

## »A sort of devil« (Keynes on Freud, 1925): Reflections on a century of Freud–criticism

In 1925, the Hogarth Press published the third volume of the translation of Freud's *Collected Papers*, prepared by James and Alix Strachey – the ›Case Histories‹. On 13 June 1925, ecologist and psychoanalyst A.G. Tansley published a complimentary review of that book alongside a translation of Stekel's *Peculiarities of Behaviour*, in the *The Nation & The Athenæum*, one of the handful of weekly magazines bought by the educated elite. On 4 July 1925 the magazine's letters column featured an »emphatic protest« from E. C. Allmond, B. Sc. (Lond.) against the tone of Tansley's review, on the grounds that this tone would appear to make of Freud's doctrines a contribution »comparable with the Copernican theory in Astronomy and the Einstein theory in Physics.«<sup>1</sup> The letter-writer cited a number of recently published criticisms of Freud's works and insisted that, until these criticisms had been satisfactorily answered by the exponents of Freud's teaching, no review as favourable as Tansley's should be published, on the grounds that it is »entirely misleading.«

On 8 August 1925, Tansley replied to Allmond's letter. Tansley noted that it was true that many psychologists take no notice of psychoanalysis, but that was because they were ignorant of it. Many others condemn it and Tansley presumes that the reason for this is that: »Freud's teaching is undoubtedly very astonishing, and his theories certainly give a first impression of being bizarre and grotesque to an extreme degree – and this apart from the disgust and general repugnance they arouse in many people. (...) Freud probes far more deeply and painfully (even than Darwin), and is even more bitterly attacked.«<sup>2</sup> Tansley went on to concede that psychoanalysts and their supporters had not replied sufficiently to a major critical study that had caused considerable stir in England which Allmond had cited, namely A. Wohlgenuth's *A Critical Examination of Psycho-Analysis*, published in 1923.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, Tansley went on, »I have devoted what intelligence and critical judgment I may possess to a first-hand as well as to a literary study of Freudian analysis« and found no alternative to accepting Freud's hypotheses because they give explanations for hitherto neglected or inadequately explained fundamental phenomena of the human mind.

The edition of 22 August 1925 contained three letters responding critically to

Tansley, from Allmond, from Dr A. Wohlgemuth, and from Sir Bryan Donkin. Donkin argued that the silence of psychologists on the question of psychoanalysis demonstrated their refusal to accept its doctrines and the silence of the analysts in replying to Wohlgemuth gets to the »*basic* question as to the soundness of the principles and the value of the practice of the Freudian cult (... Namely) there are many who deem that the doctrine contains the seeds of its own dissolution, and therefore are disinclined to discuss it.« Wohlgemuth's letter referred readers to the debates in the specialist journals and emphasized that psychoanalysis displayed a »flagrant and persistent disregard of scientific method.« And he added: »I feel quite convinced that Professor Tansley's observance of the (scientific method, J. F.) in his own domain of botany is more rigorous than in his *New Psychology* or he would not enjoy the great reputation he does.«<sup>4</sup> Miss Allmond's letter introduced a new note:

»(T)he doctrine of psycho-analysis is not an objective explanation of certain phenomena of the human mind at all, but a subjective reaction to these phenomena; that the result of dream analyses carried out by Freud are revelations of the mind of the latter even more than of the early history of the patient. (This charge of subjectivity, J. F.) could only be completely refuted by the carrying out of experiments, carefully controlled in accordance with the ordinary laws of scientific method.«<sup>5</sup>

The controversy rumbled on in the next number of the magazine, with two letters, one by P. McBride, whose depiction of the issue was stark and simple: »Does the theory of psycho-analysis rest upon a scientific basis, or does it depend upon imagination?«<sup>6</sup> And he addressed the following question to Tansley: »Has he found (in Freud's *The interpretation of dreams*, J. F.) any data which have been verified or which are capable of being verified on lines such as would meet the demands of a critic accustomed to weigh scientific arguments? (...) Repeated investigation, however, convinced me that the large volume contained no such proof.«

The other letter – by far the most interesting intervention in the debate – published on 29 August 1925 was signed by Siela, a pseudonym for John Maynard Keynes.<sup>7</sup> Here is the entire text of Keynes's letter:

»Sir, – I venture, as an outsider, to suggest that the truth about the importance to be attached to the ideas of Professor Freud lies somewhere between the views expressed by your learned correspondents.

Professor Freud seems to me to be endowed, to the degree of genius, with the scientific imagination which can body forth an abundance of innovating ideas, shattering possibilities, working hypotheses, which have sufficient foundation in intuition and common experience to deserve the most patient and unprejudiced examination, and which contain, in all probability, both theories which will have to be discarded or altered out of recognition and also theories of great and permanent significance.

But when it comes to the empirical or inductive proof of his theories, it is obvious that what we are offered in print is hopelessly inadequate to the case – that is to say, a very small number of instances carried out in conditions not subject to objective control. Freudian practitioners tell us that they are personally acquainted with a much greater number of instances than those which have been published. But they must not complain if others base their criticisms merely on what is before them.



I venture to say that at the present stage the argument in favour of Freudian theories would be very little weakened if it were to be admitted that every case published hitherto had been wholly invented by Professor Freud in order to illustrate his ideas and to make them more vivid in the minds of his readers. That is to say, the case for considering them seriously mainly depends at present on the appeal which they make to our own intuitions as containing something new and true about the way in which human psychology works, and very little indeed upon the so-called inductive verifications, so far as the latter have been published up-to-date.

I suggest that Freud's partisans might do well to admit this, and, on the other hand, his critics should, without abating their criticism, allow that he deserves exceptionally serious and entirely unpartisan consideration, if only because he does seem to present himself to us, whether we like him or not, as one of the great disturbing, innovating geniuses of our age, that is to say as a sort of devil. – Yours, &c., SIELA. «<sup>8</sup>

The form of Keynes's five-paragraph argument is worth spelling out. The first paragraph announces that he will position himself between the combattants, a man of objectivity without *parti pris*. The second paragraph acknowledges Freud's extraordinary fertility, yet hints that some of his striking ideas may not stand the test of time – the jury is not yet even out. In the third paragraph, he castigates Freudians for not making available to others the evidence they affirm they possess and, in consequence, should respect the scepticism and misgivings of their opponents. All of these arguments are indeed those of an even-handed intelligent layman sympathetic both to the bold ideas of Freud and to the rational misgivings of sceptics.

It is in the final two paragraphs that Keynes introduces an entirely different note, which renders his previous arguments almost besides the point. He imagines the effect on the impartial layman of learning that Freud's cases were pure invention, and concludes that this would not change one's attitude one jot. So he draws the implication: Freud's impact does not lie in evidence as commonly understood – objective results, carefully recorded and published – but depends instead on »the appeal which they make to our intuitions as containing something new and true about the way in which human psychology works«. In the final paragraph, Keynes turns to address the warring factions, much as he was used in these years to addressing the financiers and statesman of Europe as they struggled to maintain in place the Versailles agreement, the reparations imposed on Germany and the banking system of Europe and America. Both sides should admit that Freud speaks directly to our intuitions and little to our judgement of the weight of »inductive verifications«; in consequence, both sides should cease to blame the other. The upshot is not entirely neutral: the onus of Keynes's argument falls on Freud's critics, rather than his partisans. It is they who have to make room for something new in their view of Freud – this appeal he makes to our intuitions, which Keynes then expands upon: »he does seem to present himself to us, whether we like him or not, as one of the great disturbing, innovating geniuses of our age, that is to say as a sort of devil.«

Thus Keynes has inserted a different kind of figure between the two invoked by Freud's partisans and critics: instead of the great scientist, discoverer of new truths to place alongside those of Copernicus and Darwin, and instead of the unscientific



purveyor of fantasies that are the product of his own feverish imagination, Keynes's Freud is a hybrid of the two, and something beyond both. Yes, Freud is a great scientist akin to Darwin (or, to give a hint of an argument yet to come, of Keynes himself); yes, Freud is a man of unmatched fantasy and great speculative leaps. The little phrase ›whether we like him or not‹ introduces the notion of some kind of objective measure of Freud's cultural standing. Freud, Keynes intimates, stands above personal likes and dislikes, since he is a genius of the age, perhaps its very own *Zeitgeist*. What difference would it make if one liked or disliked Freud? At around this time, the definitely non-Freudian psychiatrist Ernst Kretschmer wrote: »Man hasste Freud, aber man glaubte an ihn«<sup>9</sup> – »One hated Freud, but one believed in him.« In a different way, Kretschmer's observation makes the same point as Keynes: like him or not, Freud must be reckoned with.

Let me leave for the moment Keynes's two significant contributions to the debate over psychoanalysis in 1925 – the fundamental importance of Freud as the principal figure of our *Zeitgeist*, and the fact that Freud calls principally on our intuitions, not on the scientific requirement to be shown evidence – to proceed to show that our understanding of this debate can be deepened by placing it in some context. As a historian of science, of ideas, one should ask questions of the sort: Who are the protagonists in the debate? where and when is the debate taking place? what are the implicit criteria guiding and funnelling the debate?

The obvious first question concerns the forum of the debate. I presented Keynes's contribution as an ordinary letter in *The Nation & The Athenæum*. Why, then, was it written pseudonymously, signed Siela? The principal reason is that Keynes at the time effectively owned and controlled the magazine, having taken it over in early 1923, as an organ for the dissemination of his brand of New Liberal political and economic views.<sup>10</sup> Installing a colleague from Cambridge as Editor, bringing in Leonard Woolf, founder of the Hogarth Press (publisher of the Freud translations from 1924 on) as Literary Editor when T. S. Eliot turned the job down, in the period 1923–25 Keynes oversaw every detail of the magazine, and in the entire life of the magazine from May 1923 to February 1931, when it merged with the *New Statesman*, Keynes contributed 155 pieces, including fifty articles on domestic policy, forty on debts and war reparations, five book reviews, twelve anonymous contributions and fourteen letters – a journalist on another newspaper described him as an »ungovernable soda-water siphon«.<sup>11</sup> This superabundance of contributions helps explain his pseudonymity. And the control he exerted, alongside that of Leonard Woolf, who brought in all his Bloomsbury and Hogarth Press friends and authors, meant that it was clearly a house journal for Cambridge economics and Bloomsbury's literary, aesthetic and moral views.

Keynes's position as controller of the public medium meant that he may have cared to keep the debate going. As Ernest Jones was to remark thirty years later, this was a »heated polemical discussion between (Tansley, J. F.) and three very bitter opponents. (...) Some of the language used by the latter rivalled the German ou-



tbursts before the war (...)»<sup>12</sup> Keynes would no doubt have liked a partisan of Freud's to have stepped into the breach; with Tansley botanizing out of England in August, he may have been casting around for someone to make good copy for a lively debate; as an interventionist proprietor he would have had no compunction in playing that role himself. It is not certain that this played a factor, but it is plausible. Of such conjunctions may heated polemics be on occasion wrought.

Freud's *Collected Papers* were published by Leonard Woolf's Hogarth Press, and translated by James and Alix Stracey, and Joan Riviere – all members of the Bloomsbury group, whose contact with Keynes went back to well before the First World War. However, A. G. Tansley, the reviewer commissioned by Woolf, was not a Bloomsbury figure, but was nonetheless equally tied to Freud and psychoanalysis.<sup>13</sup> In his most psychoanalytically active period, from 1919 to 1927, he was one of the founders of a Cambridge psychoanalysis group which met for papers and discussions, whose pre-condition for entry was having had experience of analysis. The members of this group were James Strachey (like Tansley just returned from analysis with Freud in Vienna), John Rickman (then working as a psychiatrist), Frank Ramsey (mathematician and philosopher, protégé of Keynes, translator of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* into English, whose time in Vienna in 1924 had been divided between intimate conversations with Wittgenstein and analysis with Theodor Reik), Harold Jeffreys (analysand of Jones and later Ella Freeman Sharpe, geophysicist, mathematician, philosopher and botanist) and Lionel Penrose (psychologist, biologist and future geneticist). The group often met in King's College.<sup>14</sup> And the overlap of this group with the secret Cambridge society the Apostles is clear: A.W. Verrall, Joan Riviere's uncle joined in 1871, Leonard Woolf in 1902, Keynes in 1903, Strachey in 1906, Penrose and Ramsey in 1921.<sup>15</sup>

If one adds in Keynes's other Viennese connection of this point in his life, his immersion in Freudian circles is unambiguous. August 1925, when Keynes wrote his letter for the magazine, was a busy month for a man who was never anything but busy. Having married early in the month, he was forced to accept Ludwig Wittgenstein as a house-guest a few days later. Wittgenstein arrived penniless on the 20 August and stayed for six days at the Keynes's summer cottage.<sup>16</sup> He may even have been peering over Keynes's shoulder as he wrote the letter. At the end of the month, Keynes and his new wife, the ballerina Lydia Lopokova left for the Soviet Union, so he could meet his new relations. Do we have any evidence about what Keynes and Wittgenstein talked about in those days?

The philosopher Frank Ramsey visited Keynes's cottage on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1925 – the day before Ramsey was to be married – expressly to see Wittgenstein. He wrote to his fiancée:

»I got here at tea time yesterday, and went for a long walk with Keynes and Wittgenstein and had a very good dinner.... Keynes and Wittgenstein are awfully nice together but I can't get a word in, they both talk such a lot. I got slightly heated because W said that Freud was morally deficient though very clever. To-day K has gone up to town on business and it is pouring with rain; how I



shall amuse W I can't think because he doesn't much like any but the most serious conversation, which tends to lead to such violent disagreement as to make it impossible.«<sup>17</sup>

Thus, leaving his house-guests Wittgenstein and Ramsey to work in London on that August day, Keynes may well have written his intervention in the debate about Freud with their heated debate in the forefront of his mind; as Freudian enthusiast, alongside all the others he knew, and there were many, he might have been thinking of young Frank Ramsey; as critic of Freud, he might have had not only Wohlge-muth and his acolytes in mind, but also the redoubtable Wittgenstein.

And what might Wittgenstein's views on Freud at that time have been? Whatever the complexities and ambiguities of that position as parsed by recent commentators<sup>18</sup>, Wittgenstein never ceased to recognize the extraordinary power of Freud's thinking over him and others – indeed, he might well have been a source for Keynes's view that Freud's hold stems from his speaking to our intuitions rather than our assessment of inductive inferences. He was not that far off from that period, in 1935, when he was considering training as a Freudian psychiatrist in order to make the best use of his gifts.<sup>19</sup> As Wittgenstein in 1936 put it when he gave Maurice Drury, one of his close students *The Interpretation of Dreams* for a birthday present: »Here at last is a psychologist who has something to say« – an attitude not far off, perhaps, Keynes's sense of Freud speaking closely to our intuitions.

Moving beyond a depiction of Keynes's Freudian circles, it is useful to consider the general attraction Freudian ideas had for him within his own special areas of interest: the economics and politics of post-war Europe. Keynes had become an international figure at exactly the same time that Einstein and Freud had, in the period immediately following the War, with, in his case, the publication of *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* in December 1919. That polemical indictment of the Versailles Treaty included a number of different elements, from his excoriation of the blindnesses and character defects of Wilson, Clemenceau and Lloyd George, to an audit of the ruinous state of world capitalism. Throughout Keynes's writings – from his early work on probability (massacred by Ramsey in the 1920s), through the *Economic Consequences* of 1919 into his busy political manoeuvring and polemicizing of the 1920s, when his opposition to Britain's return to the gold standard and his attempts to stave off the economic, political and eventually military consequences of the reparations exacted on Germany were his principal concerns, then into the 1930s with the publication of his magnum opus *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* in 1936 – there is a fundamental vision of economics as grounded on psychology. Like his other Bloomsbury group members, Keynes was fundamentally critical of a foundational Victorian value: that of saving and fear of the future. His account of the Great Depression, then, would point to the underperformance of the economies of the West as due to too great account being given to uncertainty and fear, and too little to the present desires to consume. Keynes was the »sort of devil« that would undermine the Victorian virtues of thrift, hoarding and miserliness with any means he had to hand. From a certain point of



view, saving was a rational means to secure a more prosperous future; Keynes, however, emphasized that the excessive desire to save stemmed from general anxiety about the future and an inability to enjoy the present.

Freudianism thus could help supply Keynes with a general psychology of the cultural unconscious. In 1919, he had described capitalism as

»a double bluff or deception. On the one hand the labouring classes accepted from ignorance or powerlessness, or were compelled, persuaded or cajoled by custom, convention, authority and the well-established order of society into accepting, a situation in which they could call their own very little of the cake that they and nature and the capitalists were co-operating to produce. And on the other hand the capitalist classes were allowed to call the best part of the cake theirs and were theoretically free to consume it, on the tacit underlying condition that they consumed very little of it in practice.«

The ›psychology‹ of the capitalist classes was thus of crucial importance to the functioning of the system. In his *Treatise on Money* (1930), a diatribe against those who would re-introduce the gold standard, freely employing the language of pleasure postponed or indulged in, a language that stemmed from its utilitarian and now Freudian versions of the reality principle, he depicted those conservative forces who saw in gold the »sole prophylactic against the plague of fiat moneys« as throwing over themselves »a furtive Freudian cloak« – the unconscious attachment to gold that Freud's essay on anal erotism had described.<sup>20</sup> Money Keynes described as a »subtle device for linking the present to the future«.<sup>21</sup> But if money were held for long out of circulation, it ceased to be money, it de-monetizes – in the Freudian dialect that Keynes appreciated, gold turned back into faeces. Excessive anxiety about the future based on an inability to enjoy the present provoked regression back to a past fixation, that of the anal stage, in which pleasure was gained in hoarding faeces; money is thus a device »through which the fear of the future takes its revenge on the hopes of the present.«<sup>22</sup>

Thus Keynes's economics required a psychological underpinning: for its portrayal of the economic virtues which, under changed circumstances, would become vices leading to the disaster of the Great Depression. Keynes was a psychologist of economics before he became a Freudian; but Freud was ideally suited to the kind of portrait of the bourgeoisie and its unconscious character-traits that Keynes's economics required. When he spoke in 1925 of »the appeal which (Freud's theories, J. F.) make to our own intuitions as containing something new and true about the way in which human psychology works«, he meant not only our intuitions about, for example, why he himself was bisexual, or why his friends' character-traits were the way they were, but also intuitions about what are the principal motors of world economic history: is it the entrepreneurs or the savers who have created wealth? This economic-historical question was also, for Keynes, a question about psychology. No wonder that, in October 1919, when he was completing the *Economic Consequences*, he met up with the new King's College undergraduates and spent an hour talking about Freud with one of them, Richard Braithwaite, remarking in a

letter afterwards: »Thank God, there's an intelligent man in College.«<sup>23</sup>

Having sketched in what a cynic might call the Freudian coterie, and given some account of why Keynes was so sympathetic to Freud, we can ask: what of the critics? Of Miss Allmond, I have discovered little. A. Wohlgemuth, born in Berlin in 1868, was a psychologist trained from 1904 on at University College, London, whose dissertation was on *The After-effect of Seen Movement* (published as a monograph in 1911); in 1919 he also published *Pleasure-unpleasure. An experimental investigation of the feeling elements*. Never a member of staff, his academic activities were curtailed by an accident during the First World War. Sir Bryan Donkin was a physician who retired from practice before 1900; he wrote an introduction to a small book of 1924 *Psycho-Analysts Analysed*, by another retired doctor F. McBride.

The substantial voice in these critics was that of Wohlgemuth. In his book of 1923, he examined all the principal claims of psychoanalysis chapter by chapter. His tone is very varied, often being contemptuous, often angry, expounding his disagreements in very great pedantic detail: railing against the way Freud writes German, against the complex interpretation of serpents in dreams and mythology developed by Herbert Silberer and Ernest Jones. The principal argument is the baselessness and illogicality of Freud's principal arguments, for the unconscious, for repression, for censorship. Yet Wohlgemuth makes no attempt to conceal the emotional reactions, common to many of Freud's readers, in the early years of this century:

»When I read for the first time Freud's exposition of the ›Oedipus-Complex‹ I passed, as probably most people have done on like occasions, through a series of emotional states. (...) there was first a violent moral shock, followed by extreme disgust, outraged self-respect, and bitter resentment turning to rage. This gave place to a transitory contempt for Freud, turning soon to sadness, pessimism, and melancholy. Quickly I reacted against this. I said to myself, if Freud's view is true, all our outcry, gesticulation, and denial will not alter it a whit, for truth is truth to the end of reckoning. We have simply to face it.«<sup>24</sup>

Yet, besides the analysis of concepts and the refutation of the coherence of the unconscious and the censor, Wohlgemuth's principal means of refuting Freud is »experimental«, by which he means trusting in his skill as an introspectionist psychologist in detecting the psychological contents Freud posited. Thus, in order to refute Freud's claim that human beings oscillate between homosexual and heterosexual feeling, Wohlgemuth subjects himself to the rigours of examining every man he met,

»in railway-carriages and omnibuses, in the park, at theatres and concerts, at lunch in the restaurants, at dinners, meetings, and so on. I chose as objects for these experiments youthful men of varying types: the martial figure of the dashing soldier or the brainy and intellectual countenance of the thinker, the athlete, or the delicate and dreamy artist – all men who would probably please and whose exterior decidedly attracted me. I contemplated them and dwelt upon their personal advantages, having constantly in mind the purpose of the experiment. I imagined the preliminary period of a sexual approach; but I think it unnecessary to enter here into further details of this pro-



cess, and will state at once the result of these experiments. In no single case have I ever been able to discover the slightest trace of libido, whilst I discovered invariably decided repulsion and disgust.«<sup>25</sup>

When he conducted a similar control experiment studying his heterosexual feelings, he deliberately chose

»women whose exterior was decidedly repulsive. Old and decrepit women, and such as were afflicted with some nauseating complaint, women of varying degrees of cleanliness, or rather uncleanliness. In all these cases I have invariably been able to discover sexual conative tendencies and unmistakable libido. It was vanishingly small as compared with the colossal repulsion felt, yet it was unmistakably there. I thus satisfied myself that my introspection in the experiments on men was accurate and reliable, as I could not have missed in the one case what I was able to discover in the other.«<sup>26</sup>

Thus, when Wohlgeomuth entered the controversy in the letter columns of *The Nation & The Athenæum*, on 19 September, after Tansley had responded for a second time on 12 September, one of his two principal arguments concerned the possibility of experimental examination of Freud's scientific claims. Tansley had written that Wohlgeomuth's »experimental evidence« was quite valueless for the use to which Dr. Wohlgeomuth put it«<sup>27</sup> and went on to describe Miss Allmond and Dr Wohlgeomuth's accusation of Freud's »flagrant and persistent disregard of scientific method« and »careful control« as »mere pseudo-scientific bombast«; he added:

»We all know that controlled experiment is by far the most satisfactory method of establishing any scientific conclusion. But the method of controlled experiment is simply not available in many spheres of scientific investigation, and no one denies them the name of science or refuses to give credence to results based on converging lines of evidence.«<sup>28</sup>

There spake the botanist, ecologist and psychoanalyst. Wohlgeomuth was not going to allow this argument; he regarded his introspective experiments as controls on psychoanalytic findings – he had retraced Freud's steps and come up with »better and less far-fetched«<sup>29</sup> Freud-analyses than Freud had managed in his own analysis. He repudiated Tansley's claim that there were fields of science in which controlled experiment was not available, asserting that he himself had made and published such experiments. »Such controls will,« he added, »suggest themselves easily enough to the trained psychologist, though they may worry the dilettante.«<sup>30</sup> He continued:

»The critic (i.e. himself, J. F.) has also practised psycho-analysis upon himself and others, as Freud did, and has repeated Freud's experiments upon which Freud rests his doctrine, and this with the result that he could not accept it.«<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, betraying a remarkable capacity for overlooking the uniquely individual character of the method of free associations, Wohlgeomuth then claimed that he had taken an example of self-analysis of a seemingly random number, 426718, that Freud had published in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and »analyzed: it with the greatest ease, and my published ›analysis‹ has been adjudged better and less far-fetched than Freud's, whose ›Unconscious‹ was concerned in the promp-

ting, and not mine.«<sup>32</sup> Wohlgemuth clearly regarded his experiments with Freud's numbers and his self-examination while out strolling on station platforms and while in restaurants as practising psychoanalysis. The reviewer of Wohlgemuth's book for the *International Journal*, James Strachey, who would have been complimented to be called a dilettante, saw nothing to worry about; he opened his review with the nonchalant words: »This volume is chiefly remarkable for its dust-cover, and we therefore propose in this instance to review the dust-cover instead of the book which it contains.«<sup>33</sup>

Wohlgemuth captures well two quite different tones in which stringent criticism of Freud were couched in this period: the tone of moral outrage, and the tone of professional censure. His entire critical project and his last dig at Tansley – who, he implied, being a distinguished botanist, was not sufficiently aware of the sophisticated experimental protocols which come second-nature to the well-trained psychologist – were based on the view that psychoanalysis represented a threat not to this well-trained psychologist, for whom, he wrote at the end of his book, »in general, psycho-analysis was still-born, and has ever been as dead as a door-nail«<sup>34</sup>, but to the general public, to medical men and to educationists, who he observed were increasingly taken in by »the psycho-analytic confidence trick«.<sup>35</sup> The tone of moral outrage is also candidly avowed, as befits Wohlgemuth's committed disciplined introspectionist methodology; yet he puts this to one side, he claims, since he is explicitly and only committed to the truth, whatever its consequences.

Set against such critics, Tansley noted, were others, also outside psychoanalysis, who »find its doctrines in harmony with their independent observation of human life.«<sup>36</sup> This allusion is no doubt to the language of »intuitions« that Siela employed in his letter (we do not know if Tansley knew the identity of its author, though the odds are he did). Yet Tansley immediately shifts from this general observation of life to the specific business of overcoming one's scepticism with regards Freud:

»I confess that at first I was sceptical of very many of the Freudian theses, and even now there are interpretations which strike me as far-fetched. But I have become very chary of downright unbelief, for in so many cases I have been forced by accumulating evidence to accept interpretations which at first I rejected as overstrained. Freud generally turns out to be right.«<sup>37</sup>

This was not, however, to be the last word. Well into October McBride and Wohlgemuth were attacking Tansley and Freud. Then a different voice was heard, that of the anonymous ex-patient:

»in the interests of thousands of others who have been sufferers, through no fault of their own, I may perhaps be permitted to protest against the foolish and ignorant manner in which such correspondents as Miss Allmond and Dr. McBride have attempted to discredit a system of medical treatment whose powers to strengthen and to heal the mentally afflicted have already been vindicated in numerous instances.«<sup>38</sup>

The ex-patient then described his own case, his years of suffering and his cure through a three-year psychoanalysis just after the War:



»by the end of that period, every trace of the shadow had faded into lucid daylight. Since then it has never returned, and I have the best of reasons for knowing it can never return – this reason being that, in the course of my slow recovery, nearly every aspect of my mental life has been completely and permanently transformed.«<sup>39</sup>

Giving an account of the process of the analysis in which his long-held doubts and scepticism were finally overcome by the weight of evidence and his entire transformation – »physical, mental and moral«, the ex-patient took special pains to refute Wohlgemuth's »pretentious treatise« on three grounds: his refusal to accept the concept of subliminal mind in general, entirely independently of Freudian theories; his refusal to take account of the confirmatory experiences of patients themselves, and, lastly, »the whole body of evidence adduced by psychical research.« For this ex-patient, the experiments of these researchers can be explained in either one of two ways: through the »spiritualistic alternative« or through the hypothesis of an »active sub-conscious«. For this reason, the critics of psychoanalysis should »explain why they have not adopted the spiritualistic alternative.«

In his biography of Freud, Ernest Jones<sup>40</sup> revealed the identity of the author of this anonymous letter: Dr Ivor Lloyd Tuckett. Tuckett was a physiologist, an exact contemporary of Tansley's studying Natural Sciences at Trinity College, Cambridge in the 1890s, becoming a Fellow at Trinity in 1895 and later University Demonstrator in Physiology (1899 and then again in 1905), having also trained as a doctor at University College London and the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital (qualifying in 1898). He had clearly long been interested, like many Cambridge scientists of the period, in spiritualism, publishing *Evidence for the Supernatural*, 1912. The fact that in 1957 Ernest Jones knew the identity of this anonymous contributor to the 1925 debate makes it highly probable that he was Tuckett's analyst. So, with Tansley, Keynes (pseudonymously) and Tuckett (anonymously) making up the trio of defenders of Freud against the intemperate attacks of Wohlgemuth and his »flying-squad«<sup>41</sup> of co-conspirators, it looks very much as if, once the true identities are revealed, the Freud enthusiasts consisted solely of eminent Cambridge scientists, one a botanist-analyst, one a physiologist-analysand, one a »sort of devil«. Keynes ordered the debate closed in late October 1925 and then published a two-part article by James Glover, one of the pre-eminent orthodox Freudian London analysts, to put the case for the scientific credentials of psychoanalysis in respectable – and unanswered – prose.

Let me draw some of the strands together.

The first thing to remember is that a public spat may be a rather well-orchestrated ritual dance. The three principal Freudian critics of 1925 referred to each other's writings, wrote prefaces for each others's books and adopted something of a united front. On the other side, Keynes probably intervened to keep the debate going – which does not mean that he did not regard the debate of first-rank importance, quite the opposite – and it is fair to say that on a normal day, his magazine

was stuffed full of faithful Freudians. In addition, those defending Freud turn out, surely not solely by coincidence, to be Cambridge dons, from Trinity and King's. So as a historian, one wants to know a little more about magazine ownership, private agendas, coordinated strategies of using the media and so forth.<sup>42</sup>

What are the lessons to be extracted from this episode? Let me return to the three strands that Keynes wove into his letter: »inductive verifications«, »our intuitions« and Freud as a »sort of devil« for his age.

1. Inductive verifications: Those sympathetic to Freud, particularly Tansley and Keynes, both admitted that the inductive verifications of his theories had not been made available. Tansley tussled with Wohlgenuth over the issue of experimental controls: the key issue is what other sorts of evidence are convincing and trustworthy if such controls are not available? The Freud-bashers of 1925 certainly allowed no other variety of science than the experimental, even if their version of the experimental consisted in rigorous inspection of the state of the experimenter's libidinal desires while watching attractive young men board the train for work. In this fetishism of the experimental, little has changed when it comes to »scientific bombast«. Tansley the observational ecologist and Keynes the mathematical modeller of macroeconomic systems had little interest or need for experiment. Whether ecology and economics are sciences without such experimental controls is a question that clearly lurks behind the war raging over psychoanalysis. The third pro-Freudian, Tuckett, did wish to introduce confirmatory evidence, drawn from the therapeutic successes of psychoanalytic treatment; but even he, working in the Cambridge Physiology Laboratory alongside of Sherrington, thought the crucial experiments were those conducted by »psychical researchers«.

2. Intuitions: It is here that Keynes adds a third way of crucial importance between those of the partisans convinced by their own experience and the sceptics appalled at the confidence-tricks pulled by charlatans on a gullible public. I have sketched in the kind of world that Keynes inhabited – the free-thinking and –living Bloomsbury set, an economist seeking a foundation in psychology for his theoretical and practical doctrines – that may have made him liable to find Freud's work speaking to his independent intuitions about human psychology. The list of those who feel the way Keynes did are endless. Most of those enthusiastic about Freud on first acquaintance usually experience their reading of him as a revelation because he speaks to the intuitions they did not even know they had. Often enough, they grow out of their enthusiasm without feeling the need to repudiate Freud. To take a recent example: the English novelist Ian McEwan was recently asked in a magazine interview, »Which book changed your life?« He replied: »Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. The very idea of an unconscious made me think about writing in a completely different way.« He then added: »Today, Freud means little to me.«<sup>43</sup>

Returning to the question of intentions: Introducing one modern writer of fiction reminds us of that other argument of Keynes's which is so striking – the idea



that Freud may have invented all of his cases, and yet, for Keynes, this would not alter his view of Freud at all. In other words, Keynes recognized and accepted the porous boundary between psychoanalysis and imagination, the world of fiction, which has been so important a part of the presence of psychoanalysis in the culture of the twentieth century. Then, and now, for many of Freud's critics the porosity of the boundary between fiction and ›reality‹ is what frightens them and leads them to an outright condemnation of psychoanalysis in the name of science. Wohlgemuth himself confessed that he was strongly attracted to Freud's theory of dreams until he read Freud's analysis of Jensen's *Gradiva*, and realized with a shock that Freud applied his method to both real and fictional dreams. It was at that moment that he became a virulent anti-Freudian.<sup>44</sup> For us, older but maybe no wiser than Keynes, we see in this recognition the vision of psychoanalysis as the dream of the twentieth century, with Freud its dreamer.

But it is also clear that there will be many if not more people whose intuitions about human psychology require the repudiation of Freudian theory. They can find nothing in their minds that gives any hint of an unconscious; they find the very notion of infantile sexuality or repressed homosexuality implausible, against common sense and in some deep sense unfair, a violation of the principle of charity. This point, it should be noted, is not the same as the question about the emotions aroused by Freudian theory. Clearly Tansley found Freud's theories repulsive and grotesque in some sense; but they spoke immediately to his intuitions while they also roused his scepticism and resistance.

We may add that what Keynes meant by intuitions might well correspond to what is now called folk psychology. But Keynes's term has far greater force because intuitions includes a substantive content that the term folk psychology often lacks. The sort of ›thing‹ an intuition is must be some kind of inner measure or standard – a click which tells us that ›people are like that‹ (or not). Thus we might see Keynes's position as an early version of the thesis that psychoanalysis is an extension of folk psychology – though I would prefer to return to the language of intuitions than try to make do with the mechanistic and finally condescending term folk psychology.

3. The fundamental emotional reaction to Freud must be included under Keynes's third heading: Freud as »one of the great disturbing, innovating geniuses of our age, that is to say as a sort of devil.« For those like Keynes who were the shit-stirrers of their time – and I choose my words carefully – Freud was a powerful and welcome ally. Many disciplines and many thinkers looked to psychology for a foundation, in the same way Keynes sought to build economics on a psychological analysis of the virtue of thrift and the love of money. In anthropology, sociology, legal studies, recourse to psychology was an endemic temptation. Freud's dark and fragmentary psychology, with its emphasis on sex, its respect for and generosity towards the irrational, appeared to be the work of just the sort of devil whose temper the age required. One difference in our own Freud-bashing age is that it is no longer so easy for the Keyneses of our day to dismiss the anti-Freudians as conserva-

tive forces whose day is almost up. Our culture is less sure whether Freud belongs to the radical future or to a conservative past. Certainly the thirst for Freud's kind of psychology is not felt in economics or anthropology, where analysis of consumer behaviour based on rational choice theory or calculations of kinship structures based on maximal mating strategies are much more likely to slip through the grant-vetting committees unchallenged. Yet the very passions of our Freud Wars bear witness to the fact that there's life in the old devil yet. We still may not know if it's the right kind of life or the right kind of devil. He was, after all, a rather knowing devil. Remember the epigraph of *The Interpretation of Dreams: Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo* – *If Heaven I cannot bend, then Hell I will arouse.*

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> E. C. Allmond, Psycho-Analysis, in: *The Nation & The Athenæum*, July 4 (1925), 425.
- <sup>2</sup> A. G. Tansley, Psycho-Analysis, in: *The Nation & The Athenæum*, 8 August (1925), 566 ff.
- <sup>3</sup> A. Wohlgemuth, *A Critical Examination of Psycho-Analysis*, London u. New York 1923.
- <sup>4</sup> A. Wohlgemuth, Freudian Psycho-Analysis, in: *The Nation & The Athenæum*, 22 August (1925), 619.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> P. McBride, Freudian Psycho-Analysis, in: *The Nation & The Athenæum*, 29 August (1925), 644.
- <sup>7</sup> For information concerning Keynes, I've drawn heavily on the first two volumes of the fine three volume biography: Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes. Vol 1: Hopes Betrayed 1883-1920*, London 1983 and *John Maynard Keynes. Vol 2: The Economist as Saviour 1920-1937*, London 1992, which I will from now on abbreviate as Skid I or Skid II. What significance does the pseudonym ›Siela‹ have? Skidelsky gives no clue. I speculate that it is an inaccurate anagram of ›alias‹, with a possible play on the ambiguous pronunciation of the word ›Keynes‹, sometimes pronounced as ›Kaines‹, sometimes (mispronounced) as ›Keenes‹ – the message is: pronounce the ›e‹ in ›Siela‹ as you pronounce the ›ey‹ in ›Keynes‹, i.e. as an ›a‹.
- <sup>8</sup> ›Siela‹ (John Maynard Keynes), Freudian Psycho-Analysis, in: *The Nation & The Athenæum*, August 29 (1925), 643 pp.; see also Winslow, E.G., *Keynes and Freud: Psychoanalysis and Keynes' account of the ›animal spirits of capitalism‹*, in: *Social Research* 53 (1986), 549-578; Skid II, as note 7, 414.
- <sup>9</sup> Ernst Kretschmer, quoted in Kurt Eissler, *Freud as an Expert Witness*, Madison, CT 1986, xii.
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. Skid II, as note 7, 134-139.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 136; the syphon quote is from 139.
- <sup>12</sup> Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud. Life and Work*, Vol. III., London 1953-1957, 119.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. Laura Cameron and John Forrester, ›A nice type of the English scientist‹: Tansley and Freud, in: *History Workshop Journal* 48 (1999), 65-100.
- <sup>14</sup> For further information on this group, and further background to this debate, see Laura Cameron and John Forrester, *Tansley's psychoanalytic network: An episode out of the early history of psychoanalysis in England*, in: *Psychoanalysis and History* 2 (2000), 189-256.
- <sup>15</sup> Richard Deacon, *The Cambridge Apostles: A History of Cambridge University's Elite Intellectual Secret Society*, London 1985.



- <sup>16</sup> Cf. Skid II, as note 7, 208.
- <sup>17</sup> Letter from Frank Ramsey to Lettice Baker, 20<sup>th</sup> Aug 1925, Frank Ramsey Papers, King's College Modern Archive, Cambridge.
- <sup>18</sup> Cf. in particular, Jacques Bouveresse, Wittgenstein Reads Freud. *The Myth of the Unconscious*, transl. Carol Cosman, foreword by Vincent Descombes, Princeton 1995.
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. Ray Monk, Ludwig Wittgenstein. *The Duty of Genius*, London 1990, 356.
- <sup>20</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *Treatise on Money*, Vol. II. *The Applied Theory of Money* (1930), *Collecting Writings Vol. II*, 258.
- <sup>21</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The general theory of employment, interest and money*, London 1936, 293; see Thomas Crump, *The Phenomenon of Money*, London 1981, 3 ff.
- <sup>22</sup> Skid II, as not 7, 543.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>24</sup> Wohlgemuth, *Examination*, as note 3, 146.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 157 f.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 158 f.
- <sup>27</sup> A. G. Tansley, *Freudian Psycho-Analysis*, in: *The Nation & The Athenæum*, 12 September (1925), 699-700, this passage from 700.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> A. Wohlgemuth, *Freudian Psycho-Analysis*, in: *The Nation & The Athenæum*, 19 September (1925), 729.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> James Strachey, *A Critical Examination of Psycho-Analysis*. By A. Wohlgemuth, D.Sc. (Lond.) (Allen & Unwin, London, 1923. Pp. 250. Price 10s. 6d. net.), in: *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.* 5 (1924), 222-225.
- <sup>34</sup> Wohlgemuth, *Examination*, as note 3, 246.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> Tansley, *Freudian Psycho-Analysis*, as note 27, this passage from 700.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* It appears characteristic of this period of Freud's first great public influence that his readers were often at first sceptical while respectful, and only subsequently became convinced by a slow drip effect of empirical evidence, often of a personal and thus non-experimental sort. Witness Einstein's letter in 1936 to Freud: »I am happy that this generation has the good fortune to have the opportunity of expressing their respect and gratitude to you as one of its greatest teachers. You have undoubtedly not made it easy for the sceptical laity to come to an independent judgement. Until recently I could only apprehend the speculative power of your train of thought, together with its enormous influence on the Weltanschauung of the present era, without being in a position to form a definite opinion about the amount of truth it contains. Not long ago, however, I had the opportunity of hearing about a few instances, not very important in themselves, which in my judgement exclude any other interpretation than that provided by the theory of repression. I was delighted to come across them; since it is always delightful when a great and beautiful conception proves to be consonant with reality.« Einstein to Freud, 21 April 1936, in: Jones, Freud, » as note 12, Vol. III, 217.
- <sup>38</sup> »Ex-patient«, *Freudian Psycho-Analysis*, in: *The Nation & The Athenæum*, 10 October (1925), 46.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> Jones, Freud, as note 12, Vol. III, 119.
- <sup>41</sup> James Glover, *Freud and his critics*, in: *The Nation & The Athenæum*, 14 November (1925), 259.

<sup>42</sup> We should be aware that these media are the work of interested parties to the debates. The University Library in Cambridge still catalogues psychoanalytic books in a special zone of the library because when the International Psycho-Analytic Library was founded in the 1920s, just at the time of this debate, the University Librarian decided that psychoanalysis should be on restricted access, available only to senior readers or doctors.

<sup>43</sup> Sunday Times, 23 May (1999), Section 8, 11 (see [www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk)).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Wohlgemuth, Examination, as note 3, 7-8, 246.