wonderful sense of rhythm. Just as Jews are criticised for, on the one hand, flashiness and flamboyance and, on the other, for being squalid and dirty, so too are Negroes for, on the one hand, Cadillacs, on the other, a slum mentality. The list of parallels could go on — over-sexuality, over-appearance, over-speech. But Cohn points out that such parallelism does not cover one particular aspect: Negroes or Asians are never seen as being quite so powerful as Jews; the Afro-Asian bloc is no match in popular mythology for the conspiracy of international Jewish finance. Nor, suggests Cohn, is the cartoon or polemical imagery of 'the Negro' quite the same as that of 'the Jew'; there is fear and fantasy there, but of uncontrolled physical power, flashing teeth and rippling muscles. With the Jew, however, the image is of an older man — enshrined forever of course in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion — often with a beard, often, too, partaking in ritual.

39 S. Freud, 'Libidinal Types' (1931), ibid., p. 218.
40 Cohn, 'Conclusion', pp. 251-68.
murders that involve both the drawing-off of blood and the castration of a young male child. The ritual murder is, as it were, the physical actualisation of the sapping of Gentile economic strength to enrich and nourish the Jews. It is also relevant to Mosley. Cohn sees the image of the Jew in the anti-semitic mind as coming from the Oedipal phase; only thus, he suggests, can its difference from what we might call normal racism be explained. Reading Cohn gives one the last piece in the Mosley jigsaw: the Jew became for Mosley his father, punishing and powerful, yet having to be challenged. It was also necessary, however, to be defeated by him.

A treatment such as this leads me to a final point. How basically valid is the application of a method, psychoanalysis, that seeks to explain failure to cope or to treat the sick in mind, to the great historical figure? Apart from the factors we have mentioned — the varying depth of material available, the problems of method — surely it must be thought that the person who has risen above any psychological failings to such an extent that he becomes President, Prime Minister or even Führer has in fact achieved a cure, or at least an adjustment? In ordinary therapeutic practice this would be so: the patient has come to terms with his difficulties; they no longer disastrously affect his performance in life — indeed they may have been harnessed to help achieve success. Such a process affects historical figures, too. Hitler's oratorical vehemence, his desire for order, his vaulting imagination, all the results of a disturbed psyche, were eminently useful in the context in which he chose to operate. It might be argued, however, that such success is only temporary: under stress the weakness shows out again and collapse or disaster follow. Woodrow Wilson behaves oddly at Princeton, at Versailles and in Washington; Hitler's obsessions brought forth errors as the war progressed; Sir Anthony Eden, re-living a private agony of appeasement in greatly changed circumstances, overcompensated in 1956 and the Suez tragedy ensued. One accepts this as so, but consideration of it seems to highlight a striking feature of the application of psychoanalysis to biography. Whereas psychoanalytic literature concentrates to a large extent on the cured, or the successes of adjustment, the psychoanalytically-oriented biography is almost wholly, if not totally, concerned with the failure or the monster: Hitler, Wilson, Henry VIII; or, if it is not concerned with the failure, it seeks to expose the weaknesses of the success: Luther for instance; and now we hear that Erikson is at work on Gandhi. Doubtless he will find just as much muck to spread there as he did with Luther — Arthur Koestler has already indicated the whereabouts of some deposits. Where are the psychobiographies of the well-adjusted success — of Winston

Churchill say? Those who apply psychoanalytic techniques to the lives of the great, or to the near-great, seem to me to be in danger of falling into a trap of primitive error. By 'naming', particularly naming in terms of magic words ('Oedipus', 'masochism', 'reaction formation'), a sense of power is induced in the reader and the self-esteem of the writer is doubtless enhanced also. One can observe this happening in the work of Lytton Strachey, smart, derogatory and permeated with amateur Freud; but one suspects that the same forces are at work, even among skilled and serious biographers, today. This is the age without heroes, the age of the inside story, and the modern psychobiography lives on and feeds the phenomenon.

To say this does not, however, necessarily invalidate the method, nor its findings; but it would be pleasant to see it applied to a person who achieved full and lasting balance. If the method continues to be concentrated on explaining failure, or denigrating success by exposing unresolved flaws of character, then it remains a method unbalanced and of limited usefulness.44 The undoubted fascination of villainy, the pandering to the thrill of scandal are no excuse: if psychoanalytic techniques are to prove themselves of use to historians, then they must be utilised by builders of monuments as well as by crime reporters, gossip mongers and muck-rakers.

Donald Meyer, in his review of Young Man Luther, had this to say: 'Psychoanalytic history cannot be validated until it proves its usefulness in dealing with sources containing none of the elements overtly and classically amenable to interpretation in Freudian clinical terms.'45 One might cavil at the word 'none', but the point is well taken. Previously I mentioned Churchill as a possible example of the well-adjusted success. In the process of publication there is now one of the most massive 'lives and letters' that has ever been devoted to a great historical figure. It should, I think, be a test case. If this material is utilised by the psychoanalytically-oriented purely to expose the quirks and quiddities of Churchill, it will be more than a pity. Certainly Churchill made mistakes, was subject to tensions, drank heavily and so on, but by and large his was a productive, successful life. It will be interesting to see if anything is made of it, and if so in what manner.

Let Freud, who had a just sense of reverence for the mysteries of the great personality, have the last word. In an address dealing with Goethe, he dealt with the point in question and said: 'It is true that the biographer does not want to depose his hero, but he does want to bring him nearer to us. That means, however, reducing the distance that separates him from us; it still tends in effect towards degradation. And it is unavoidable that if we learn more about a great man's life we shall also hear of occasions when he has in fact done no

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44 See also a letter from the President of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis, Dr. R. M. Crowley, in *Encounter*, XXVIII (June 1967), p. 96.
better than we, has in fact come near to us as a human being.'\textsuperscript{46} Freud denied that any degradation was intended by this. Just so; it is advisable to want to recognise the humanity of the great, but so far no one, not even Freud himself, has been able to avoid degrading in some measure his subject. For the psychobiographer that could be the next assignment.

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\section*{Landfall 83}

\textit{James K. Baxter and The Globe}

In twelve months poet James K. Baxter has had four plays produced at the Globe Theatre, Dunedin. The new issue of \textit{Landfall} carries the text of one of these, \textit{The Band Rotunda}, and an examination of Baxter as a playwright. Also: Stories by Warren Dibble and Philip Mincher; poems by C. K. Stead, Charles Brasch, Kevin Ireland, Bill Manhire and Iain Lonie; an examination of the Maori Affairs Amendment Bill by Dr. Douglas Sinclair.

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