The Strange Case: II

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A DISSERVICE TO HISTORY

The publication of this book has been long delayed, but not, in my opinion, long enough. My first thought upon reading it was to wonder how much harm it would do, but on reflection I think it will not do much. Freud’s stature is above being impaired by a miscarriage of this kind, especially since the precise extent of his involvement in its composition has been left uncertain. Wilson’s reputation as a statesman has always been vulnerable, and opinion about him will no doubt continue to be divided between those who are charmed by the grandeur of his vision, the nobility of his sacrifice, and the high moral resonance of his rhetoric, and those who are more disposed to insist upon sureness of touch and effectuality in their statesmen and to emphasize the hard fact of his ultimate failure. Moreover, the basic pattern of his character set forth in this book is not altogether new. This book embellishes, with additional interpretive suggestions, a conception of the man, resting upon his extraordinary relation to his father, that is already familiar in its general outlines to those who know the Wilson literature.

Even Mr. Bullitt’s reputation is unlikely to be as much affected as one might at first think. In the history of culture he will always be entitled to a grateful footnote for having been instrumental in rescuing Freud from Vienna in 1938. He has no reputation as a biographer or psychographer to lose, and his qualities as a diplomat can only be somewhat underlined by the existence of this work. It was quite a stroke of personal diplomacy to secure and keep Freud’s complicity—in this undertaking. Finally, one must ask whether the complex and delicate work of applying depth psychology to history, biography, and public affairs will be set back by the appearance of such a book. The body of writing in this field is now large, and some of it is good enough to promise that the enterprise will survive occasional bad examples.

I have tried to come to terms with my own irritation at this book, which I find rests mainly on three things: its indefiniteness about the details of authorship, a certain persistent insensitivity in thought and style, and a punitive tone which gives it the aspect of a vendetta carried on in the name of science. One would like to know more than we are told about the circumstances of this collaboration, in which the extent of Freud’s participation is still unclear; and it seems hardly unreasonable to expect that a joint effort of this kind—in which Bullitt was working as a layman in psychology and Freud as a comparative stranger to research in the details of Wilson’s life—should be explained more substantially than it is in Mr. Bullitt’s foreword.

As to the possible animus of the authors, one would have been grateful if Bullitt had been as explicit as Freud, whose Introduction, though it passes over his own general anti-Americanism, is clear enough on his feelings about Wilson himself. Freud’s interest in Wilson arose out of a Central European’s “aversion,” which increased, he says, the more he learned more about the man, “and the more severely we suffered from the consequences of his intrusion into our destiny.” Finally, however, Freud reports that he began to feel a measure of sympathy—a sympathy mixed with “pity…so overwhelming that it conquered every other emotion.” “Thus, in the end,” he writes “I am able to ask the reader not to reject the work which follows as a product of prejudice…. and I can promise the same for William C. Bullitt, as whose collaborator I appear in this book.” But it is only Mr. Bullitt who could have made good on this promise.
No such personal confession and purgation as Freud’s is supplied by his collaborator, who crossed Wilson’s path at a
crucial moment in both their lives. Mr. Bullitt is not, of course, trying to conceal his own part in Wilson’s final disaster,
which is a matter of historical record; but neither is he willing to pose it for us at the outset, as a problem, in the candid
way Freud did with his “aversion.” We have to wait until page 271 of this book to encounter the extraordinary letter that
Bullitt sent to Wilson in May, 1919, resigning as an assistant in the Department of State and from his post on the
American peace commission. “I was one of the millions,” he wrote, “who trusted confidently and implicitly in your
leadership and believed that you would take nothing less than ‘a permanent peace’ based upon ‘unselfish and unbiased
justice.” After criticizing the terms of the peace, notably the territorial decisions regarding Shantung, the Tyrol, Thrace,
Hungary, East Prussia, Danzig, and the Saar, that had affronted his youthful idealism, Bullitt added:

…It is my conviction that if you had made your fight in the open, instead of behind closed doors, you would have
carried with you the public opinion of the world, which was yours; you would have been able to resist the pressure
and might have established the “new international order based upon broad and universal principles of right and
justice” of which you used to speak. I am sorry that you did not fight our fight to the finish and that you had so
little faith in the millions of men, like myself, in every nation who had faith in you.

In August, 1919, Bullitt appeared as a surprise witness before Lodge and other members of the Senate Foreign Relations
Committee and startled the world by revealing that Secretary of State Lansing had told him in Paris that many parts of the
treaty were “thoroughly bad, that the League as it stood was “useless,” and that the American people would surely reject
the treaty if they “ever understand what it lets them in for.” This public airing of his Secretary of State’s skepticism was a
devastating setback to Wilson’s case, which he was then taking to the public on his ambitious and futile trip to the West.
Two weeks later he broke down in Colorado and was forced to cancel the rest of his speeches. Bullitt was, of course,
trying to be true to his own principles and to what he conceived to be the interests of mankind; but the method the
fledgling diplomat had chosen was rather unusual, and he paid a heavy price for it. His career in diplomacy went into
eclipse until F.D.R., in his search for fresh and unorthodox talents, brought him back to public service, first as
Ambassador to the Soviet Union and then to France. Surely some of the preconceptions of the book must be considered
against the background of the year 1919, when Bullitt judged Wilson and found him wanting, wanting above all for his
unwillingness to make a fight.

TH AT ALL ANIMUS in this book has given way to pity is hard to see. One of its essential difficulties is a curious
combination of the moralistic and the clinical stance. It is of course quite possible to approach a statesman, or any man, in
the posture of a moral judge, and it is also possible, even, within limits, for a layman, to look at any man as a clinical
“case.” But it is supremely difficult to combine the two approaches and it becomes impossible when both are pursued
cruelly. The animus here appears in the beginning and reappears relentlessly throughout. Wilson’s father, Joseph Ruggles
Wilson, is introduced as “a handsome man who talked too much,” a man who cared “more for the expression of a
thought than for its substance.” His effusive letters to his son are “syrup.” Young Tommy Wilson is a “prime prig” who
“never had a fist fight in his life”—a possibility a candid biographer may suggest but cannot assert. Further on, young
Wilson is described as “a rather pathetic little boy to whom one cannot refuse sympathy.” (Yet when Wilson breaks
down, he “creeps back,” he “flees,” to the family manse at Wilmington.) At Paris, Woodrow Wilson “preached
magnificently, promised superbly, then fled. To talk and run is not in the best American tradition nor in the finest line of
European development, and the Western world will not find it easy to wipe from memory the tragi-comic figure of its
hero, the President who talked and ran.”

The insensitivity of which I have spoken is well illustrated in some passages Erik Erikson cites in his review. It seems
sufficient here to say only that the whole book rattles with the mechanical sound of jargon, jargon of a kind we do not
encounter, say, in Freud’s own studies of Leonardo and Dostoevsky. It is hard to imagine Freud ever writing in this
manner:
Thus on March 14, 1919, Wilson’s love for House began to turn to “coldness” and he was cut off, in the crucial month of his life, from the outlet which for eight years had carried so satisfactorily a considerable portion of his passivity to his father. His unconscious identification with the Beloved Son of the Almighty Father was his only other large outlet for his passivity to the Reverend Joseph Ruggles Wilson, and it is not remarkable that as his love for House waned his need to identify himself with Christ waxed apace. Thenceforth an immense quantity of libido charged his identification with the Saviour. But his passivity to his father was the strongest of his desires, and it is impossible to believe that this single identification could give it adequate outlet. One is compelled to suspect that after March 14, 1919, a considerable quantity of his passivity to his father was without outlet, needing outlet, seeking outlet. Direct submission to a masculine opponent, with an attendant mother identification, offered possible outlet. The weeks which followed Wilson’s turning away from House were the weeks in which he submitted to the leaders of the Allies.

One of the questions raised by this book, which I can here do no more than call attention to, is how much of value detailed clinical imputations of the kind in which this work abounds adds to what might be gained from a more restrained characterological study. For history, such details are unnecessary, even distracting or misleading; for psychology it seems that they can hardly have the kind of authenticity and verification that comes from actual clinical contact with the subject. It is true that the central analytical line of this book, stripped of its over arguments, its hyper-specificity, its “quantities” of libido, and its “outlets,” has a good deal to commend it. Even without the benefit of Freud’s conceptions some Wilson biographers have found a key to Wilson in his relationship to his powerful father, and certain repetitively enacted events of his life are consistent with the general lines of the analysis offered here. Arthur Link, for example, Wilson’s most learned and painstaking biographer, writing without benefit of Freudianism and I believe without much sympathy for it, noted long ago how the personal element in Wilson’s quarrels as President of Princeton prefigured his behavior in the fight for the League. More than ten years ago Alex L. and Juliette L. George wrote their *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study*, which lays out what seems most valid and accessible in the basic interpretive scheme of the Freud-Bullitt book, but does so with more humane feeling and much more historical sense. The present book offers some interesting suggestions about Wilson and his younger brother which may shed some additional light upon Wilson’s ultimately unhappy relations with some of his juniors like Tumulty. But the Georges’ study, which has practically all the clinical data that can be found in this book and uses them without the same strident, repetitive tone, may serve as an antidote to those who are interested in personality studies of this kind but who find themselves put off by this book.

The same thing that makes this work deficient as psychological biography makes it deficient as history. Implicitly, by subordinating or ignoring the real problems put to Wilson by historical events, it makes personal psychology the demiurge of history, and—though the authors could hardly have intended it—leads us to imagine that we can understand the world by thinking, say, of the sick psyche of Wilson locked in mortal combat with the presumably less sick psyche of Lenin or Lloyd George or Henry Cabot Lodge. In the same manner it encourages us to steer clear of the achievements of men and to concentrate exclusively on the elements of pathology. No doubt hundreds of thousands of American boys suffered from suppressed hostility to overwhelming fathers, but it was only Tommy Wilson who surmounted his incapacities and became Woodrow Wilson. “A more intimate knowledge of a man,” Freud writes in his Introduction, “may lead to a more exact estimate of his achievements.” And it is precisely this for which we look. But this book deals with Wilson’s achievements by ignoring them. The authors (if we can indeed in full propriety speak of two authors) give a couple of casual sentences to Wilson’s book, *Congressional Government*, which was one of the few thoughtful and enduring works of American political science in the Gilded Age; they spend many pages on his controversies and failures in Princeton but pass quietly over his accomplishments there; they dismiss in less than a paragraph his success as Governor of New Jersey; they have nothing to tell us about how he picked his way through the mazes of American politics to reach the White House; and they ignore all the aspects of his Presidential leadership that are not connected with the war, the treaty, and the League—that is, all the aspects in which he can be said to have had some success. It is easy to believe, in a very general way, that Wilson’s repressed and wholly unconsummated hostility to his father returned
to haunt him in his dealings with other men who appeared as father surrogates and that this pattern was intimately bound up with his rigidity and certain repeated failures. What one might reasonably ask of such a psychological study is that it also show how the subject’s weaknesses and deficiencies were controlled, even sometimes mobilized, in the interests of achievement.

In his study of Leonardo, Freud expressed himself with caution and humility. “We have to admit,” he wrote, “that the nature of artistic attainment is psychologically inaccessible to us”—a judgment later echoed in his study of Dostoevsky: “Unfortunately, before the problem of the creative artist, analysis must lay down its arms.” If we are to hope that the nature of attainment in statecraft will be psychologically more accessible than artistic attainment, presumably it will be because we have concerned ourselves with the terms and conditions of achievement and not only with pathology and failure. What is at stake is not simply a question of “fairness” to Wilson—though fairness is never unimportant, even in treating of the great and powerful—but, more urgently, the necessity of seeing the problems of the psyche against the texture of society. Wilson was trying to cope not simply with the demands and the smothering love of Joseph Ruggles Wilson but also with the problems of male identity in the America of the Gilded Age, the problems of ambition and conscience, of academic life as against the life of action, of political scruple and political advancement, of the balance between his native conservatism and the appealing moral upsurge of American Progressivism as he saw it, of presidential power, of neutrality and national security, of the European balance of power, of the wartime collapse of the nineteenth-century bourgeois world. That a man so troubled in mind, so steadily articulate about himself, whose life has been so voluminously documented from birth to death, should also have been at the center of a world tragedy is a gift and a temptation to psychological biographers. But just as no great and complex novel can be “explained” by occasional forays in textual criticism, so the significance of a public life like Wilson’s is not revealed by this kind of personal psychic excursion. Though it has probably added a useful new insight here and there, this work, if taken seriously, would in fact cast a shadow across our understanding.
The two men's eyes met, and the younger, a slight, mild-eyed youth with a listless chin, excused himself and presented himself at the elder's table. "Won't you join us?" he said nervously. Frederick Cavendish's trim, bearded jaw tightened and he shook his head. The Stranger study guide contains a biography of Albert Camus, literature essays, quiz questions, major themes, characters, and a full summary and analysis. Chapter two is important to the reader because it fills in the details of the prison which are left out of chapter one. We had learned about the interrogations of the magistrate and the meeting with the lawyer but what occurred on a day to day, basic functions level for Meursault during the eleven month period he is held is avoided. By: Randy Engel. [The following first appeared in the August 2018 edition of The Catholic Inquisitor. PLEASE NOTE: This article was written in late June 2018 well before Archbishop Viganò’s testimony. I would caution readers to refrain from impugning Mrs. Engel’s stellar reputation for accuracy and fairness until she has an opportunity to respond in detail to Archbishop Viganò’s claim that he had no hand whatsoever in halting the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis’s investigation into the Nienstedt affair. Mrs. Engel is preparing a response. I will publish her remarks on this specific The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde is a Gothic novella by Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson, first published in 1886. The work is also known as The Strange Case of Jekyll Hyde, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, or simply Jekyll and Hyde. It is about a London legal practitioner named Gabriel John Utterson who investigates strange occurrences between his old friend, Dr Henry Jekyll, and the evil Edward Hyde. The novella's impact is such that it has become a part of the language, with the vernacular The Strange Case (II). User Reviews. 0 Reviews.