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Hitler and Murray's Hitler

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Henry A. Murray's "Analysis of the Personality of Adolph [sic] Hitler" dated October 1943¹ is useless as a tool for understanding the personality of Adolf Hitler. But it is an uncommonly instructive specimen of the modern wartime tendency to pathologize the enemy hit or miss.

Granted, Adolf Hitler was morally beyond the pale. Such was already the wartime Anglo-American consensus in 1943, based above all on his pretendedly preemptive wars launched with self-sanctified righteousness (about like George W. Bush's later), even while his decisive claim to infamy, the Final Solution, was still a state secret in Washington as well as Berlin. True too, he showed some signs of preparative behavior beginning about when Murray wrote. At no point,

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¹Henry A. Murray, *ANALYSIS OF THE PERSONALITY OF ADOLPH HITLER WITH PREDICTIONS OF HIS FUTURE BEHAVIOR AND SUGGESTIONS FOR DEALING WITH HIM NOW AND AFTER GERMANY'S SURRENDER* (1943) (on file with Cornell Law Library, Donovan Nuremberg Trials Collection, <http://library.lawschool.cornell.edu/donovan/hitler/>).

however, was he clinically insane, attractive as Murray's label of "paranoid insanity"² may have been and indeed may still be for distancing the monster from our normal, humane selves. Refuted by the rich psychiatric records of Hitler available since the Third Reich crumbled, that diagnosis was already groundless when Murray wrote. Murray's sources for it, all remote from their subject, ranged from a couple of able but ill-informed journalists (Konrad Heiden and John Gunther) all the way down to crackpot Otto Strasser, false witness Reinhold Hanisch, Hermann Rauschning's confected exchanges with Hitler, and Hitler's self-mythicizing *Mein Kampf*. They yielded a composite portrait of Hitler tantamount to a case of mistaken identity. Murray's analysis was thus vitiated at the core.

A full catalogue of Murray's misinformation would be as tedious to read as to compile. So let me just exemplify. Hitler is not a common Jewish name.³ Adolf of that name had no Jewish godfather.⁴ Adolf's father's mother was a housemaid in Graz, not Vienna.⁵ Authentic testimony on Adolf's father weighs decisively against the coarse, boastful bully that Murray needed.⁶ Adolf's mother-to-be ran off nowhere as a girl, let alone for ten years to Vienna.⁷ By no stretch of the medical imagination did she die "as a result of the press of aggressive dominance

²*Id.* at 12. Murray continued regarding Hitler's state, calling it "a complete semi-delusional system characteristic of paranoid schizophrenia." *Id.* at 147.

³*Id.* at 75.

⁴*Id.* at 5, 94.

⁵*Id.* at 94.

⁶Murray, *supra* note 1, at 9, 74, 95.

⁷*Id.* at 56-57.

and insult from the father.”⁸ Adolf was her fourth, not her third, child.⁹ That child was not “frail and sickly.”¹⁰ The tantrums thrown by him¹¹ are no more reliably on record than are any fits of yelling and weeping¹² or any later private collapses at Berchtesgaden.¹³ Only in pure (or impure) psychoanalytic guesswork did he observe parental intercourse¹⁴ or get caught playing dirty games at age twelve.¹⁵ His early experience of insult, humiliation, or wounded pride integral to Murray’s diagnosis¹⁶ is unknown to scholarship. He did have a close personal friend in his youth.¹⁷ He did not reject all his relatives after he left home.¹⁸ There is no credible evidence that he ever begged, shoveled snow, peddled his own postcards, or worked as a hod-carrier in Vienna.¹⁹ He moved to Munich in 1913, not 1912.²⁰ Only in one ludicrous second-hand account was he a “full-fledged masochist.”²¹ As a soldier he was content to remain a corporal²² and was

⁸*Id.* at 198.

⁹*Id.* at 57.

¹⁰*Id.* at 4.

¹¹Murray, *supra* note 1, at 8, 87, 88, 104.

¹²*Id.* at 5, 73, 137, 141.

¹³*Id.* at 15-16.

¹⁴*Id.* at 9.

¹⁵*Id.* at 6, 108.

¹⁶Murray, *supra* note 1, at 1, 2, 9.

¹⁷*Id.* at 12, 108.

¹⁸*Id.* at 6.

¹⁹*Id.*, at 58-59.

²⁰*Id.* at 59.

by no means markedly “subservient to his superior officers.”²³ His gas poisoning of 1918 was real, not hysterical, and it induced temporary blindness, with no deafness or mutism for good measure.²⁴ The future Nazi Party existed well before Hitler met Anton Drexler.²⁵ Never did he admire the aristocracy or despise the lower classes.²⁶ No “master of crude metaphor,”²⁷ he was rather a master of pungent folk diction. “All of Hitler’s writings and reported speeches exhibit a disorganization of ideas and verbal expression which at times verges on the pathological”²⁸: what verges on the pathological is such wild hyperbole. And so on and on. Murray’s Hitler was crazy enough but just wasn’t the real McCoy.

But didn’t Murray predict Hitler’s suicide? He did indeed--as one possibility out of nine²⁹ (including madness, martyrdom, staged-managed assassination, refuge abroad, and even a natural death³⁰), and in terms that were ultimately belied by the fact. When confronted with failure, wrote Murray, “Hitler will lose faith in himself and in his destiny, and become the helpless victim of his repressed conscience, with suicide or mental breakdown as the most likely

²¹Murray, *supra* note 1, at 5, 18.

²²*Id.* at 75.

²³*Id.* at 4, 19, 131, 136. Murray states that Hitler’s subservience “disgusted” his comrades. *Id.* at 131.

²⁴*Id.* at 4, 25, 87, 131, 146.

²⁵*Id.* at 59. However, Murray’s “Post-War History” is a correct account. *Id.* at 133-34.

²⁶Murray, *supra* note 1, at 5, 128.

²⁷*Id.* at 7.

²⁸*Id.* at 141.

²⁹*Id.* at 29-33.

³⁰*Id.* at 223-27.

outcome.”³¹ Or again, “at the highest point of success [sic] . . . the personality may collapse under the flood of its own guilt feelings. It is, therefore, quite possible that Hitler will do away with himself at whatever moment German defeat becomes sufficient enough [sic] to destroy the fiction of Fate which has shielded him from the violence of his own guilt.”³² And yet again in this tryingly repetitious tract: “As soon as successful offensive action becomes impossible, the man will become a victim of a long-repressed superego, a condition which will lead to suicide or mental breakdown.”³³ In the event, Hitler on the contrary vindicated his evil work to the bitter last. Worse for Murray’s foresight, he shot himself not “in the most dramatic possible manner,”³⁴ but unceremoniously. Beside such a misconception, it hardly matters that “successful offensive action” was already impossible for Hitler by the time Murray wrote. Collateral misfire prophecies by Murray abound, such as that “Hitler will become less and less of a leader; others will take over.”³⁵ Of a piece with Murray’s overall analysis of Hitler are his suggestions for curing Germany of Hitler.³⁶ Happily, Germany cured itself.

Reginald Phelps, a pioneer of exacting Hitler research, once had me to lunch with Murray, by then emeritus, at Murray’s request to discuss Murray’s project of analyzing Hitler’s metaphors at book length. The lunch suffered as Reginald’s and my own jaws dropped into our soup bowls when it emerged that Murray knew no German and meant to base his psycho-

³¹Murray, *supra* note 1, at 13.

³²*Id.* at 80-81.

³³*Id.* at 194.

³⁴*Id.* at 31-32, 225-26.

³⁵*Id.* at 223.

³⁶ Murray *supra* note 1, at 38-53.

philologico-historical study on an English translation of *Mein Kampf*. To the best of my knowledge, this non-contribution, unlike its predecessor of 1943, never got off the ground. I mention it because, though unrealized, it shows up sharply in miniature, as in a cautionary tale, the arrant foolishness to which the scholar armed with a just cause and a recondite technical vocabulary is prey.