Why Psychoanalysis Has No History

In this paper we offer a brief history of writing about psychoanalysis’ history. We argue that both psychoanalysis and historical writing about it were shaped crucially by the early schisms within psychoanalysis, by Freud’s death, and then the diaspora of European psychoanalysis, a trauma history which precipitated a fragmentation or dissociation. We have noted how psychoanalysts have tried to master that trauma with history-writing, and, at certain moments, with a degree of historiographical consciousness. But, we note, psychoanalytic history-writing kept regressing into biography writing, memorializing, or criticizing Freud himself, not the science, and we offer the judgment that even the more historiographically conscious history-writing of the last few years has not yet made psychoanalysis a discipline with a history. It is our assumption that psychoanalysis needs, like a traumatized individual, to be able to tell reflectively the story of the group trauma.

Introduction

No one who is concerned with psychoanalysis as a theory, a practice, and a cluster of local, regional, and international educational and scientific institutions would dispute that psychoanalysis is, today, in a profound crisis. The most obvious symptom of this crisis is comparable to the symptom most studied by contemporary psychoanalytic investigators of trauma, that is, dissociative fragmentation, loss of identity. There are now many versions of psychoanalytic theory; practitioners with

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the most diverse sorts of training perform the “talking cure” in the most diverse ways; and many of psychoanalysis’ institutions are unable to integrate themselves or operate as communities even after intensely discussing everything about themselves, starting with: “What is psychoanalysis?” Psychoanalysis is also in a critical relationship with the diverse societies and cultures world-wide where its work is performed and where it competes with other mental health specialties for patients, for resources, for scientific status and control of disciplinary boundaries, and for recognition of its particular qualities and appreciation of its illustrious past, when it grew from a marginal, revolutionary theory and treatment into a main source of all modern mental health specialties. As with individual traumatic experiences, working through the dilemmas of contemporary psychoanalysis is a slow and complex process, mixing advances, retreats, and iatrogenic effects as the doctors try self-doctoring and doctoring of their field.

Psychoanalysis’ fragmentation is, we want to argue, connected to its trauma history, which reached a key culmination point with the death of its founder and organizing force, Freud, in 1939, on the eve of the Second World War and the Holocaust, which generated the diaspora of surviving psychoanalysts mostly to England and to the Americas—a geographical but also a communal fragmentation. Behind this trauma cluster lies a predisposition to traumatization connected to the fact that psychoanalysis was, from its inception, built up out of deep disagreements and internal splits. Each time there was a split, a valuable part-theory disappeared from consideration, impoverishing psychoanalysis and distorting its development. At the very origin of psychoanalysis, Freud sharply disagreed with himself, precipitating a depressive reaction, and decided that actual seduction in childhood was not the sole cause of hysterical neurosis. He responded with his essential initial formulations about the Oedipus complex and the power of unconscious fantasy. But a split between concern for external traumas and concern for unconscious fantasy took place in Freud and in his followers, to the eventual relative neglect of external traumas. After that, there were multiple splits in the early group around Freud in Vienna: Alfred Adler, for example,
left, taking very important theories about the ego instincts and about aggression with him; Jung departed, taking with him his concern with spirituality and symbols and his interest in treating psychotics with the talking cure.

The first trauma that Freud himself acknowledged as such was the First World War, about which he said in his “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death:”

We cannot but feel that no event has ever destroyed so much that is precious in the common possessions of humanity, confused so many of the clearest intelligences, or so thoroughly debased what is highest (1915, p. 275).

His own response was to cut off any consideration of the ego instincts, submerging them in the life instincts as of secondary importance to the sexual instinct, and to posit the Death Instinct as the antagonist to the life instincts. Once again, the ego instincts disappeared from view, and were not available for his thoughts about narcissism; and human beings became creatures endlessly, repetitively condemned to being at war within themselves and with each other. Most of Freud’s followers found the Death Instinct theory traumatizingly bleak and rejected it, disavowed it, and left themselves unable to explain aggression—and unable to tolerate Melanie Klein’s fervent embrace of the Death Instinct as the elemental drive.

In the late 1920s came the crucial disagreement that Michael Balint described in The Basic Fault (1968), which was a reprise of Freud’s internal disagreement over the seduction theory. “The historic event of the disagreement between Freud and Ferenczi [which] acted as a trauma on the psychoanalytic world” (p. 152), Balint argued, had arisen when Freud considered the theory and especially the technique developed by Freud’s colleague, analysand, and friend Sandor Ferenczi to understand and treat adults who had been abused as children. (And when Ferenczi was marginalized within psychoanalysis, his interest in the ego instincts went with him as well.)

This multifaceted, cumulative trauma story and its post-war sequelae is, on one level, well known. But we do not think that psychoanalysis as a discipline has really—or not yet—gener-
ated a collective historical consciousness that comprehends it as such, as a trauma history, a repetitive pattern of splits and consequent distortions. We want to suggest in this paper that psychoanalysis is without a history of this sort—a trauma history, a history of reaction to trauma—but we also want to argue that it is without a history in a further sense. It is without history writing that has grown out of historiographical consciousness, that is, out of a reflective and diagnostic process in which writers say, first, “This is the kind of history that psychoanalysis needs,” and then go on to say, “These are the internal and external forces, values and ideologies that have shaped the histories that have been written, generating different types and forms of storylines, about which someone trying to write a more reflectively conscious—and perhaps more psychoanalytic—history must be aware.” By this standard, which most professional historians would assume, the existing histories of psychoanalysis are without reflection on the form and function of narratives; they do not really rise to the level of history in the fullest sense; they are various kinds of often tendentious fragments, like the history of psychoanalysis itself.

**Writing about Psychoanalysis: A Brief History**

Before we pursue our two step claim that psychoanalysis has no trauma history and that it has no historiographical consciousness about what kind of history psychoanalysis needs, we want to construct a brief history of how psychoanalysis’ history has been written, and to view that existing history-writing as itself symptomatic.

However, as a preface to this history of history-writing we want to offer a more elaborate description of historiographical consciousness—the kind of consciousness that we are going to work with, work in. We need first to note that every field of science and art (or, more broadly, every domain of culture) comes to a moment in its development when it has accumulated a history—that is, histories of it have been written or constructed in some medium—and those histories then become an object of reflection and critique. The sources, methods, and development
of the histories, individually and collectively, become the object of historical inquiry and narrative; the field or discipline enters into a period of self-consciousness or group consciousness. In the discipline of history itself, the Western founding fathers, Herodotus and Thucydides, outlined the historiographical task, although it was not fully taken up until the Enlightenment. The fathers of history not only wrote history but made explicit their decisions about what kind of stories they were going to tell for what reasons. They were not going to write myths (mythoi), nor mere hearsay and anecdotes. Rather, they would make inquiries into causes and into the nature of things; they were going to collect the facts, but also reflect on how versions of what had really happened had been constructed and handed down before them. Thucydides, further, reflected on what it meant to be a contemporary historian, writing about events unfolding around him, and writing as what we would now call a participant observer.

“Historiography” eventually became (in the Enlightenment) not just another word for “history” or history-writing but a word specifically designating inquiry and narrative about history-writing. The late 19th-century German historians living in the land of Kant’s *Kritik*, wrote “histories of history.” Recently, the American historian Hayden White added the term “meta-history” to the lexicon to indicate his idea that historiography should also include in its scope reflection on historiography itself, not just inquiry into the first principles of a discipline (like “meta-physics”) and the methods (he emphasized narrative methods and rhetorical strategies) by which the discipline has accumulated its knowledge or made its claims to knowledge. This second order self-reflective dimension—meta-meta-history—involves examination of the historical representations themselves as motivated choices. A central historiographical question is: “How is the representation of the past shaped by the desires of the present?” In psychoanalytic terms, historiography seeks to explore a transferential dimension of historical construction: “How are present desires, which are influenced by past desires, constructing this history?” The question is not—or not only—a biographical one, about a specific historian; it is a more general cultural one about what kinds of desires and stories are fostered or permitted in a given time.
Now, if we turn to the history of psychoanalysis, we can imagine or construct certain moments of change or crisis in which historiographical reflection and critique might have come about. One such moment could be constructed around Freud’s death in 1939, when his movement was left leaderless and still wrestling with the unresolved controversy with Ferenczi, who had died in 1932. But the start of war—an external trauma—eclipsed that moment, or left it to a poet, W.H. Auden, who gave the world a famous phrase as a marker for future reflection on what psychoanalysis had become: “a climate of opinion.” Another moment can be marked in 1956, the 100th anniversary of Sigmund Freud’s birth, which was celebrated with events and publications sponsored by psychoanalytic institutes and societies around the world. These celebrations were obviously effected by the appearance of Ernest Jones’s monumental three-volume biography *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (1953–1957), the first biography to have been written with access to Freud’s private papers and correspondences. Similarly the celebrations were affected by the appearance of James Strachey’s English translation of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (incorporating the earlier *Gesammelte Werke*), which contained a scholarly apparatus that, for the first time, made it possible for readers to see the complete works chronologically, developmentally, as a story of ideas unfolding, being explored, changing, evolving. The high degree of Freud’s own critical self-consciousness—his own historiographical consciousness—was apparent for the first time in a commentary on his Works. Strachey can be seen as like an Averroes to an Aristotle.

With these milestone works available, psychoanalysts and scholars, including intellectual historians, began to contemplate Freud’s life and work as a whole—they began to assess, interpret, reflect. It was in this period that Freud’s entire work became the basis of broadly influential books like (in America) Norman O. Brown’s *Life Against Death* (1959), Philip Rieff’s *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* (1961), and Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* (1955/1966). These works and others like them, written by non-analysts, developed narratives of the internal evolution of Freud’s thinking and its impact on twentieth-century Western
culture. The alliance of Freud and the culture of the humanities was also advanced by works that followed in the footsteps of Lionel Trilling’s *The Liberal Imagination* (1950). By the end of the 1950s, psychoanalysis began to have a history comparable to the histories of other disciplines in which a founding figure or figures have done the work of establishing the discipline (and sometimes of training the immediate successors); the discipline’s key evolved concepts and techniques have become available to frame the history; and a reflective, historiographical dimension has grown up. (A moment in sociology could be noted comparatively: Auguste Comte had initiated the field, and then, with Max Weber, a flag had been planted on it as a modern field, historiographically conscious, and with a key text: “Science as a Vocation” [1919/1946].)

Psychoanalysis had, of course, been written about historically before the 1956 centenary moment. But, like everything else in psychoanalysis’ history up until that moment, the history writing had been completely dominated by Freud himself, and specifically by such texts of his as *On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement* (1914) and *An Autobiographical Study* (1925 [1924]). But the main history writing method used by Freud and then by his early followers was what he came to call “psychobiography.” That is, Freud had tried to psychoanalyze his own and his collaborator’s psychological dispositions to theorize and practice in the ways they did. (Freud thus went further than Nietzsche, who had simply proclaimed that all philosophy is unconscious autobiography). Correlatively, psychobiography became the main psychoanalytic genre for writing both history and historiography, no matter whether the history was focused on intellectual and theoretical developments, rather than biography proper, or not. Even long after Freud’s death, really until the late 1980s, the history of psychoanalysis was available predominantly in the medium of biographies—especially biographies of Freud himself, but, by the late 1980s, biographies of the second generation Freudians like Anna Freud and Melanie Klein as well. And this biographical mode correlated with the way in which psychoanalysis was handed down among psychoanalysts themselves—as a kind of oral tradition focused on relationships among analysts, on who analyzed whom, on
who agreed with whom or quarreled with whom, who led and who followed in the various groups. Psychobiography was like a tribal history or a chronicle in which the stories of the chief and the chieftains dominated—like “the begats” in the Bible, but with psychoanalytic markers.

As we noted before, there was a brief period in the late 1950s and early 1960s in which some non-biographical historical works written with emergent historiographical consciousness appeared. For that moment, Jones’s biography functioned as a memorial for Freud, a way of keeping him on after his death, and keeping his followers unified in their mourning for the larger than life figure of genius they found in the biography and in the *Standard Edition* with its apparatus. But at the same time Ernest Jones’s work—particularly because it was so idealizing—also provoked a vein of critical writing. The psychobiographical approach was adopted by the critics, as well, but in a mode that the philosopher Paul Ricoeur was to call “the school of suspicion.”

During the 1960s, the critics of Freud began to generate controversy about how to view Freud. Not his greatness, but his detrimental effect on individuals—particularly women—and on cultures began to be stressed. Paul Roazen published *Freud and his Followers* (1974), a kind of multibiography emphasizing the pathologies of Freud and the various Freudians. This critical, de-idealizing development was simultaneous with and related to the post-war history of psychoanalysis as a field of contending individuals and contending schools of thought, some of which were schismatic (that is, fully split off), but most of which stayed uneasily under the broad label “Freudian psychoanalysis,” even if they had identifying designations of their own, like “Kleinian psychoanalysis.” It was in this period of the late 1960s that the controversy over Lacan’s “return to Freud” built up and then erupted in Paris, a controversy at the crossroads of institutional, clinical, and theoretical psychoanalysis.

Looking historiographically at the period after Jones’s biography, we can summarize by positing that two dominant story lines about psychoanalysis developed. The first was the one laid down by Jones, and it featured a heroic Freud, complex but noble, whose views, although much contested from within the
ranks of the early analysts, triumphed and achieved the status of foundational knowledge, needing development and elaboration but not, ultimately, revision. This story could reference the encyclopedic compendium of psychoanalytic thinking to be found in every analyst’s library, at least in North America, Otto Fenichel’s *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (1945); and it could offer as evidence of itself a great many synthetic ego-psychological works, especially Erik Erikson’s (now almost unread) *Childhood and Society* (1950). This storyline served all the so-called “classical Freudians” who treated Freud’s work as received wisdom. Freud did not die in this developmental line; the trauma of his death was disavowed. This was a story of expansion (of the sort envisioned by Erikson in his famous paper on Freud’s specimen dream) and of struggle, but not of fragmentation.

The second story line, developed by Freud’s critics, including those like Eric Fromm who became known as neo-Freudians, was that Freud’s authority, which was often called authoritarian, made it very difficult for fundamentally divergent knowledge claims to be heard, and the authors of those claims—chiefly, Ferenczi, Klein, Fairbairn, Bowlby, and then later Winnicott, Sullivan, and Kohut—remained marginal until groups of their followers were able to bring them forward. This second line has more recently been updated to indicate that each of the divergent authors (except Winnicott) was the font of a group or school until the collective influence of the divergent authors produced a paradigm shift within psychoanalysis, so that now all of the schools can be heard, sometimes in discord and controversy, and sometimes—as in the so-called “relational” school—in accord or in a kind of amalgam. Also during this recent period, psychoanalysis extended its influence—always controversially—into a very broad range of humanities and social science disciplines, including literature, history, art history, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, and some interactions arose between the non-medical academic teaching of psychoanalytic theories and the institutional training of analysts. In this critical story line, Freud’s death can be seen as an event that exposed all kinds of fault-lines and fissures. But this story is also not a “confusion of tongues” fragmentation trauma story; it
is something like a contested succession story, an Elizabethian history play about contending princes and princesses after the passing of a Richard or a Lear.

As we noted before, even in the post-Jones-biography period, when these two story lines were developing, the main method of history-writing (and what little historiographical writing there was) remained what it had been all along: psychobiography. The appearance of many memoirs by analysts and many biographies of Freud’s collaborators and critics reinforced this tendency. But, although nearly every article would begin with a little “review” of the history of psychoanalysis since Freud, there were very few intellectual or institutional histories, and, until quite recently, very few efforts to place psychoanalysis as an institution (or, in Freud’s term, a movement) in broader social, political, and cultural context, despite its profound influence on thinking in these areas. When the broader context was portrayed, it tended to be national, not international (with the rudimentary exception of Edith Kurzweil’s *The Freudians* [1989]). Psychoanalytic centers had developed all over the world as the European analytic diaspora settled, particularly in England, America, and South America, but most histories of psychoanalysis were national histories; there is not yet a world-wide context or a “cosmopolitan intent” (in Kant’s phrase) in the histories or historiography. Further, histories of psychoanalysis (still mostly in biographies of psychoanalysts) were written exclusively by analysts from the 1960s until the late 1970s, when the role of psychoanalysis in broader social, political, and cultural movements did finally begin to become a compelling topic for academic historians (seldom for analysts).

In the academy, in the Americas and Europe, the 1970s was a period of interdisciplinary flowering, when a variety of psychoanalytic theories were at play simultaneously. There was an open, exploratory dimension to the teaching of psychoanaylses (now plural), a kind of comparative psychoanalysis. For example, differing and conflicting theories of infancy were taught and evaluated in relation to one another. In general, during this period, there were marked differences between three approaches to psychoanalysis and its history: (1) the various orthodoxies of the training institutes, which were sometimes
internally split; (2) the more “cosmopolitan” reception in segments of academia; and (3), most vociferously, the antagonisms that developed out of the tendency to criticize or attack Freud’s character and motivations, which became the so-called Freud Wars in the late 1980s and 1990s. Academic efforts to evaluate the meaning, the importance, and the significance of psychoanalysis—and particularly of the key concept, the unconscious—in the broader context launched these Freud Wars, both within psychoanalysis and among those academic historians and critics who wrote about it. But the Freud Wars have hardly been more than a grand polemic over the person of Freud (as the war metaphor implies), not a discussion; and, as though calling out for psychobiography, they have been conducted by a large number of pseudo-scholars as well as by actual scholars. (The Freud Wars have yet to have their David Lodge, much less a mere historiographer.) Nevertheless, in cultures that had already become increasingly receptive to nosological and pharmacological approaches to mental disturbances, the Freud Wars contributed to the decline of psychoanalysis as both theory and practice. Where Freud had studied what Richard Wollheim called “the deafness of the mind,” and the Freudian émigrés, survivors of the catastrophes of war-time, had dwelt in the darkest continents of the unconscious, the focus in other brands of therapy and theory was shifting to the more positive features of human development and less time-consuming technologies of symptom removal.

**Reflections on this Brief History in the Current Moment**

In retrospect, the moment in the late 1950s when psychoanalysis might have begun to have a “normal” history and historiography comparable to what other disciplines have produced as their founding figures have been succeeded, was probably too Freudian to be sustainable; that is, too under the still powerful influence of Freud and Jones’s Freud and the tradition of psychobiography. Criticism, controversy, and struggle to win a hearing for voices other than Freud’s finally swept the discipline, preoccupying both analysts and non-analyst historians
Psychoanalysis was not alone in this respect. Many disciplines began to undergo internal rifts and fissures in the 1960s, and the phenomenon was international in scope. Charismatic offerings by theoretical gurus swept academia, encouraging discipleship rather than open-mindedness. Deconstruction and distrust of received opinion often led, ironically, to idealization of new authorities. Unlike academia, however, psychoanalytic institutions often proved incapable of containing public dissent and diversity within their institutional structures; hence institutional as well as conceptual splittings began again—as they had in the 1920s—to impede a “normal” historiographical development.

It is interesting to compare what happened in the history of medicine after the 1960s. It was still being sustained worldwide by the huge launch it had been given in London, when Henry Wellcome established the Wellcome Institute in 1931 as—and this is crucial—simultaneously a historical and research library, a museum of medicine, a museum of human culture, and a current medical research foundation. In its multifunctionality, the Wellcome Institute was the fullest definition of history incarnate, a model for other institutes. Further, after the 1960s it was directed by Roy Porter, who had a specialty in the history of medicine, but who was also a prolific historian in many cultural areas; a man who could connect the history of medicine to cultural history and to contemporary developments in historiography, and who could also connect the Wellcome Institute to more fractious university history departments all around the world. By contrast, psychoanalysis had the secretive Sigmund Freud Archives and, after Anna Freud’s death in 1982, the Freud Museum in Hampstead, which was just that, a museum about Freud, a kind of psychobiography in many media, centered on the Master’s consulting room and his library and collection of antiquities. While popular culture was Hollywoodizing Freud in every possible way, the Freud Museum was a shrine or a mecca for Freudians in the midst of a rami-
fication of theories and techniques. It was deeply defensive, a shrine to fear of fragmentation.

Once psychoanalysis began its post-war fragmentation after the 1960s, the possibility that history and historiography of psychoanalysis might grow beyond Freud biography writing faded further and further as partisans appropriated the biography-dominated history of psychoanalysis to advance their schools. Then, as the institutional power of psychoanalysts peaked, and as the generation of analysts who fled Europe in the 1930s began to retire, the wars within psychoanalysis were caught up in, and in many ways overshadowed by, externally generated wars against psychoanalysis originating in social movements. These cast into question Freud’s views on female psychology, on homosexuality, on aggression, and—most complicatedly, because the unresolved Freud/Ferenczi disagreement was involved—on childhood trauma and repressed memory. Historical study of Freud himself and of psychoanalysis came from within sociopolitical movements—from within Marxism, Feminism, and the Gay Liberation Movement—and later from within the academic disciplinary clusters Cultural Studies and Post-Colonial Studies. These “external” movements and their historians were mostly antagonistic. However, they also generated a great number of new and revised views within psychoanalytic circles. (Splitting can be a generative process as well as a defensive one.) At the same time, both the antagonistic and positive effects of these movements made it more difficult to discern the boundaries of psychoanalysis. The “traumatic” process was ironic: it overwhelmed the sense of coherence while simultaneously opening avenues of growth.

Only in the late 1990s, after the external wars against psychoanalysis had subsided—having had enormous and in some respects progressive, reforming impact upon both theory and practice in all the various schools of psychoanalysis—did there open up another moment in which a historiography of psychoanalysis could flourish. This moment, the current moment, which is also, not coincidentally, an extremely rich moment in the history of historiography, could be described as one in which the Jones story featuring Freud the invincible authority has completely ended—Freud has really died—but so has the
polemically critical counter-story of the pathological and harmful Freud. Theoretical and practical pluralism has established the revisionary paradigms. However, these paradigms can be outlined in terms of what they have rejected of Freudianism more easily than they can in their own terms, which are an orchestration (more or less harmonious in different judgments) of the once marginalized or side-stage theoreticians' views.

In the last decade psychoanalytic history-writing and historiography (aided by the derestricting of the documents that had been gathering in the Sigmund Freud Archives since the 1950s) have begun to emerge from their long period of domination by biography, and then of internal partisanship and external embattlement. This has happened not only in one-volume histories of psychoanalysis like (non-analyst) Eli Zaretsky’s *Secrets of the Soul* (2004), by far the most historiographically conscious history to date, but in societies for the history of psychoanalysis like the International Association for the History of Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis (Paris), journals for the history of psychoanalysis, and exhibitions (both in the museums specifically dedicated to psychoanalysis in Vienna and London and in the Library of Congress), especially around the 2006 celebration of the 150th anniversary of Freud’s birth. For the fifty years between 1956 and 2006, psychoanalysis really had no history in the full sense we have been trying to describe, but it is possible that the conditions are now right again.

One of the most obvious signs of this shift is that so much of the historical work is now being done by non-analysts, that is, by historians who approach psychoanalysis as a field, as a cultural phenomenon, as a theory and a clinical practice (or a group of theories and practices) that have had a defining impact on modern life in much of the world. That is not to say that such events as the acrimonious controversy that broke out over (and influenced the final form of) the Library of Congress exhibition “Sigmund Freud: Conflict and Culture” are now anomalous. Historical study of Freud and psychoanalysis is still fraught with controversy. But this controversy, although it retains unique features, is at least comparable to the kinds of controversy that are to be found in the historical study of other disciplines (even though no other discipline has had a
history comparably organized around a cumulative trauma). This normalizing trend in psychoanalytic historiography means—very importantly—that it is now possible to ask questions about what light the history of psychoanalysis can shed on current developments in psychoanalysis and on the relations psychoanalysis has both with other fields and disciplines and with social issues and world contexts.

A Story of Cumulative Trauma

Moving from period to period, from the 1950s to the 1960s and 1970s and then to the 1980s and 1990s, we have been constructing a brief history of writing about psychoanalysis’ history. Into this history, we have woven strands suggesting that psychoanalysis and historical writing about it were both shaped crucially by the early schisms within psychoanalysis, by Freud’s death, and then the diaspora of European psychoanalysis, a trauma history which precipitated a fragmentation or dissociation. We have noted how psychoanalysts have tried to master that trauma with story-telling, history-writing, at certain moments with a degree of historiographical consciousness. But, we noted, psychoanalytic history-writing kept regressing into biography writing, memorializing or criticizing Freud himself, not the science, and we offered the judgment that even the more historiographically conscious history-writing of the last few years has not yet made psychoanalysis a discipline with a history, comparable to other scientific disciplines in this respect (although not with respect to the traumatic content of the history, because, as we noted, no other discipline was traumatized by dissension, death, and loss in the way that psychoanalysis was). It is our assumption, as we said at the outset, that psychoanalysis needs, like a traumatized individual, to be able to tell reflectively the story of the group trauma. That is, like a curative personal narrative (or a curative analytic process) this reflective story would involve both telling what happened and reflecting upon how the telling is being done and what it means for the tellers and in the wider world. In psychoanalysis’ own terms, it needs to be both analytic (psychoanalytic) and synthetic.
Now, to be historiographically conscious in the way we have been recommending and saying is normal among historians and historians of other disciplines; we should be able to say why we think that the as yet unwritten history of psychoanalysis should be a reflective trauma story and why it makes sense to speak of group processes in the traumatization terms that have been developed for individuals. After all, the people and events of psychoanalysis’ past could be shaped into another kind of story, another narrative—as we are saying they have been.

First, we see the need for a trauma history in the shared symptoms of psychoanalysts, by which we mean something simple: psychoanalysts around the world, but particularly in Europe and in the Americas, North and South, where European émigré psychoanalysts founded colony-like institutions after the Second World War, now routinely speak of their profession as one in search of an identity—or as multiple professions in search of an author. Their stories are not usually written, they are much more frequently present in conference speeches, the platforms of candidates running for psychoanalytic offices, and online discussions. Our sense (as participant observers) is that these stories come in basically three varieties or variations, each a continuation of the critical second storyline we described before, the one that variously acknowledges the plurality in psychoanalysis. Further, our sense is that the shared stories are the unifying stories of three groups or three types within psychoanalysis, but these are not institutionalized groups: the groups exist more or less influentially in each institution, and they are defined most obviously by shared character type or characterologically rooted affinities for types of group. None of the pluralism storyline variations explicitly acknowledges the traumatic loss of the great leader or the traumatic losses of the diaspora colonies—losses of life and losses of home and culture—but they are not understandable without this submerged reference.

The first of these three commonly heard stories reflects a stance that is depressive. Psychoanalysts drawn to this story acknowledge the fragmentation of their discipline but, rather than look for its cause, they throw up their hands, convinced that Humpty-Dumpty will never be put back together again, even if
there were kings and horses and not just well-intentioned but undistinguished foot soldiers to come to its rescue. The past, unexplored or even explored to a degree, simply looms like a ghost or an intruder, often representing Freud or another great contributor. All the great contributors, like the great founder, are gone, and publishing is now all full of sound and fury signifying nothing. This was the theme that recurred insistently in last year’s online discussion with the psychoanalytic publisher Paul Stepansky, to give an example.

A second stance, which is manic, generates a futureward, optimistic story, again without an explanatory past: out of chaos, a new paradigm will certainly come, either a new unifying idea or a clear common ground. Some people of this persuasion will go so far as to announce that the redemptive new psychoanalysis is at hand: object relations theory or attachment theory will embrace all disparate strands; or psychoanalysis will make an alliance with neuroscience that will, finally, dispel any charge that the polyglot psychoanalysis is not scientific. To cite an example, Joseph Schwartz in his *Cassandra’s Daughter* (1999) is a psychoanalyst historian in this vein, who celebrates the triumph of relational psychoanalysis, of which he is a partisan.

Finally, a kind of middle way position, cautious and sometimes obsessional, embraces diversity and tells a very present-oriented story of groups in dialogue, meetings, fruitful pluralism. People of this inclination organize case conferences, for example, in which clinicians of different orientations or schools all comment on a single case, or they plan issues of their journals in which a variety of perspectives is represented. From the work of Fred Pine, embracing diversity, through Lewis Kirshner’s recent *Having a Life: Self-Pathology after Lacan* (2004), efforts to negotiate and translate differences have seemed to lose more in power of revelation than they have gained; even when careful attempts at “translation” between and among different psychoanalytic conceptual vocabularies are offered, they have not generated a large following. For practical as well as more deeply rooted psychic reasons, most analysts adhere to and continue the orientation of a local group or subgroup, at least in public. It is difficult for clinicians who do not identify with an orientation to have a presence in such an identity-typed
world; they are like stateless people. Few can be what Donald Winnicott was clinically, a loner who never became the source of a school, although his influence, after some decades, pervaded many schools; and even fewer can be what Hans Loewald was theoretically, a pluralist who specifically focused on the tensions in psychoanalytic theory with a synthetic intent. But both Winnicott and Loewald, in their quite different ways, demonstrate the power of being a pariah in a world dominated by parvenus and negotiators.

We view these three modes as symptomatic, as defenses against recognizing the traumatic past or reliving it in acknowledging it. They all insist that some key feature of Freud’s legacy must be discarded—and thus they repeat the trauma of splitting and dissociation that has marked psychoanalysis as it banished split off theories. Among the depressives who think that the current fragmentation is unhealable, who do not think that any integration is possible, it is Freud’s structural theory and his notion of the ego as a synthesizer that must be abandoned—and with it everything that is known as Ego Psychology. Lacan, for example, set himself up as the great critic of Ego Psychology and the one who could endure psychoanalytic life without any of the stultifying reifications of Ego Psychological theory or technique, without synthesis. Interestingly, it is the Lacanians who most oppose the notion of adaptation that Ego Psychology promoted, for they think that adaptation must result in stultifying conformity.

Among those hoping that the object relations tradition, in its British beginnings or in its American development, perhaps in combination with Attachment Theory, will be the new paradigm or the new common ground, it is Freud’s instinct theory that must be discarded, as Stephen Mitchell insisted so forcefully (and argued as a historian in *Freud and Beyond*, which he co-authored with Margaret Black [1995]). An implicit antithesis prevails: either instinct theory or an object relations theory. Either there is a “one person” therapeutic situation in which the analyst analyzes conflicts between the instincts and the defenses or there is a “two person” therapeutic situation in which the focus is on the relationship of the analyst and the analysand. Thinking in terms of an *ancien régime* that must be
overthrown requires, for its forward thrust, a basic old/new binarism—and the instinct theory is the old. For theorists of this type, Ferenczi, even though he subscribed to Freud’s instinct theory and developed it in his own way, is the most important theorist of Freud’s generation because he stressed object relations and real-world experiences, particularly of trauma.

Among those who promote pluralism—those who are eclectics or who, above all, want the voices of each school to be heard—what must be discarded is Freud’s focus on the Oedipus complex as the nucleus of the neuroses, for this blocks out the basic orientations of the Kleinians, the Self Psychologists, the Object Relations theorists of different sorts, the Attachment Theorists, all of whom focus on the pre-oedipal. And the Oedipus complex, a story about rivalries, a story about parricide, also brings to the fore rivalries amongst schools, and that makes it quite problematic to argue for the vision of a triumphant theory or even a common ground.

Concluding remarks

Each of the three positions we have been sketching has generated a certain degree of historiographical consciousness. But, we have been suggesting, the appearance of these positions, and the attractions of them, has not been analyzed. We are, of course, assuming that such an analysis should be psychoanalytical, and connected to the psychoanalytical analysis of psychoanalysis’ traumatic history. But, by that, we do not mean that psychobiography should be the mode of analysis, because we are describing group or shared images of psychoanalysis and its history, and to analyze group consciousness a psychoanalysis of groups is required. As with everything else in psychoanalysis, Freud gave the original impetus for this requirement with his Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921), a text that reached for generalities about the father-son, intragenerational, oedipal dynamics of all groups. We, by contrast, think of group dynamics in more characterological terms, assuming that there are fundamentally different dynamics operating in different characters and in groups of different characters (that is, groups
But it has not been the purpose of this paper to suggest how the three positions we have sketched and constructed as responses to a trauma history, which reflect that history, can be worked through (in a process that would have features in common with the working through in an individual analysis). Nor has it been our purpose to develop the history we are imagining or to explore the theory that would be needed for its elaboration—although we have called historiographical consciousness to the task, and to the aid of psychoanalysis itself. But we do want to suggest, in closing, that there is also something that psychoanalysis can give historiography: perhaps the most profound contribution that psychoanalysis can make to historiography lies in its recognition of the inevitable investment we make in any construction of the past, and the interminable process of becoming conscious of the structure and purposes of that investment. In this respect, psychoanalysis is potentially the most historiographical of disciplines.

References


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