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Psychology for Medievalists: Examining Theoretical Boundaries and Potential Opportunities

by
Daryl Hendley Rooney[1]

"Psychology without historical insight dehumanizes the individual into a 'case'; history without psychological insight drowns the individual in a sea of social forces or elevates him to mythical heights."
Cushing Strout, "Ego Psychology and the Historian," 295

Abstract

Today's scholars are ever availing of interdisciplinary approaches in their studies of the Middle Ages. The marriage of disciplines has led to new insights into the medieval past and as such, it is appropriate to explore the benefits which may be afforded to us through the use of psychological theories and concepts.

The historian has many roles, one of which is to ruminate upon and propose the reasons and causes of past events and how they occurred through social, political, economic, and cultural processes. The involvement of men and women in these events is often reduced to psychological motivations by historians without explicitly flying the flag of psychological discourses. As such, historians are amateur psychologists in a way. However, the use of psychological approaches has created much concern and scepticism amongst scholars, and for good reason. Norbert Elias's attempt to historicise psychoanalytic insight, and the popularity of psychohistory in the 1970s and 1980s are just some of the examples of the questionable attempts at consolidating psychological theory with history.

The application of any theoretical discourse warrants serious questioning about the applicability of such an approach and the potential benefits and pitfalls. Hence, one might ask: how does one create an appropriate rationale for applying psychological theories to

[1] Daryl Hendley Rooney, B. A. English and History (UCD), M. A. Medieval Studies (UCD); Affiliation: Independent scholar at time of submission; Email: daryl.rooney@ucdconnect.ie.

history? Does such an approach become anachronistic and presumptuous with regards to the medieval mind? With these questions in mind, this paper begins with a review of histories which held psychological approaches at their core, exploring the methodologies of Lucien Febvre, Norbert Elias, Lloyd deMause and Peter Gay. Thereafter, the paper examines more recent scholarship which has used psychology to elucidate new understandings of the emotions and their expression, as well as how neurobiology has helped scholars to pinpoint the cause of a certain medieval scribe's tremulous writing. Finally, the theoretical implications as well as the potential benefits of adopting psychology in the study of medieval history are discussed. This is supported with a brief exploration of how one might approach the construction of the Irish Other in Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hiberniae* from a psychological framework.

Keywords
Psychology; medieval history; historiography; construction of the self and Other

Introduction

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century there has been an increase in the use of interdisciplinary approaches in historical studies. However, one discipline which has so far failed to be used extensively within these interdisciplinary approaches is psychology. The use of psychological theories and concepts in the study of history is nothing new. In the 1920s–1940s, Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch of the Annales School had both asserted the need for the explicit use of contemporary theories of psychology in the study of history.[2] Despite their assertions,

[2] The Annales School of historians—its namesake deriving from the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*—operated out of France and was co-founded by Lucien Febvre (1878–1956) and Marc Bloch (1886–1944). Their works focused upon social themes rather than those which were usually political or economic in basis. The Annales had a profound impact upon the historiography and intellectual thought of France in the twentieth century. For a discussion, see Jacques Revel, introduction to *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, eds Jacques Ravel and Lynn Hunt, trans. Arthur Goldhammer et al. The New Press Postwar French Thought Series, Volume 1 (New York: The New Press, 1995), 1–63. For examples of Febvre's and Bloch's works, see Lucien Febvre, *Martin*

medievalists and historians in general tend to avoid using psychological theories and concepts in their works. However, for the interested medievalist there abounds many new and exciting projects being undertaken by scholars who have availed of psychology in various ways, examples of which this paper will explore.

This paper discusses psychology and its use in the field of history, surveying the Annales School and psychohistory, as well as the history of emotions. It re-examines the theoretical issues associated with the use of psychology and psychoanalysis in the study of history, with a focus on medieval history.[3] Moreover, it does not attempt to merely encourage scholars to adopt psychological approaches in their academic endeavours; on the contrary, this paper aims to instigate the reader to further reading of the psychological literature with the intention to spark further-reaching impacts. For example, by developing an understanding of the psychological literature, one's understanding of even seemingly banal social and cultural interactions, traditions and norms are questioned in a self-conscious manner. Such a psychologically-informed approach acts by querying which psychological schemata may potentially be functioning when one interacts with external phenomena. In other words, psychology provides one with an auxiliary frame of reference regardless of one's discipline.

Luther: A Destiny), trans. Roberts Tapley (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1930; Febvre, *Le Rhin: Problèmes d'histoire et d'économie* (Paris: A. Colin, 1935); Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society, Volume 1: The Growth of Ties of Dependence*, trans. L. A. Manyon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); and Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam. (New York: Vintage Books, 1953).

[3] As a theory, psychoanalysis may be defined as "a theory of interpretation which calls into question the commonsense facts of consciousness, which it maintains can only be grasped after the event. To this degree psychoanalysis is itself a theory of knowledge in which the notion of a plain objectivity susceptible to a true-false analysis is open to question." See Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 2.

From Annales to Psychohistory

Psychology has been availed of by many theorists, philosophers, and critics to explore the psychosocial fabric of our world. As previously stated, Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch of the Annales School undertook historical investigations which, unlike most of their contemporaries, were consciously aligned with psychology. Bloch utilised collective psychology in his works, whereas Febvre used a form of psychosocial history which was inherently non-psychoanalytic.[4] In his studies of the emotions, Febvre's methodology was inherently psychological. His works on the study of sensibility—or emotions and their expression—insisted that emotions could be understood psychosocially; in other terms, emotions had both individual psychological and social dimensions.[5] Febvre's studies of the emotions, for example his article "La sensibilité et l'histoire: Comment reconstituer la vie affective d'autrefois?" (1941), are regarded as the precursors to the current studies associated with the history of emotions.[6] In his essay "History and psychology", Febvre expressed the need for a "historical psychology" to be developed through the cooperation of historians and psychologists.[7] Febvre saw that one of the main failings of historical studies was the frequent reliance on psychological anachronism. This form of anachronism assumes that past peoples interpreted their experiences and world with the same mental schemata that modern people possess. This is an incredibly important point, as one cannot assume that human consciousness operates by "downloading" base mental schemata which in turn react the same to different contexts across different time periods. So, for example, one cannot assume that

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[4] For those of the Annales, the *history of mentalities* provided a new insight into areas of thought which "often found no direct expression at all," according to John Tosh, for example, the emotional, the instinctive and the implicit. See John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of History*, 6th edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 216.

[5] Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (W. W. Norton: New York, 2015), 103.

[6] Lucien Febvre, "La sensibilité et l'histoire: Comment reconstituer la vie affective d'autrefois?" *Annales d'histoire sociale (1939-1941)* 3, no. 1/2 (Jan.–Jun. 1941), 5–20.

[7] Lucien Febvre, *"History and psychology,"* in *A New Kind of History*, ed. Peter Burke (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973.

the way in which modern people react to the weather is similar or identical to how people in the Middle Ages would have reacted. In comparison to Febvre, his contemporary the German sociologist Norbert Elias had developed an almost polar-opposite model for psychosocial historical analysis. Elias aligned his work with developmental psychology in his studies of the European *habitus* or 'second nature'. In *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (1939), Elias examined how post-medieval standards of social etiquette could be traced back to psychological motivations associated with Freud's concept of the 'super-ego', thus showing that the self had a history which had gradually developed since the fourteenth century.[8] The self-enclosed individual developed as the threshold of shame lowered, allowing for greater amounts of self-control. The psychoanalytically based study of Elias ultimately reduced people of the Middle Ages to classifications of an infantile or emotionally immature nature. Moreover, as Lynn Hunt affirmed:

> Elias's pejorative depiction of the Middle Ages revealed the downside of a developmental historical psychology: the attempt to elaborate on the parallel between the individual and broader cultural or social development encouraged scholars to classify earlier times as infantile, childish, or immature.[9]

The reservations of historians in the adoption of hardline psychological approaches are in part due to works such as Elias's *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* as well as the reductive conclusions associated with crowd psychology. From the late-nineteenth and into the early-twentieth century, crowd psychology enjoyed a popular stint throughout Europe, having a great influence upon the social sciences and humanities.[10] The independent scholar

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[8] Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The Development of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (original German edition, 1939; New York: Urizen Books, 1978).

[9] Hunt, *Writing History*, 102–103.

[10] While crowd psychology was assailable and understandably so, it is the precursor to what we now call *social psychology*. Although Le Bon is regarded as the starting point when it comes to crowd psychology, social psychology's origins may be dated from the late seventeenth century and the German *Völkerpsychologie* (literally "People Psychology") of the early nineteenth century, See Graham Richards, *Putting Psychology in its Place: Critical Historical Perspectives*, 3rd edn (East Sussex: Routledge, 2010), 185–186.

Gustave Le Bon is one of the best-known writers associated with the genre. Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1895) reduced group actions to what was called the "crowd mind." The study functioned as a sort of crude Mirror for Princes which could instruct society's "natural rulers" to manipulate the masses and direct the instinctive energies of the crowd. He concluded that the individual within a crowd environment loses all agency as an individual and is effectively "no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will."[11] As such, the work dictated that in social-political circumstances such as the French Revolution, the individual becomes irrational and "descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation."[12] In contrast, the British Marxist historian George Rudé insisted that Le Bon's conclusions were flawed. Instead, Rudé proposed that the behaviour of crowds was best understood in sociological, not psychological terms.[13] Crowd continues to live in infamy: in 2010, the former Director of the British Psychological Society's History of Psychology Centre, Graham Richards, referred to *The Crowd* as "one of the most sinister modern texts, second only to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*."[14] While Le Bon's works were of concern to historians in the early twentieth century, historians in the post-war period would meet new theoretical challenges to the methodological status quo in the form of "psychohistories." Decades after Febvre's and Elias's psychosocial histories, historians or more specifically, "psychohistorians", began explicitly using psychoanalysis to inform their readings of the past. Psychohistory—or the study of the psychological motivations of past events—was pioneered by the American psychohistorian Lloyd deMause from the late 1960s.[15] In 1968, deMause wrote to the Association for Applied Psychoanalysis (AAP) outlining a 29-page proposal which suggested

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[11] Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 12–13.

[12] Ibid., 13.

[13] See George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730–1848* (New York: Wiley, 1964).

[14] Richards, *Putting Psychology in its Place*, 186.

[15] For a survey of the foundation of psychohistory and deMause's role, see Joseph F. Campbell, "Psychohistory: Creating a New Discipline," *The Journal of Psychohistory* 37, no. 1 (Summer 2009), 2–26.

that a Centre for Research in Psychogenealogy be founded under the auspices of the AAP.[16] In that 29-page document, "Psychogeneology" was described as the "new science of evolution of the psyche from generation to generation" and defined as the "the science of evolution of parent-child relations as the basic cause of man's personality."[17] DeMause's works have largely focused upon the history of childhood, especially with regards to how child abuse evolved in advanced nations.[18] However, the fact that psychoanalysis was taken as *truth* and universal in psychohistories, led to many historians bypassing psychohistory altogether. Moreover, DeMause did not help the psychohistorical cause when he stated that "the relationship between history and psychohistory is parallel to the relationship between astrology and astronomy."[19] The almost formulaic conclusions of psychohistories led to David E. Stannard referring to the field as a form of "cultural parochialism."[20] While deMause's studies have met unyielding opposition, and for justifiable reasons, one must give credit where credit is due. DeMause's journal, *The Journal of Psychohistory* has been publishing quarterly since 1973, with over 800 articles published to date. Despite the fact that the content of the journal may be deemed speculative at best, the journal has challenged historians' approaches to their discipline and if nothing else, has forced historians to be more conscious of their methodologies and assured in their conclusions. Psychohistorians have approached numerous and varied topics emanating from late antiquity to the modern period. One of the most controversial subfields of psychohistory is "psychobiography."

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[16] Campbell, "Psychohistory," 2.

[17] Lloyd deMause, "Psychogeneology: New Directions of Research in Applied Psychoanalysis," undated. Personal Collection of Lloyd de Mause, cited in Campbell, "Psychohistory," 2.

[18] See Lloyd deMause, *The history of childhood* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); and Lloyd deMause, "On Writing Childhood History," *The Journal of Psychohistory* 16, no. 2 (1988), 35–71.

[19] Lloyd de Mause, "The Independence of Psychohistory," in *Psycho/history: Readings in the Method of Psychology, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. Geoffrey Cocks and Travis L. Crosby (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 50.

[20] David E. Stannard, *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 30.

The psychobiographical studies associated with psychohistory have provided interesting—albeit speculative—results.[21] Freud himself wrote what is considered to be the first psychobiography, which examined Leonardo da Vinci's life and was entitled *Leonardo Da Vinci, A Study in Psychosexuality* (1916). In this work, Freud claimed that Leonardo's departure from art and his venture into science was a result of a neurotic regression to his infantile past. He also stated that Leonardo's artistic genius could not be explained by psychoanalysis; however, he did contend that he located the source of Leonardo's artistic obsessions in an early fantasy about a "vulture" said to symbolize the artist's desire for his mother.[22] In response to the growth of psychobiographies in the 1970s, Donna Arzt in her paper, "Psychohistory and Its Discontents" (1978), explored the genre of psychobiography in order to gauge the benefits and pitfalls of psychoanalytic approaches to biographical works. Arzt concluded that "with the limitations of the genre kept in mind, students of the biographical method should be able to open up new areas of inquiry through the cautious and judicious use of psychohistory."[23]

Scholars have long debated psychohistory's recognition as an independent field of scholarly enquiry and its distinction from the discipline of history. On the one hand, psychohistorians would maintain that their methods and scholarly objectives set them apart from conventional historical methodologies. On the other hand, detractors of psychohistory would say that it is a pseudo-discipline since psychohistories rely primarily upon speculative conclusions regarding an individual's or group's psychological motivations.[24] One of the serious objections to the field is based on the issue of transposing the psychoanalytic approaches of Freud onto people of the past without realising that such an application is then, as previously mentioned, a

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[21] For examples, see Alexander L. George and Juliette L. George, *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* (New York: Dover Publications, 1964); and Bruce Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

[22] Donna Arzt, "Psychohistory and Its Discontents," *Biography* 1, no. 3 (Summer, 1978), 2.

[23] Ibid., 30.

[24] There has been much written to detract from psychohistory as a discipline, but for an especially vitriolic criticism, see Stannard, *Shrinking History*.

psychological anachronism. While the works of many psychohistorians failed to sway the approaches of historians more generally, largely due to the associated theoretical implications, some scholars managed to adopt psychological discourses without being cast out to drift on the psychohistory raft.

In general, deMause's works failed to receive critical acclaim within the wider academic community and were largely contained and appreciated within the cadre of psychohistorians; however, Peter Gay's works were well received both within and without academia, attested by the fact that the American Historical Association (AHA) bestowed unto him their Award for Scholarly Distinction in 2004. Gay's scholarship explored topics which varied from the Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, to Weimar culture; however, Gay is perhaps best remembered for his works which explored psychoanalysis as a legitimate tool for exploring history. His best-selling biographical work, *Freud: A Life of Our Time* (1988), used the Freud Archives to provide a new insight into the life of Sigmund Freud by contextualising his life, as Gay himself states:

> I have placed Freud and his work within their various environments: the psychiatric profession he subverted and revolutionized, the Austrian culture in which he was compelled to life as an unbelieving Jew and unconventional physician, the European society that underwent in his lifetime the appalling traumas of war and totalitarian dictatorship, and Western culture as a whole, a culture whose sense of itself he transformed out of all recognition, forever.[25]

For Gay, psychoanalysis gives a legitimate theoretical discourse for framing historical enquiries. In *Freud for Historians*, Gay provided an interesting and constructive rebuttal against anti-Freudian historians by systematically addressing the arguments of detractors one by one. His discussion of the issues which are associated with the often-hermetic methodology of psychoanalysis provides a thoughtful analysis and survey of the reasons why historians have for so long avoided the psychoanalytic method. In his conclusion, Gay provides an albeit brief

[25] Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (London: Papermac, 1995), xvii.

outline of a 'total history' informed but not at the behest of psychoanalysis, he asserts:

> Psychoanalytic history, then, is at its most ambitious an orientation rather than a speciality. I cannot reiterate often enough that psychoanalysis offers the historian not a handbook of recipes but a style of seeing the past. That is why Freudian history is compatible with all the traditional genres—military, economic, intellectual—as well as with most other methods. … To be steeped in Freud does not compel historians to see only the child in the man; they can also observe the man developed out of the child."[26]

Here, Gay is addressing one of the main issues associated with the use of psychoanalysis in historical studies: that psychoanalysis will become *the* method of examining the past. However, as he himself points out, the ideal means of using such a methodology is to place it in an auxiliary position to existing theoretical discourses.[27] However, the adoption of psychoanalysis is not as straightforward as simply using it in addition to other methodological frameworks. It requires historians to change the way they do history, forces them to dispense with prized convictions and challenges them to revise their favoured and long held conclusions.[28] Gay was relatively successful in fighting for the cause of using psychology in history, but despite his efforts historians continued to avoid the theoretical minefield that psychological discourses represented. However, in the 1990s a field of historical enquiry which drew upon psychological literature began to grow in popularity: the history of emotions.

The History of Emotions

In the last decade, the history of emotions has become somewhat of a stalwart when it comes to the adoption of psychological scholarship in the study of history.[29] The history of emotions as a field may trace its

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[26] Gay, *Freud for Historians*, 210–211.

[27] Ibid., 210.

[28] Ibid., 212.

[29] This may be reflected by the fact that there are several academic centres for the history of the emotions dotted across the globe, notably: ACCESS The Amsterdam Centre for

genesis to the work of Lucien Febvre, namely *Histoire de Sensibilités*. The history of emotions is more nuanced than just studying the emotions in history. The field explores emotions as learned phenomena, rather than a biological manifestation inherent in our mental makeup. In the last three decades, historians such as Barbara Rosenwein, William Reddy, Juanita Ruys and Jan Plamper have weighed in on the historical research on the self and emotions.[30] In her 2010 article, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions," Rosenwein explored the methodological issues associated with the writing of a history of emotions. The issues associated with the "Universalist"/"presentist" views of the emotions are comparable to the issues brought forth by adopting psychological approaches to the study of history more generally. On the one hand, "Universalist" views place the emotions as inherently universal and identical in expression across cultures and across time. On the other hand, "presentist" views assert that today's emotions were the emotions of the past and will remain those of the future.[31] Rosenwein has challenged these views and affirmed that to understand emotions and their expression throughout history, one cannot simply avail of psychological materials, but also draw upon sociological sources and entertain the possibility that emotions are social constructs.[32]

Cross-disciplinary Emotion and Sensory Studies; ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions (1100-1800) whose directorate and national administration is at The University of Western Australia, with nodes at the Universities of Adelaide, Melbourne, Queensland and Sydney; Center for the History of Emotions, Max Planck-Institute for Human Development, Berlin; Les Émotions au Moyen Age (EMMA); and The Emotions Project: The Social and Cultural Construction of Emotions: The Greek Paradigm, Oxford.

[30] For studies on the history of emotions, see Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions," *Passions in Context: Journal of the History and Philosophy of the Emotions* 1, no. 1 (2010) http://www.passionsincontext.de/?id=557; William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Juanita Ruys, "But Were They Talking About Emotions? Affectus, Affectio, and the History of Emotions," *Rivista Storica Italiana* 128, no. 2 (2016), 521–543; and Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[31] Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions," 4.

[32] Ibid., 5–10.

The use of psychological and neurobiological literature in the field has paid dividends. Paul Ekman and Wallace F. Friesen's article (1971), "Constants across Cultures in the Face and Emotion", has become an integral source for understanding the facial expressions associated with emotions.[33] However, Ekman and Friesen's article has largely contributed to the assumptions of "Universalist" views. Scholars of the history of emotions have expanded their frame of reference to include the most recent findings of neurobiological research. For example, the findings of studies using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to examine the brain systems involved in the perception of facial expressions and their associated emotions are being incorporated into histories of the emotions.[34] Similarly to Gay in his calls for a "total history" which involved psychoanalysis as an auxiliary theoretical framework, Rosenwein concluded that:

> Just as issues of gender are now fully integrated into intellectual, political, and social history, so the study of emotions should not (in the end) form a separate strand of history but rather inform every historical inquiry. Thus, for example, a history of Germany between the two world wars should include a discussion of not only the economy, the relations between men and women, the ideologies of communism, fascism, and liberalism, and so on, but also the emotions that were privileged—and denigrated—during that period by various dominant and marginal groups."[35]

Rosenwein, like Gay, affirms the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in the study of history. Historical enquiries can of course be monodisciplinary, but by drawing upon auxiliary disciplines one gains new and varied perspectives which brings history closer to the ideal of a "total history" which elucidates the events and developments of the past and brings into focus a sense of continuity over time. Moreover, as Hunt has stated, the study of the emotions is important as emotions "show up in historical documents more readily than any other

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[33] Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, "Constants across Cultures in the Face and Emotion," (1971) *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1, no. 2, 124–39.
[34] Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions," 2–4.
[35] Ibid., 24.

expression of selves."[36] Regardless of whether one believes emotions to be universally recognisable, different outcomes arise out of different contexts and the presence of individuality no doubt affects how emotions are expressed in a given circumstance.

The merging of psychology and neurobiology with history, as illustrated by the history of emotions, has provided new and exciting understandings of how emotions were expressed between people, across different cultures and time periods. Through the use of neurobiology, scholars have been afforded new ways to understand the nuances of the brain and how it affects our expression and perception of emotions. Furthermore, neurobiology has also influenced how we understand the senses and bodily movement. At present, these findings are gradually being incorporated into historical studies—an example of which will now be discussed.

Neurobiology and History

Aside from theories related to psychological motivations, an understanding of how the brain works on an anatomical and a physiological level may also help historians to understand the past. By drawing upon neurobiological literature, a palaeographer, for example, may avail of current understandings of tremors to ascertain why the handwriting of some scribes deviated from the norms, such as the thirteenth century glossator, the Tremulous Hand of Worcester. In the case of the Tremulous Hand, the pioneering work—based in neurobiology—of Deborah Thorpe and Jane Alty has examined the medieval scribe's tremor. Thorpe states:

> People have always been fascinated with him [the Tremulous hand of Worcester]; but this is the first time his writing has been investigated from a joint neurological and historical perspective. To our knowledge, this is the first time medieval handwriting has been analysed by a neurologist with a specialist interest in movement disorders.[37]

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[36] Hunt, *Writing History*, 109.

[37] Deborah E. Thorpe, "Solving the mysterious handwriting of a medieval scribe," https://www.york.ac.uk/c2d2/news/2016-17/tremulous-hand/.

Thorpe and Alty's study availed of current understandings of tremors to elucidate which type of tremor likely afflicted the scribe. Using methods to measure the tremor frequency, Thorpe and Alty concluded that the evidence balanced towards essential tremor. This finding was based on evidence of a fine amplitude, regular frequency tremor, with a frequency of at least 6–8 Hz and a unidirectional axis that was present during action and exhibited rapid fluctuations in severity.[38] Moreover, they affirmed that the lack of evidence of "cognitive decline, amplitude decrement, micrographia, ataxia, or increased nib pressure, is consistent with this diagnosis."[39] While neurobiological research provides new and improved ways for medical practitioners to diagnose and treat neurological diseases and degenerative disorders such as Parkinson's disease, historians and other scholars of the social sciences and humanities may be afforded new understandings of the human condition which we may not otherwise reach if we remain monodisciplinary. Yet, despite the evidence so far suggesting that there are benefits to adopting psychological approaches in the study of the Middle Ages, there are theoretical concerns for medievalists which must be addressed.

Theoretical and Practical Concerns for Medievalists

For many historians, the application of *psychology* to history is synonymous with the application of *psychoanalysis* to history; however, they are not identical terms, which is illustrated by the previous example of Thorpe and Alty's research. Psychoanalytic theory is often reduced to Freudian analysis, yet psychoanalytic criticism is wider in scope and detail than many historians are aware of.[40] One only needs to

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[38] Deborah E. Thorpe and Jane E. Alty. "What type of tremor did the medieval 'Tremulous Hand of Worcester' have?" *Brain: A Journal of Neurology* 138, (2015), 3127.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Freudian analysis also known as *classical psychoanalysis*, is the therapeutic method which Sigmund Freud founded at the turn of the twentieth century. This method was based on the assumption that a patient's *neuroses* or ills were a result of unconscious mental defences against inappropriate urges which dated back to a patient's early childhood. In order for a patient to overcome his/her neuroses, they must lower their mental defences in order gain an insight into buried desires, and subsequently, try to understand why he/she buried them. For a discussion of psychoanalysis and

undertake a brief survey of the dichotomy between rival psychoanalytic theories to see the true breadth of the varying schools of psychoanalysis. When medievalists examine the actions of men and women of the past, they often pin their actions to base psychological desires and motivations, for example, the desire to acquire power and control. However, as mentioned previously, if one is to examine the actions of medieval people and reduce them to mental schemata which are supposedly universal to the human condition, then what is the purpose of historical enquiry with regards to the systematic study of the development and change of human nature over time? The study of the medieval past is troublesome as historians are at the behest of the available evidence, textual, material or otherwise. So, unlike psychoanalytic therapy whereby a psychoanalyst may turn to an analysand's verbal slips (also known as "Freudian slips") or analyse their dreams, medievalists cannot speak to the dead. Despite the theoretical implications, there are reasons to remain positive.

In terms of the positive outcomes which may be afforded to medievalists who decide to venture into psychological theory, a change in perspective and understanding of how one links correlation to causation may be the most basic of benefits. Garnering an understanding of the potential reasons and motivations causing a person, medieval or otherwise, to act the way they do can alter how one perceives and understands social, cultural, economic and political processes throughout history. Moreover, one may also introspect in new ways, and question anew one's attitude towards ethics and morality and their effects upon the aesthetic process of writing history, and the associated epistemological questions. The effects of such discourses on the historian on a personal level may seem self-serving and wholly unprofessional in terms of the desired outcomes which a

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psychotherapy more broadly, see Henry Gleitman, Alan J. Fridlund and Daniel Reisberg, *Psychology*, 6th edn (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 696–714; and Miller Mair, *Between Psychology and Psychotherapy: A Poetics of Experience* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989). For expositions on psychoanalytic approaches to and interpretations of literature, see Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 131–168.

historian might define at the beginning of their historical enquiries. One must not forget that historians, like all of humanity, will always be biased at their core. The fact that a historian chooses a defined topic or period for examination and/or a theoretical discourse quite explicitly reflects their partiality. Naturally, the extent to which internal biases or prejudices operate and affect the integrity of a historical work varies. On the one hand, biases and prejudices have the potential of affecting the veracity of an historical work minimally, for example, it may have accurate scholarship but be too confined in terms of temporality, subject, geography, and/or theoretical scope. On the other hand, it may have a drastic effect upon the veracity of the historical account, for instance, a work which is bigoted or racist.[41] Having a basic grasp of the psychological literature causes one to be more introspective and conscious of one's academic enterprise. Aside from the epistemological changes that psychological discourses bring, there are more basic issues which arise as a result of applying psychological theories, especially those emanating from psychoanalysis, to medieval history.

One of the primary issues of using psychoanalysis in the study of the medieval past arises from the viability of post-mortem psychoanalysis. It is already undoubtedly difficult to attempt to psychoanalyse an analysand in the present let alone attempt such an analysis on a person or social group from centuries or even millennia past.[42] While many historians may be wary of the ambivalences and contradictory interpretations of psychoanalysis, one must remember that both psychoanalysis *and* history undoubtedly share an intrinsic trait, which is a professional commitment to scepticism.[43] As such, it is necessary to state that the point is not to insist upon the mass merging of psychoanalysis or psychology in general with history, rather, the point is to dismantle the borders which separate the disciplines and encourage the teaching and recognition of psychology in historiography.

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[41] For example, see the libel case of David John Cadwell Irving vs Penguin Books Ltd, Deborah E. Lipstadt. [2000] EWHC QB 115. http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/QB/2000/115.html#5.

[42] The term "analysand" refers to an individual who is undergoing psychoanalysis.

[43] Gay, *Freud for Historians*, 211.

Constructing the Self and Other

Having provided a brief survey of the antecedent attempts at merging psychology with history, and addressed some of the theoretical and practical concerns associated with the use of psychology, it is necessary to provide an example of how one might go about using a psychological rationale when approaching medieval history. With regards to the study of identities, current psychological literature examining constructions of ingroups and outgroups in relation to the self-concept have yielded interesting results which could benefit medievalists, specifically with regards to the construction of the self and Other.[44] Our *self-concept*—who we want to be, how we wish to be perceived, and how we perceive ourselves—governs how we interact with the social world around us and conversely, that the social world influences and defines who we think we are.[45] Robert Kegan, in his book *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (1982), stated with regards to the construction of the self and Other antithesis that "the idea of a construction directs us to the activity that underlies and generates the form or thingness of a phenomenon."[46] Furthermore, Kegan noted that the process by which one differentiates the self from the Other—or subject-object—"emerges out of a lifelong process of development: a succession of qualitative differentiations of the self from the world, with a qualitatively more extensive object with which to be in relation created each time."[47] However, the ability for us as individuals to respond consciously to such psychological phenomena and change our social interactions in turn is subject to debate. The idea of a "self" which may be understood as a sort of enduring core personal identity, has been discussed within psychological literature since the late nineteenth century, but the idea

[44] "Ingroups" and "outgroups" refer to the social groups in which an individual either self-identifies with (ingroups) or in contrast, the social groups which an individual does not identify with (outgroups).

[45] See Gleitman et al., *Psychology*, 370–384.

[46] Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 13.

[47] Ibid., 77.

of a "self" can be traced much further back in time.[48] By the end of the Enlightenment, the idea of an autonomous, private self had gradually ascended to dominance, reinforced by Romanticism. Before this time, the idea of such individual autonomy, especially with regards to one's agency and destiny, was firmly thought to be in the hands of God, or the Gods, depending on one's religion.[49] One may also see this perception reflected in the negative attitude of predestinarian Calvinists and puritans to the self— hence *"self*ish."[50] As intellectual understandings changed and developed from the early modern to modern period, so too did theoretical frameworks for understanding the self.

The rise of social history in the twentieth century gave rise to new histories which focused on social groups from a bottom-up perspective and in many ways rejected psychological analysis.[51] Given their namesake, social histories provide social explanations, which explore various social processes, to validate the motives of ordinary people. The French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault opted to emphasise the influence of social factors on the construction of the self. Foucault's social histories explored how bodies rather than individual selves were constructed by social processes, namely

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[48] See William James, *Principles of Psychology*, Chapter X "The Self" (New York: Henry Holt, 1890).

[49] Richards, *Putting Psychology in its Place*, 172.

[50] Ibid. Predestinarian Calvinists believe that God exercises control over the eternal destiny of people, with some attaining salvation by grace, while those who remain are predestined to receive eternal damnation for their sins. See Westminster Assembly, *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines* (Edinburgh: Reprinted by Evan Tyler, Printer to the King, 1647), III. 1: "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy Counsell of his own Will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass. Yet so, as thereby neither God the Author of sin, nor is violence offered to the wil of the Creatures, nor is the Liberty or contingency of second Causes taken away, but rather established."

[51] The field of social history is varied and far-reaching. It is difficult to define but one might say that it focuses on "real life" and "ordinary" people, rather than major events and elite historical characters. Within social history there are numerous subfields, including African-American history, Gender history, history of the family, and Gender history. For an example of a social history emanating from the Annales school see Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou. Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294–1324* (London: The Folio Society, 2005).

disciplinary mechanisms. For him, individual consciousness was not involved in the construction of individuals. On the contrary, individual bodies were shaped by institutions such as schools, prisons and factories.[52]

In her recent work, *Writing History in the Global Era* (2015), Lynn Hunt dedicated a chapter to the issue of rethinking society and the self in light of the intellectual changes which have occurred as a result of globalisation. Hunt asserted that "the "iron curtain" between historians and psychology that Harvard historian William L. Langer lamented in 1957 remains standing."[53] Taking Hunt's comments into consideration, my recent M. A. thesis applied such an approach to Gerald of Wales's construction of the self and Other in his *Topographia Hiberniae*.[54] Availing of theoretical frameworks from social psychology, the thesis set about examining the ways in which Gerald of Wales constructed a disparaging image of the Irish Other in order to justify the Norman invasion of 1169 AD.[55] Gerald's construction of the Irish Other rests upon several platforms of definition: religion, economy, culture, political and social structure. Gerald uses these platforms to point out the flaws of the Irish people. Yet while they were described as a flawed people by Gerald, they were not beyond saving. Hence, the invasion precipitated not only the occupation of Ireland, but also the civilizing of

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[52] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

[53] Hunt, *Writing History*, 107.

[54] Daryl Hendley Rooney, "Gerald of Wales: Constructing the Irish Other in the *Topographia Hiberniae*," (M. A. diss., University College Dublin, 2016), available upon request.

[55] Gerald of Wales (1146–1223) was a medieval ecclesiastic and historian from Pembrokeshire, Wales. For studies of his life and works, see Henry Owen, *Gerald the Welshman* (London: Whiting & Co., 1889); Michael Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis: The Growth of the Welsh Nation* (Aberystwyth: (Publisher NA) 1972); Brynley F. Roberts, *Gerald of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982); Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales, 1146-1223* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Robert Bartlett, "Gerald of Wales (c.1146–1220x23)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn, Oct. 2006. For surveys of scholarship on Gerald, see: E. A. Williams, "A bibliography of Giraldus Cambrensis c.1147-1223," *National Library of Wales Journal* 12, (1961), 97–140; and D. Walker, "Gerald of Wales: a review of recent work," *Journal of the of the Church in Wales* 24, (1974), 13–26.

a "barbaric people," namely the Irish. Gerald's ethnographic descriptions of the Irish are homogenising, but a question worth asking is: does Gerald consciously create a homogeneous image of the Irish or is it a result of unconscious motivations? In order to answer this, one might avail of concepts from social psychology, which are related to the construction of the self and Other.

The concept of *out-group homogeneity* (OHE) in social psychology refers to "the tendency to perceive out-group members as relatively similar to one another and in-group members as relatively more heterogeneous or dissimilar."[56] Thomas M. Ostrom and Constantine Sedikides (1992) have shown that the OHE is a fundamental issue in intergroup relations and acts within a variety of group identities and social settings. Furthermore, by homogenising information which we receive, it allows us to then infer certain things about information which we deem to be similar or identical. The human brain constantly draws inferences and correlations with the information that it receives. Henry Gleitman et al. (2004), note that by drawing correlations the human brain "helps us to understand the cause-and-effect fabric of our world."[57] While such functions can help a person to avoid danger, for example by associating smoke with fire, it can also lead to generalised understandings of the world and people around us. However, it is important and interesting to note that such mental schemata, despite their undesirability, are at times inadvertent. The study of social categorisation and the process of intergroup bias by Perdue et al., (1990) proffers an example of such inadvertence.[58] The study examined participants repeating pairings of pronouns with nonsense syllables and were asked to rate the pleasantness of each nonsense syllable. The study found that the syllables which had been paired with self-referential pronouns such as "we", "us", and "ours", were deemed more pleasant than those which indicated otherness, for

[56] Stephen J. Read and Darren I. Urada, "A Neural Network Simulation of the Outgroup Homogeneity Effect," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 7, no. 2 (2003), 146.
[57] Gleitman et al., *Psychology*, 382.
[58] Charles W. Perdue et al., "Us and them: Social categorization and the process of intergroup bias," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 59, no. 3 (Sept., 1990), 475–486.

instance "they", "them", and "theirs".[59] In Gerald's *Topographia Hiberniae*, such reductive thinking renders the Irish as intrinsically homogeneous. However, while such psychological concepts can inform one's understanding of how humans construct and maintain their self-concept, they in no definitive manner answer the question of whether Gerald was conscious of his homogenisation of the Irish Other. Yet, it is important for one to question *why* humans often make reductive and generalised statements about others as it helps one to understand both oneself and others on a deeper, more objective level. This allows for the breakdown of arbitrary perceptions one might harbour of others and provides new means to engage with people of both the past and present.[60]

Conclusion

While facts and figures are and always will be a mainstay of all historical enquiries, they are not the defining element of what it means to write, read, and ruminate upon history. Both Bloch and Febvre knew this and changed their methodologies accordingly. Their methodologies changed how historians approached history, yet the use of contemporary psychological discourses has not been widely adopted. While many reasons may be proposed to explain the lack of historical studies adopting psychological discourses, the reductive scholarship associated with psychohistory may be considered a driving force for such reservation. For medieval history, and history in general, to hold any relevance for modern man and woman, it must be contextualised against the culture, society, politics, economics, geography, and the psychology of its associated era and made relevant for us today. It is undoubtedly difficult to provide a survey of the scholars who have in one way or another availed of psychological approaches in their works as most, if not all, historians are amateur psychologists.

When we avail of psychological theories and concepts in relation to the constructions of the self and Other, we begin to see that

[59] Ibid.
[60] Hendley Rooney, "Gerald of Wales," 26.

the mental schemata of men and women both past and present are comparable, with the contexts which influence such constructions changing over time and between periods. Often, one is not conscious of the latent prejudices which one may harbour. Moreover, this suggests that prejudices are deeply-rooted constructs which we are often not conscious of, cropping up when the situation or circumstance calls into action our preconceived attitudes. The topic of Otherness is especially salient in our present times as the current growth of hyper-nationalistic and populist agendas in politics and culture should be of concern to those involved in the social sciences and humanities. As such, one must strive to expand one's theoretical repertoire through interdisciplinary approaches, which will provide new perspectives and understandings which may be brought to bear on one's scholarly endeavours. The case for the use of psychology has been brought forth, so be conscious of such approaches—the benefits and the pitfalls. And embrace the potential opportunities. As such, the historian must ask his- or herself: can psychological theories and concepts be availed of by practising historian broadly speaking? Or should they remain in their present position as "the historian's unacknowledged principal aide" as Gay asserted?[61]

While the use of psychological discourses in medieval history is open to debate, having such discourses in mind will promote new considerations of how we understand, for example, constructions of the self and Other; mental illness in the Middle Ages; the expression of emotions; and the history of sexuality. As a discipline, history allows one to question the very nature of humankind across lands, cultures, and time. At its core are questions of great epistemological magnitude, and yet, as time passes, humanity is no closer to writing the definitive history of what it means to be human. If history is to remain a continuum of publications which aim to elucidate our shared and individual pasts as people, then is not right to avail of psychology—the discipline which aims, above all else, to understand human behaviour based on the mind and its functions?

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[61] Gay, *Freud for Historians*, 6.

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