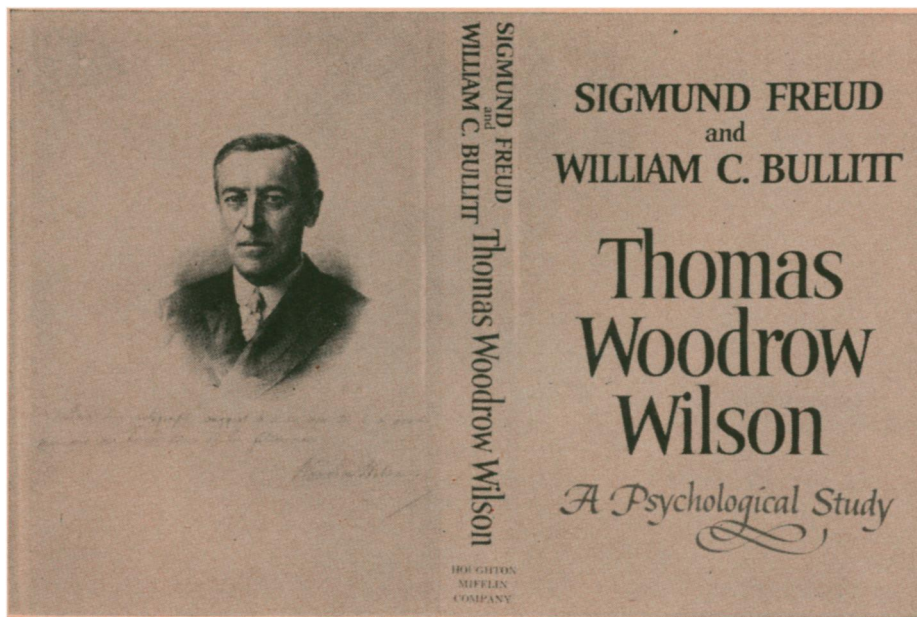


Freudian Analysis Founders on Wilson Book



by Patricia McBroom

Before he died, Sigmund Freud put his name to a psychological study of Woodrow Wilson; it was probably one of the more unfortunate acts of his life.

If he tried, the father of psychoanalysis could hardly have found a more unsympathetic vehicle for his theories than a study of a man he did not know, based on the disclosures of an openly biased collaborator, William C. Bullitt. Former Ambassador Bullitt, who helped assemble material for Wilson's Fourteen Points and was with him in Paris, turned bitterly against the Treaty of Versailles and Wilson himself.

To make matters worse, the book, "Thomas Woodrow Wilson, A Psychological Study," published last week by Houghton Mifflin Co., is unmitigated, classical Freud, applied in a simplistic manner to the U.S. President—all of which has led several psychoanalysts to question whether Freud read the final copy or indeed wrote it in the first place.

It's "gibberish," says one analyst. "Freud was in his dotage and dying of cancer at the time. I doubt he even read the book."

"One suspects," says another, "that Freud would have been more sophisticated." Not only is the book "unbelievable" in its naiveté, but it is poorly written, he said.

Authenticity aside, the Wilson study is doubly unfortunate in that it relies on precisely those Freudian concepts in question today: the libido theory and the Oedipus complex.

Though most U.S. psychoanalysts would disagree, neither concept has

been scientifically validated, nor are they likely to be. It is difficult, if not impossible, to observe children for the kind of information that would prove or disprove Freud's description of the child-parent, oedipal relationship; it is even harder to find evidence that humans are born with a basic fund of sexual energy, known as the libido, which through various forms of expression and repression is the source of psychic health and illness.

In Wilson's case, according to Freud, the normal process by which the libido is modified was distorted. Rather than releasing aggression against his father, the boy repressed it, the book leaves doubt whether Wilson had his full allotment of aggression to begin with. In any case, the man who resulted from this unresolved oedipal conflict was marked by "powerful passivity," i.e. femininity. And there hung the fate of the world following World War I—Wilson could not fight like a man.

There is no doubt the book does not do justice to Freud's total works. Not only is it a simplistic application of analytic concepts to a complex man in the pressure cooker of world affairs, but the study also employs a concept Freud himself rejected in his later writings—the death instinct.

For all that, "Thomas Woodrow Wilson" could serve a useful function if it highlights the controversy now playing around entrenched Freudian concepts. The controversy is not a superficial one; it reaches deeply into psychoanalysis and Freud's basic legacy.

Freud chose to substantiate his theo-

retical structure with endless case histories; his successors have followed suit. Castration fears, penis envy, oedipal conflicts—Freud's entire scheme of infantile psychosexuality and the foundation for his theories—appear so often in patients, say Freudian analysts, that there is now no doubt of their scientific truth.

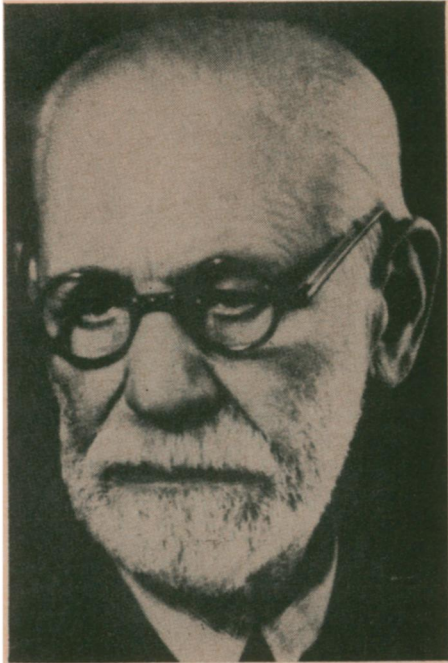
But dissenting voices are heard at an increasing rate.

Proving psychoanalytic theories with psychoanalytic methods is a "closed system" in which the preconceptions of the analyst influence what his patient produces, says Washington analyst Dr. Paul Chodoff in a recent critique of the theory of infantile psychosexuality.

Moreover, some of the case histories "convey a strong impression that the analyst already knows, and has safely pigeonholed the meaning of his patient's productions, even before they are made." Dr. Chodoff says that apart from the analytic evidence, there "is not a lot of material one way or the other," concerning Freud's concepts. At most, his theories on infant sexuality deserve the "Scotch verdict: not proven."

The truth of the matter is that while analysts stick to their doctrine, direct observation of children has been proceeding down quite another path—an empirical one, having no particular relevance to Freudian concepts or any other preconceived theories.

The work of Dr. Peter Wolff, an analytically-trained psychiatrist and close observer of infants at Boston's Children's Hospital Medical Center is a



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case in point. While he has studied in minute detail the behavior of infants, Dr. Wolff does not believe his work will test Freudian propositions, since that requires the observer to reach the child's subjective experience. And year-old infants are not too apt at describing their feelings.

For this reason, "direct observation of infants does not at present corroborate psychoanalytic propositions about early infancy . . . the propositions as they stand are descriptive and speculative," he says.

Where recent biological evidence has touched on Freudian concepts, the outcome has tended to be negative—for Freud.

A Canadian psychologist, Daniel E. Berlyne of the University of Toronto, for instance, was able to show that ambiguity, novelty and complexity arouse basic physiological reactions in humans, just as do hunger and sex. The work raises serious questions about Freud's ideas that "all behavior is motivated by the specific demands of the libido," says Dr. Leon Salzman, past president of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis.

He contends in the book "Modern Concepts of Psychoanalysis" that Freud made a "semantic leap" in assuming that pleasure of all kinds, from sex to the joys of contemplation, was basically libidinal. Social behavior and aesthetic seeking, Dr. Salzman says, could just as easily be related to a "zest for exploration" as sexuality.

Dr. Salzman, along with other members of the Academy, represents a psy-

choanalytic avant garde who are ready to abandon the libido theory while preserving Freud's major contributions to the understanding of human behavior.

Recognizing the significance of the child-parent relationship was a profound contribution. Freud's mistake, according to the new analysts, was imbuing that relationship with so much sexuality.

"Here you see where Freud was confused," Dr. Salzman points out. Though Freud insisted that the libido was not a sexual force as adults understand it, when he came to develop his Oedipus concept, he could only put it in adult terms. The libido theory was always very confused and still is, says Dr. Salzman.

Sigmund Freud was a 19th century scientist and his theories show it. By explaining human behavior in terms of an energy source—the libido—Freud was influenced by the laws of physics and the mechanistic temper of the last century. He proposed that people are born with a certain amount of love and hate, a certain amount of sexual pressures, which can be diminished through expression, and which, when repressed, fill up limited psychic space before they spill out in neurosis.

But "we are finding more and more that this is not a simple matter," that human behavior cannot be interpreted in terms of a set amount of energy, says Dr. Salzman.

No unitary theory has emerged to replace Freudian concepts; rather the new analysts are talking in such general terms as "the individual in con-

tinuous interaction with his environment . . . the individual striving to realize his potential."

A new image of psychoanalysis is growing out of "serious scientific efforts to frame psychodynamic concepts out of research, experience and observation, not conjecture and flights of poetic imagery," Dr. Salzman told a group of colleagues who recently undertook an examination of their discipline. He believes the image must change because it is presently "in bad shape and somewhat grotesque."

Freud has been calcified, Dr. Salzman contends, not only by orthodox analysts, but by "proselytes in the related disciplines of psychology, social work, theology and the like."

Why were the theories of this man, who gave so much to the knowledge of human behavior, who rediscovered the unconscious and recognized before all others that the "child is the father of the man," raised to such a pinnacle of dogma that most analysts in the United States will look no further?

Dr. Chodoff suggests that Freud, rejected so emotionally at the start, won a victory too complete. Accepting his theories, says Dr. Chodoff, "marked one as a member of an intellectual elite ranged against the Philistines."

And for some analysts, Freud has served "as a substitute for curiosity, and has fostered mental laziness and poverty of imagination," he says. "For someone who 'knows' the meaning of a piece of human behavior even before it occurs, there is no need for inquiry or even for real thought."