

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03513-3 - The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain

Michal Shapira

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction: the war inside

During World War II and the brutal experience of German attacks against civilians on the home front, Britain underwent a consequential, yet unstudied, development. This total war elevated British psychoanalysis to a role not enjoyed anywhere else in the world. Under the shock of bombing and evacuation, exiled continental analysts such as Anna Freud (Sigmund Freud's daughter) and Melanie Klein and native analysts such as John Bowlby (the "British Dr. Spock") and Donald Winnicott were called upon to treat a diverse group of men, women, and children. Children occupied a privileged position in this expert work. They came to be seen, on the one hand, as vulnerable and in need of protection; on the other hand, as anxious, aggressive subjects requiring control. The war proved a decisive moment for the history of psychoanalysis, and, in turn, its evolving theories and practices helped produce new expectations for selfhood, citizenship, mental health, and the emergent social democracy. While scholars of World War I have highlighted the effects of shellshock on culture and society, we have yet to understand how the brutalities of World War II, and the theories of selfhood developed under its guise, reshaped postwar Britain. By examining together both the ideas and practices of child psychoanalysts and their wide impact on public opinion and social policy, *The War Inside* reconstructs this essential social and cultural legacy of World War II. While looking at analyst–patient interactions in the clinic, significantly, this book takes the history of psychoanalysis beyond the couch. It follows psychoanalytic practice in a variety of social and institutional settings such as the war nursery, the juvenile court, the state committee, the radio, and the hospital. Spanning the periods before, during, and after the war, it reveals how psychoanalysis became important for much public and welfare-state thinking about democracy, mental health, childhood, and the family.

Psychoanalytic experts made the understanding of children and the mother–child relationship key to the successful creation of social democracy in two ways. First, by asserting a link between a real "war outside" and an emotional "war inside" individuals, analysts helped

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03513-3 - The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain

Michal Shapira

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 Introduction: the war inside

make the state increasingly responsible for the mental health and family life of citizens. Second, rather than being an elite science confined to the private clinic (as the discipline has been characteristically described by many historians), psychoanalysis informed new and changing understandings not only of individuals and their health, but also of broader political questions in the age of mass violence and mass anxiety. Psychoanalysts sought to understand the underlying emotional mechanisms that led to violence, so as to advance human well-being in ways that could secure the future of democracy. They targeted the child's psyche as a site for expert knowledge and mediated ideas regarding citizenship, democracy, and the family that influenced both citizens and welfare legislation. They contributed in important ways to the reshaping of modern British society.

The War Inside is located at the intersection of history and psychoanalysis while placing the relationship between self and expert culture in a historical frame. Historians have rarely looked at psychoanalysts other than Sigmund Freud as social actors in their cultures, leaving the histories of psychoanalytic movements' influence on their European societies still largely uncharted.¹ Even psychoanalysts who have studied the theoretical ideas of their predecessors have seldom situated them historically or explored their social impact using archival sources.² Unlike previous histories of psychoanalysis, this book approaches the second generation of psychoanalysts after Sigmund Freud as actors in specific political and social circumstances. While Bowlby, Winnicott, Klein, and Anna Freud were prominent then and today, this group also included psychoanalysts who are now long forgotten such as Edward Glover, Melitta Schmideberg (Klein's daughter), and Kate Friedlander. These psychoanalysts all provided an important secular account of inner life, and they described a world much wider than that of privileged patients lying on the couch. Integrally tied to the tumultuous history of war and violence in the twentieth century, this generation of analysts forged a new project of thinking about the place of aggression in democratic societies.

¹ See Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925–1985* (University of Chicago Press, 1990).

² This is also true for the biographies that are available on these experts. For example, see Suzan van Dijken, *John Bowlby: His Early Life, A Biographical Journey into the Roots of Attachment Theory* (New York: Free Association Books, 1998); Raymond Dyer, *Her Father's Daughter: The Work of Anna Freud* (New York: J. Aronson, 1983); Brett Kahr, *D. W. Winnicott: A Biographical Portrait* (London: Karnac, 1996); Elisabeth Young-Buehl, *Anna Freud: A Biography* (New York: Summit, 1988).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03513-3 - The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain

Michal Shapira

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction: the war inside

3

During the 1930s, Britain became home both to native psychoanalysts and to many Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis and continental anti-Semitism. Out of the once-flourishing psychoanalytic societies in Europe, only London remained as a real hub and a center for a unique intellectual diaspora.³ Yet Britain was no safe haven. The anticipated attacks on and the actual ruthless bombardment of British civilians during World War II made it a unique setting for this generation of psychoanalysts to explore the experiences of violence, especially upon children. The cataclysm of the war and the projected and real human suffering allowed experts in the psychological science of anxiety, trauma, and aggression to step forward with solutions and address some of the main dilemmas of the time. They offered new ways of looking at psychological trauma and the self. They provided novel interpretations of the civilian condition under shelling, and of human relations more broadly.

For Anna Freud and her staff in London's Hampstead War Nurseries, for example, the war brought work with a large number of dislocated children, or "infants without families."⁴ Among these young war victims were children whose homes had been destroyed, children who were sent back from evacuation, and "Tube Sleepers," i.e., children who had been taken to Underground shelters at night and lost their ability to sleep. Anna Freud and her staff aimed to repair the perceived mental damage already caused to the children, to prevent what was seen as possible future disorder due to mother-child separation, and to conduct research on the psychological conditions deemed necessary for the normal development of the child. During wartime, Anna Freud's skills as an organizer as well as a theorist were deployed. She and her staff ran several houses in London and its vicinity. The detailed reports that she wrote during the nights of air raids provide a rich testimony of the work of psychoanalysts with children under fire. The war allowed her not only to develop her theories, but also to put them into practice and to reevaluate them for dissemination in peacetime. Along with the ideas of other psychoanalysts, such work shaped a generation of parents and policymakers.

The War Inside explores the contribution of British psychoanalysis to a certain psychologization of the self and the child as these two separate but

³ See Gregorio Kohon (ed.), *The British School of Psychoanalysis: The Independent Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 24–50; Riccardo Steiner, "It Is a New Kind of Diaspora," *Int. R. Psycho-Anal.* Vol. 16 (1989), pp. 35–72.

⁴ Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, *Infants without Families: Reports of the Hampstead Nurseries, 1939–1945*, vol. III of *The Writings of Anna Freud*, 8 vols. (New York: International Universities Press, 1967–1981).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03513-3 - The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain

Michal Shapira

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 Introduction: the war inside

interconnected phenomena developed during the mid twentieth century.⁵ Following the evolving ideas of psychoanalysts and their actual work, it looks at the world that made psychoanalysts, and how they in return shaped it as well.⁶ Collaborating with other experts, state officials, and citizens, analysts became involved in the war effort and in the postwar development of the welfare state, influencing social policy, law, popular culture, and public opinion. What kind of understanding of childhood and of the self emerged from the intensity of a total war experience? How did experts comprehend emotions of fear and anxiety and conceptualize outbreaks of violence? What were the long-term consequences of home-front brutality on postwar society? The book engages with these broad questions and adds to the still-underdeveloped literature on the larger and long-lasting sociocultural effects of World War II as a total war that killed more civilians than soldiers worldwide.⁷

The War Inside provides examples of a tighter interaction between psychoanalysis and politics than scholars have previously offered.⁸

⁵ Indeed, general studies of the history of psychology in twentieth-century Britain are strikingly scarce. Mathew Thomson recently provided the main exception, yet his study deliberately looks beyond the particular history and influence of psychoanalysis. It is important to note, however, that when discussing mid-century developments Thomson uses the writings of many analysts without emphasizing this as such. And indeed analysts themselves did not always emphasize their distinctiveness but rather identified as psychologists, experts, or psychiatrists. It is important then to follow their work beyond obvious locales such as the British Psycho-Analytical Society (though this location was important as well), and to see how they participated in larger debates on crime, evacuation, and wartime anxiety etc. in order to show their broad impact. The history told here is therefore not limited to psychoanalytic institutions or high-minded debates, but looks at the deep impact of a set of psychoanalytic discourses on different realms of British society in ways and degrees that have remained unrecognized by scholars. See Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2006). See also Leslie S. Hearnshaw, *A Short History of British Psychology, 1840–1940* (London: Methuen & Co., 1964).

⁶ See George Makari, *Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), p. 2. Broad intellectual histories of the Western self rarely look at it in detailed context. For example: see Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989). See also the more detailed studies of Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); and James Hinton, *Nine Wartime Lives: Mass Observation and the Making of the Modern Self* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷ The chief exceptions are Sonya Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939–1945* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Susan Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). Cf. the American context: William M. Tuttle, *"Daddy's Gone to War": The Second World War in the Lives of America's Children* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁸ Cf. Denise Riley, *War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother* (London: Virago, 1983). Though I see my study as complementary to Riley's superb work, her views about

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03513-3 - The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain

Michal Shapira

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction: the war inside

5

Psychoanalysis was not only high theory; it also had very real implications for public debate and social policy. It should be looked at as knowledge and practice operating in relation to particular sociocultural settings and, in this sense, one could say that each country has “its own psychoanalysis.”⁹ Like historians of revolutionary Russia and the Soviet Union who study Marxism as a lived civilization, I make psychoanalysis here the object rather than the subject of study, that is, psychoanalysis is not a theory that I use in my investigation, but an intellectual constellation that I examine.¹⁰ Indeed, British psychoanalysis was bound to the rationale of a specific understanding of social democracy in a period of war and peace. Through the focus on different versions of separation theories, stressing the need for a constant bond between children and their caretakers, psychoanalysis offered influential answers to questions regarding the possibility of harmonious and cooperative human relations in the

psychoanalysis and its lack of impact on the question of daytime war nurseries for working mothers could not be extended to other realms, for example, to that of child hospitalization. Furthermore, scholars such as Carl Schorske and William McGrath believed that, in fin-de-siècle Vienna, the analytic turn to the inner world of the psyche was a sign of political disillusionment or was counterpolitical. I show how in twentieth-century Britain the analytic focus on “the war inside” was profoundly political. For a survey of literature on this topic, see Joy Damousi and Mariano Ben Plotkin (eds.), *Psychoanalysis and Politics: Histories of Psychoanalysis under Conditions of Restricted Political Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. xi–xvi.

⁹ As suggested by Edith Kurzweil, *The Freudians: A Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). See also Damousi and Ben Plotkin (eds.), *Psychoanalysis and Politics*. Damousi and Ben Plotkin make the argument that psychoanalysis is able to flourish under forms of political authoritarianism. They argue against those who believe that a certain level of political and social freedom is a precondition for a successful implantation of psychoanalysis. In non-European countries, for example, in Latin American cases of restricted political freedom in the 1930s to the 1970s, psychoanalytic practice did flourish. Damousi and Ben Plotkin notice that in Europe, in the conditions that emerged in fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Franco’s Spain, and the Soviet Union, psychoanalysis almost ceased to exist. But they argue that the situation was more nuanced and that, curiously, the practice did survive even in Europe, with much compromise to accommodate the new regimes and with the removal of the Jewish analysts. They therefore offer to eradicate the distinction between “real” and “false” psychoanalysis, and to look instead at psychoanalysis as it “really existed” in different contexts. I believe that whether or not a modified and racist form of psychoanalysis could still be called “psychoanalysis” is an open question. My goal here, however, is to map the encounter of psychoanalysis with British democracy, emphasizing that even the working of the discipline under favorable conditions of social freedom took specific forms.

¹⁰ Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000); Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). For historians who employ psychoanalytic theory, see Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: From Victoria to Freud*, 5 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999); Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994); Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03513-3 - The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain

Michal Shapira

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 Introduction: the war inside

twentieth century. Psychoanalysis helped make the modern democratic self in Britain.

Analysts operated within a historically specific configuration of childhood which they in turn helped to shape. Some background on the history of childhood and the early development of psychoanalysis as well as child psychoanalysis in Britain in the time leading up to our period is therefore essential. Indeed, as Philippe Ariès long ago established, childhood has a history.¹¹ In Britain, the modern concept of the child evolved mainly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Industrialization and urbanization, a new emphasis on the domestic sphere, and debates about compulsory schooling and child labor all contributed to a new awareness of childhood as a period detached from the world of adults. In contrast with previous eras, childhood was seen (at least in theory) as a period of education, and less of labor, and the child was often perceived as innocent and dependent. By the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as the health of children was gradually seen as vital to the future of the nation and empire, their bodies were increasingly subject to state intervention.¹² Child psychology, too, became a distinct area of study in the late decades of the nineteenth century and since then the child has also been increasingly made an object of scientific research and psychological inquiry.¹³ After World War I in particular, a time when psychology and psychoanalysis developed as disciplines, the mental health and psychology of children gradually became the focus of expert discussion.¹⁴ While psychoanalysis contributed to that shift “from bodies to minds,” its key role came right before, during and after World War II as it reified the child’s psyche and parental relationships as central to the normal development of the future adult citizen.¹⁵

¹¹ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage, 1962).

¹² Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare: Historical Dimensions, Contemporary Debate* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2003); Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (New York: Longman, 1995); Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1900–1939* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

¹³ See Riley, *War in the Nursery*, pp. 42–79.

¹⁴ Hendrick, *Child Welfare: Historical*, pp. 149–176.

¹⁵ Cathy Urwin and Elaine Sharland, “From Bodies to Minds in Childcare Literature: Advice to Parents in Inter-War Britain,” in Roger Cooter (ed.), *In the Name of the Child: Health and Welfare in England, 1880–1940* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 174–199; Nikolas Rose, *The Psychological Complex: Psychology, Politics and Society in England, 1869–1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985); Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1999, 2nd edn.). The literature on the history of the child in twentieth-century Britain is still a limited one, and scholars have concentrated their investigations on the period before World War II. See Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood*; Deborah Dwork, *War Is Good for Babies and Other Young*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03513-3 - The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain

Michal Shapira

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction: the war inside

7

It was between the 1930s and 1960s that psychoanalysis actually attained a significant social role in the specific historical making of a desired, functioning, “healthy” democratic individual self.¹⁶

Psychoanalysis was first introduced in Britain in the 1890s through the work of F. W. H. Myers, the founder of the British Society for Psychical Research, and through the writing of physician Mitchell Clarke and the psychologist-sexologist Havelock Ellis. Psychoanalysis had already attracted wide interest among medical professionals, anthropologists, and artists before World War I, but it increased greatly during the war and its aftermath, partially in relation to the phenomenon of shellshocked soldiers.¹⁷ The 1910s and 1920s were years of growth for British psychoanalysis mobilized in part by the enthusiasm of Ernest Jones (1879–1958), a Welsh neurologist and psychiatrist who started practicing psychoanalysis as early as 1905.¹⁸ Together with David Eder, a Jewish physician, early Zionist, and socialist,¹⁹ Jones founded the London Psycho-Analytical Society on October 30, 1913; it became the British Psycho-Analytical Society (BPAS) on February 20, 1919, after Jones dissolved the original Society. The International Psycho-Analytical Press and the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* were established in 1920. The London Clinic of Psycho-Analysis was founded in 1924 and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis was set up in the same year.²⁰ By 1925,

Children: A History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England, 1898–1918 (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1987); Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Ellen Ross, *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870–1918* (Oxford University Press, 1993). The literature on the child in the period of the 1930s–1960s is minimal. It is discussed mainly in a survey by Harry Hendrick and more extensively in Denise Riley’s book on psychological theories of mother and child: Hendrick, *Child Welfare: Historical*; Riley, *War in the Nursery*, pp. 42–80. See also Harry Hendrick, *Child Welfare: England 1872–1989* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 149–176.

¹⁶ See Nikolas Rose, *The Psychological Complex*, p. 190. My book therefore concentrates on these years and covers the period just before World War II and the years immediately following it, bridging existing historical scholarship that studies the war and postwar periods as separate eras.

¹⁷ After the Great War, an interest in the occult and psychoanalysis often went hand in hand. See Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 231.

¹⁸ Ernest Jones, “Reminiscent Notes on the Early History of Psychoanalysis in English Speaking Countries,” *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.* Vol. 26 (1945), pp. 8–9.

¹⁹ Edward Glover, “Eder as a Psychoanalyst,” in Joseph Burton Hobman (ed.), *David Eder: Memoirs of a Modern Pioneer* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1945), pp. 88–116.

²⁰ The Society, Clinic, and the Institute were in the same house at 96 Gloucester Place, London, until 1950, when the Institute moved to Mansfield House, New Cavendish Street in London. During the first fifty years of its existence about 3,090 patients had been psychoanalyzed for little or no fee under the auspices of the Clinic. See Pearl King, “Background and Development of the Freud–Klein Controversies in the British Psycho-Analytical Society,” in Pearl King and Riccardo Steiner (eds.), *The Freud–Klein*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03513-3 - The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain

Michal Shapira

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 Introduction: the war inside

there were fifty-four members in the Society from diverse professional disciplines – a characteristic of the British branch of psychoanalysis ever since. The press challenged the Society’s legitimacy at that time because it included both medical and lay colleagues, but Jones was instrumental in securing its professional status.²¹ In the interwar years, shellshock doctors, such as W. H. R. Rivers, used Freud’s theories very selectively, yet helped nevertheless with their dissemination.²² Oxford and Cambridge were centers of informal cultural interest in Freud.²³ In addition, the Bloomsbury Group, despite its complex relationship with psychoanalysis, contributed too to its spread during those years. From the Bloomsbury Group, James and Alix Strachey became psychoanalysts at the BPAS, as did Adrian Stephen, the younger brother of Virginia Woolf, and his wife Karin, a niece of Bertrand Russell. The first collected works of Freud were produced by Leonard and Virginia Woolf’s Hogarth Press. After World War II they were published as the Standard Edition, the official English translation edited by James Strachey.²⁴

Sigmund Freud himself did not directly treat child patients.²⁵ However, it was among psychoanalysts, and those in Britain in particular,

Controversies, 1941–1945 (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 10–11; Riccardo Steiner, “Jones, Ernest (1879–1958),” in *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference Books, 2005).

²¹ With his help, the British Medical Association recognized in 1929 that psychoanalysts are legitimate, special, and separate kinds of practitioners. See King, “Background,” pp. 12–13; “Report of Psycho-Analysis Committee,” *Supplement to the British Medical Journal* (29 Jun. 1929), pp. 262–270.

²² For example, W. H. R. Rivers, “Freud’s Psychology of the Unconscious,” *Lancet* Vol. 189 (16 Jun. 1917), pp. 912–914. The psychiatrist Henry Butter Stoddard also had a role in spreading psychoanalysis through his textbook *Mind and its Disorders: A Text-Book for Students and Practitioners*, as did Bernard Hart in his popular textbook *The Psychology of Insanity*.

²³ See Laura Cameron and John Forrester, “Tansley’s Psychoanalytic Network: An Episode out of the Early History of Psychoanalysis in England,” *Psychoanalysis & History* Vol. 2 (2000), pp. 189–256. John Maynard Keynes was also exposed to psychoanalysis at Cambridge and through the Bloomsbury Group: see Edward Winslow, “Keynes and Freud: Psychoanalysis and Keynes’ Account of the ‘Animal Spirits of Capitalism,’” *Social Research* Vol. 53 (1986), pp. 549–578.

²⁴ Kohon (ed.), *The British School*, pp. 24–50; Sally Alexander, “Psychoanalysis in Britain in the Early Twentieth Century: An Introductory Note,” *History Workshop Journal* Vol. 45 (Spring 1998), pp. 135–143; Perry Meisel and Walter Kendrick (eds.), *Bloomsbury/Freud: The Letters of James and Alix Strachey, 1924–1925* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); King, “Background”; Pearl King, “Biographical Notes on the Main Participants in the Freud–Klein Controversies in the British Psycho-Analytical Society, 1941–1945,” in King and Steiner (eds.), *The Freud–Klein Controversies*, pp. ix–xxv; Barbara Caine, “The Stracheys and Psychoanalysis,” *History Workshop Journal* Vol. 45 (1998), pp. 145–169.

²⁵ The exception is the indirect analysis of “Little Hans” conducted by the boy’s father with Freud’s help: see Sigmund Freud, “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy [1909],” *SE/PEP* Vol. X, pp. 3–149.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03513-3 - The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain

Michal Shapira

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction: the war inside

9

that the most innovative and influential theories of child psychology were developed.²⁶ The 1920s and 1930s were major decades for interest in child psychoanalysis and in new theories of the mother–child relationship. Work done by child-study pioneers Melanie Klein in Berlin and Anna Freud in Vienna contributed to the growing attention paid to psychoanalytic theories. Both women ended up in London; while Klein moved there in 1926 under more favorable political conditions, Anna Freud, along with her father and some of her extended family, fled there as Jewish refugees in 1938. Early theoretical disputes between Anna Freud and Klein began during the interwar period and would reach a climax during World War II in what became known as “the Controversial Discussions” in the BPAS. During the 1920s and 1930s, native British psychoanalysts such as Jones, Susan Isaacs, Joan Riviere, and others showed early interest in child psychoanalysis (and Klein’s ideas in particular), thus shaping the BPAS to have a particular interest in childhood. No isolated elitists, psychoanalysts were instrumental in popularizing psychoanalysis and helped raising public interest in it among teachers and parents.²⁷ Barbara Low, for example, a teacher and founding member of the BPAS, wrote a psychoanalytic book for mass consumption that ran into several editions starting in 1920. Low’s many public lectures appealed equally to a wide circle of educators.²⁸ Isaacs, an educational psychologist and psychoanalyst, also known by her pseudonym “Ursula Wise,” introduced psychoanalytic ideas in her popular columns for parents published in the journals *Nursery World* and *Home and School* between 1929 and 1940 and in additional widely circulated books on childcare.²⁹

Indeed, during the interwar years “Psycho-Analysis became a craze as well as a serious study.”³⁰ It was widely discussed among the general educated public in a wave of popular books that enjoyed considerable

²⁶ Riley, *War in the Nursery*, p. 72.

²⁷ Cf. Kurzweil, *The Freudians*, p. 31. Sigmund Freud’s own writings began appearing in English in 1909 (New York) and 1913 (Britain), with different translations spanning several editions. The Controversial Discussions are examined in Ch. 3.

²⁸ Barbara Low, *Psycho-Analysis: A Brief Account of the Freudian Theory* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1920).

²⁹ See press clippings of the DC/SI Papers of Susan Isaacs Collection at the Archives of the Institute of Education, London. The most popular texts were Susan Isaacs, *The Nursery Years: The Mind of the Child from Birth to Six Years* (London: Routledge, 1929); Susan Isaacs, *Intellectual Growth of Young Children* (London: Routledge, 1930); Susan Isaacs, *Social Development in Young Children* (London: Routledge, 1933).

³⁰ Charles Mowat, *Britain between the Wars 1918–1940* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 214. See also R. D. Hinshelwood, “Psychoanalysis in Britain: Points of Cultural Access, 1893–1918,” *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.* Vol. 76 (1995), pp. 135–151.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-03513-3 - The War Inside: Psychoanalysis, Total War, and the Making of the Democratic Self in Postwar Britain

Michal Shapira

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 Introduction: the war inside

success, and in magazines and novels.³¹ Journalists in the national press started using psychoanalytic vocabulary about inner life, regression, and emotional conflicts.³² At the end of 1922, the *Daily News* wrote, “We are all psycho-analysts now, and know that apparently innocent dreams are the infallible signs of the most horrible neurosis; and so we suppress our nightly divagations as feverishly as a murderer tries to remove blood from his shirt-front.”³³ In 1923, the *New Statesman* used very similar words: “We are all psychoanalysts now. That is to say that it is as difficult for an educated person to neglect the theories of Freud and his rivals as it would have been for his father to ignore the equally disconcerting discoveries of Darwin.”³⁴ In addition to pursuing psychoanalytic treatment of individuals, during the interwar years, analysts offered popular public lectures and study groups to medical and psychology students, social workers, teachers, parents, and those interested in party politics.³⁵ Among fiction writers and dramatists, some knowledge of psychoanalysis became essential.³⁶ Despite the existence of opposition to the new discipline from the church, the medical establishment, and some members of the public, by 1939, W. H. Auden was able to publish a memorial poem for Sigmund Freud saying, “if often he was wrong and, at times, absurd, to us he is no more a person now but a whole climate of opinion.”³⁷ Thus, even before World War II, psychoanalysis in various guises had a

³¹ For accounts focused on the popularization of psychoanalysis in Britain during World War I and the interwar period, see Sandra Ellesley, “Psychoanalysis in the Early Twentieth Century: A Study in the Popularisation of Ideas” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Essex, 1995); Dean Rapp, “The Reception of Freud by the British Press: General Interest and Literary Magazines, 1920–1925,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* Vol. 24 (1988), pp. 191–201; Dean Rapp, “The Early Discovery of Freud by the British General Educated Public, 1912–1919,” *Social History of Medicine* Vol. 3, No. 2 (1990), pp. 217–243; Graham Richards, “Britain on the Couch: The Popularization of Psychoanalysis in Britain, 1918–1940,” *Science in Context* Vol. 13 (2000), pp. 183–230.

³² Ted Bogacz, “War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England 1914–1922: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock,’” *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 24 (1989), p. 234.

³³ Quoted in Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain 1918–1939* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940), p. 103.

³⁴ Quoted in Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), p. 366.

³⁵ Archives of the British Psycho-Analytical Society (hereafter ABPAS): Annual Reports for 1933, 1934, and 1935; and Decennial Report, May 1926–May 1936, pp. 20–21. Analysts wrote and lectured on issues as diverse as psychoanalysis and education, childrearing, fashion, design, nursing, birth control, sterilization, war, art, film, crime, masculinity and femininity, and theatre.

³⁶ On Graham Greene’s psychoanalytic treatment, see Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*, Vol. I, 1904–1939 (New York: Penguin, 1989), pp. 92–116.

³⁷ W. H. Auden, “In Memoriam Sigmund Freud,” *Another Time: Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940), p. 118.