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Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of  
Psychoanalysis (review)

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Republic. Gerson is not always as clear as he might be on how this came about, but the general outlines of the process do come into focus. The 1870s and 1880s witnessed the emergence of new town-based elites, men of more modest social origins than in the past. Did they have a different vision of what local life meant? It's hard to say, but erudition seems to have mattered less to them. They spoke a new vocabulary, touting not so much the particularities of the *pays* as the virtues of the *petite patrie*. Pedagogy had mattered to the notables of old but not as much as it did to the new men who wanted to teach a hometown consciousness that would lead citizens to a greater love of nation. Such a municipalist groundswell might have troubled the elitist Guizot, but not the more democratic-minded men of the Third Republic who embraced it. On occasion, the new localism took a Nationalist turn with the accent on rootedness, on a conception of local identity which froze out outsiders in a way inconsistent with the Republic's putative universalism. But even the Nationalist spoke in a populist idiom that would have made the erudite of bygone days uneasy. Long ago, Daniel Halévy characterized the coming of the Republic as *la fin des notables*. In matters of localism, there was an end of the notables as well.

Gerson sketches in a particular historic epoch, the period 1830 to 1880, when men of means and erudition enjoyed the upper hand in provincial life. They were people of liberal views on the whole, firm believers in learning and localism, and in these beliefs they were not so different from their homologues elsewhere in Europe, whether the Honoratioren of the German hometowns or the Dissenting city fathers of the English Midlands. But they did differ in one respect: in their participation in a nation-wide, state-sponsored network of erudition. There was a statist tinge to French liberalism. It is a point Pierre Rosanvallon<sup>1</sup> has been hammering away at for years, and Stéphane Gerson's elegant and learned book fleshes it out from a novel angle and with a fine-grained attention to nuance and ambivalence.

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## ENDNOTE

1. See, most recently, Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le Modèle politique français. La société civile contre le jacobinisme de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris, 2004).

*Secrets of the Soul. A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis.* By Eli Zaretsky (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004. xv plus 429 pp. \$30.00).

Eli Zaretsky has set himself a very ambitious goal: to bring together developments in psychoanalysis in the West with wider cultural changes and show a relationship between the two. Although his book is liberally sprinkled with interesting information, on the whole he does not succeed in his project. Moreover, Zaretsky's errors of detail cast doubt on the accuracy of his broader syntheses.

Culturally and socially, Zaretsky's book is a study of the "second industrial revolution," that period in the West after 1880 when nations had completed their major transportation and communication networks, had begun to use electricity as the most flexible source of power for manufacturing, transportation, and illumination, and had begun the application of science to industrial processes and to the creation of new and improved consumer and industrial products.<sup>1</sup> "The organization of [Zaretsky's] book mirrors the trajectory of the second industrialization: part one (1890–1914) evokes its origins, part two (1919–1939) its Fordist heyday, and part three (1945–1976) its transformation into the Keynesian welfare state and its decline" (pp. 8–9).

Zaretsky says he will demonstrate both how psychoanalysis enhanced the second industrial revolution and in turn was enhanced by it. While the first industrial revolution emphasized community relations, the second put a stress on a "singular personal life," precisely that which psychoanalysis also made possible. Throughout his book, Zaretsky is fond of religious metaphors and comparisons; one of his early ones is that psychoanalysis enabled the second industrial revolution in the way that Calvinism enabled the first (*pace* Max Weber).

Now to some of the problems in Zaretsky's narrative. Here is a passage from a chapter entitled "Gender, Sexuality, and Personal Life." I am citing it in order to demonstrate that where Zaretsky claims connections, I see none:

Freud's idea of a personal unconscious, and of a distinctively individual constellation of sexual wishes that first take shape in relation to one's parents, resonated with still broader currents. The Freudian unconscious appeared along with such inventions as the typewriter, film, the moving-picture camera, and the first mass daily newspapers read by both men and women. The new media had, along with crime, two main topics: wars, such as the Spanish-American War, the Boer War, and the Moroccan crisis; and sexual scandals, such as the 1907 Eulenberg scandal in Germany, which revealed that the Kaiser was surrounded by a coterie of homosexuals, and the 1889 Cleveland Street scandal in England, which concerned the discovery of a homosexual brothel allegedly run by several lords (p. 63).

There are many other passages, particularly those attempting to connect Fordism (mass production and mass consumption) and psychoanalysis, that rest on sweeping generalizations so that one can only wonder: are they true? do they make sense?

Clearly Zaretsky has read across a wide variety of disciplines in order to write a book of synthesis. His research is impressive. Unfortunately, and perhaps understandably, he has been unable to master all the fields he attempts to cover. From my area of scholarship, I can see quite a few blunders; I imagine, therefore, experts in other areas could point out inaccuracies as well. These errors inevitably cast doubt on the validity of Zaretsky's generalizations.

Let me give a few examples. In a chapter on the dilemmas of absorption and marginality for psychoanalysis, Zaretsky proposes that "the dialectic of absorption and marginality also reflected the uneven development of Europe and the United States" (p. 66). This was manifested in "the psychiatric professions" (p. 67). It is in this context that Zaretsky commits a colossal error. Discussing psychiatry in Europe, he writes about the famous Emil Kraepelin (1856–1926): "Kraepelin's fame rested on his distinction between dementia praecox [today

termed schizophrenia], which he deemed the result of external causes (traumas) and possibly treatable through psychological techniques, on the one hand, and hereditary and incurable diseases of the brain, on the other" (p.67). The truth is that Kraepelin was a firm believer in the somatic origins of dementia praecox, even establishing laboratories to discover the origins, and had almost nothing but scorn for "psychological techniques," attacking in particular psychoanalytic "investigation [as] the representation of arbitrary assumptions and conjectures as assured facts, which are used . . . for the building up of always new castles in the air. . . ."2

Later, trying to make a sociological point, Zaretsky writes that "the composition of Freud's circle reflected the shift in the makeup of the middle class from state-dependent civil servants to self-employed professionals" (p. 69). No such thing. The composition of Freud's circle of self-employed professionals (almost entirely Jewish) was owed to the fact that in Austria a Jew could not hold a state job unless he made a conversion to Christianity. So Jewish men, after graduating from the university, joined the "free" professions, turning to careers that were not dependent upon official, state-sponsored jobs.

Furthermore, Zaretsky writes that "the psychologists of the second industrial revolution invented the entire nomenclature of twentieth-century psychopathology" among which was hysteria (pp. 21–22). "Casting doubt on the somatic model, it seemed to compel a psychological explanation" (p. 23). This last statement is not true. Most physicians clung to an organic explanation of hysteria in the early period Zaretsky is talking about (1860s–1880s).

Lastly, I present a mistake Zaretsky makes in basic modern European history. Talking about shell-shock in World War I (1914–1918), he gives as evidence the experience of a French medical student "across the Maginot line" (p. 121). But the defensive Maginot line was not even begun until 1929.

There are many other errors, particularly concerning Freud and the psychiatrists Eugen Bleuler and Carl Gustav Jung, that I could comment on, but I think I have made my point.

Zaretsky attempted a grand and original interpretation. But *Secrets of the Soul* is obscurely written—sometimes demanding the reading of a section more than once after which one is still left searching for meaning. It is difficult to walk away from *Secrets* with a clear understanding of many of Zaretsky's syntheses of psychoanalysis and culture. I think the strongest part of his book is an interesting and sometimes original history of psychoanalysis, which minus its errors, could stand well on its own as a separate work.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., "Industrial Revolution," *The Reader's Companion to American History*. Houghton Mifflin. [http://college.hmco/history/readerscomp/rcah/html/ah\\_045300\\_industrialre.htm](http://college.hmco/history/readerscomp/rcah/html/ah_045300_industrialre.htm)
2. Emil Kraepelin, *Dementia Praecox and Paraphrenia* (Bristol, England, 2002), p. 250. (Original edition published in Edinburgh: E.& S. Livingstone, 1919.)