

BAKUNIN AND THE PSYCHOBIOGRAPHERS:

THE ANARCHIST AS MYTHICAL AND HISTORICAL OBJECT

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Biographies typically rely more heavily upon personal documents than do other kinds of history, but subtleties in the use of such documents for psychological interpretation have long been recognized as pitfalls for misinterpretation even when contemporaries are the subject of study. Psychobiography is most persuasive and successful when its hypotheses and interpretations weave together the individual with broader social phenomena and unify these two levels of analysis with any necessary intermediate levels. However, in practice psychobiography rarely connects the individual with phenomena of a social-psychological scale.¹ Psychobiography is probably the only field of historical study more problematic than psychohistory in general, principally because questions of interpretation are so much more difficult. Russian revolutionaries and have been one of the groups most fascinating to historians for the application of psychological approaches, and among these revolutionaries Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin stands out as the most captivating and attention-getting personality. A comparison of two recent psychobiographies of the nineteenth-century Russian anarchist Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin reveals some key problems of psychohistorical interpretation and also sheds light on important issues in the historiography of the great anarchist.²

1. Introduction: The Psychological Tradition in Modern Bakunin Historiography

A brief review of the general trends in Bakunin historiography illuminates the significance of psychological interpretations, particularly in the English-language literature. It is

¹ The author (email: rnc@alum.mit.edu) is senior research fellow in the Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Carleton University, Station H, Box 518, Montreal, Quebec H3G 2L5, Canada. This article is based on a paper presented to the IVth World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Harrogate (U.K.), 21–26 July 1990. I wish to thank Raymond Grew, Zachary T. Irwin, and Thomas S. Schrock for their comments on an earlier draft of this article. For two attempts to inventory such levels, see H.N. Hirsch, "Clio on the Couch," *World Politics*, 32, no. 3 (April 1980): 407-08; and Saul I. Harrison, "Is Psychoanalysis 'Our Science'? Reflections on the Scientific Status of Psychoanalysis," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 18, no. 1 (January 1970): 129. The classic example of success in such a project is Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Norton, 1958).

² These are Aileen Kelly, *Mikhail Bakunin: A Study in the Psychology and Politics of Utopianism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Arthur P. Mendel, *Michael Bakunin: Roots of Apocalypse* (New York: Praeger, 1981). References to these works in the text below are given parenthetically.

broadly possible to distinguish three traditions in this historiography: that of the Romance languages (dominated by French), that of the Slavic languages (dominated by Russian), and that of the Germanic languages (dominated by English). The national literatures within each of these categories share specific features, and these sets of distinctive aspects distinguish the three broad categories from one another. Works of synthesis are of course hampered by the fact that despite a half-dozen attempts by a half-dozen editors in a half-dozen languages over the course of a century, Bakunin's *complete* works have never been collected and published, though the project under way at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam since 1961 fills many important gaps.³

It is not surprising that the Romance languages have been the kindest to Bakunin, since his activity in the 1860s and 1870s found its most sympathetic echo, into the twentieth century, in Spain, Italy, and French-speaking Switzerland. Objective historical scholarship in Italy on Bakunin was impossible between the wars for political reasons, and archives there are still being combed for primary sources. Letters surrounding his meetings with Garibaldi were published in the early 1950s, and some previously published works from Bakunin's Italian period were collected and republished in the 1960s. With respect to Bakunin's influence on the origins and early development of Italian socialism, Ravindranathan's English-language monograph, however, supersedes all previous work.⁴ Also for political reasons, the Spanish language offers little in way of distinctive Bakunin historiography. The wide and serious francophone literature has occasionally been too *uncritical* of, or uninterested in, Bakunin's activities, though there is wide serious scholarship in the literature, which tends, however, to avoid an evaluation of his personality, which is the focus of this paper..

Literature in the Slavic languages means, most significantly, literature in Russian. Before the end of the Second World War, the only significant work outside Russian was some Czech work published between the wars about Bakunin's activities around the time of the 1848 All-Slav Congress. That was, however, superseded in the 1950s by a Polish compendium of primary sources that included a long and still authoritative introductory essay. Aside from that work, literature on Bakunin produced in Central and Eastern Europe since 1945 is mostly limited to the publication of primary sources without synthetic interpretation of Bakunin's life or personality. The exception to this is, again, a substantial body of Polish literature focused on Bakunin's activities in the early 1860s, when he championed Polish nationalism from London, travelled several times to Paris, and sailed to support the 1863 insurrection, only to dock in Sweden because it was already suppressed while he was still at sea.

³ Pierre Péchoux, "Bilan des publications," in *Bakounine: Combats et débats*, [edited by Jacques Catteau] (Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1979), pp. 45-59, remains the best survey of the extremely disparate state of the corpus of Bakunin's published writings. See also his "Bibliographie," *ibid.*, pp. 241-47. Also useful for its commentary of the various editions of Bakunin's works in different languages is Paul Avrich, "Bakunin and His Writings," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 10 (Winter 1976): 591-96.

⁴ T.R. Ravindranathan, *Bakunin and the Italians* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988).

The Russian literature is most copious in the first three decades of this century and is of extremely high quality, although this quality degraded with the onset of the Stalin school of historiography in the Soviet Union generally. Bakunin's *persona* strongly influenced not only the Russian revolutionary movement but also Russian literature. Turgenev modelled the figure of Rudin on Bakunin, in his novella of that name, and a well-known polemic in the 1920s turned on the question whether Stavrogin, in Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, was also Bakunin. The latter question was resolved with the conclusion that the figure was modelled, rather, on Nechaev. Indeed Bakunin served as model for at least half a dozen literary figures in half a dozen Russian *romans à clef* between roughly 1860 and 1930.⁵ Scholarly literature on Bakunin disappeared in Russian until the 1960s, when the period of his Siberian exile in the 1850s became the object of strictly scientific and documentary study. In the 1930s, an interesting monograph on *Bakunin and the Oedipus Complex* was published in Serbo-Croatian by one I. Malinin, who anticipates some of Arthur Mendel's work.⁶

The literature on Bakunin in Germanic languages is dominated by English. For political reasons, little about Bakunin was published in German for decades this century, starting with the interwar period. Max Nettlau's invaluable but almost indecipherable and often uncritical manuscript of several thousand pages was completed, in German, and deposited by him in major European and American libraries in the first decade of this century. A small Swedish literature concentrates on the months Bakunin spent in Stockholm in 1863-64 following the suppression of the 1863 revolt in Poland. The English-language literature is quite varied in quality, but a dominant historiographic trend verges on slander and privileges psychological interpretations. This article focuses on that tradition, as represented by two relatively recent psychobiographies. For both authors, Bakunin's relations with Marx and Nechaev are key points to the argument, and demonstrate moreover the authors' respective strengths and shortcomings. The next section therefore concentrates on these matters.

2. Key Links and Weak Links: Bakunin's Relations with Marx and with Nechaev

A key indication of the status and seriousness of the two authors' psychological arguments, is given by the differences in their treatment of the Bakunin-Marx conflict and the Bakunin-Nechaev relationship. Mendel's analysis of the Bakunin-Marx conflict is an integrated part of his overall psychological interpretation. This interpretation is truly psychoanalytical, in that it seeks to establish structural similarities among Bakunin's relations with different sets of psychological objects. Mendel holds that Bakunin projected adolescent patterns of familial interactions onto Marx and the International. Specifically, he argues that Bakunin renounced the

⁵ See, for example, the inventory in M.S. Al'tman, "Russkie revoliutsionnye deiateli XIX veka -- prototipy literaturnykh geroev," in *Istoriia SSSR*, 1968, no. 6 (November-December), esp. p. 131.

⁶ I. Malinin, *Kompleks edipa i sudba Mikhaila Bakunina* (Belgrade, 1934). Compare Patrick P. Dunn, "Belinski and Bakunin: A Psychoanalytical Study of Adolescence in Nineteenth-Century Russia, *Psychohistory Review*, 7 (no. 4, 1979): 17-23., where Bakunin is treated as a case of arrested adolescence.

exercise of power throughout his anarchist adult life because of a predisposition, inherited from his childhood, against anything that would threaten paternal omnipotence. This argument, which relies heavily upon the selection and sequencing of citations, is undergirded by a series of logical steps:

- a) He argues that a particular phrase or set of phrases has a particular psychoanalytic significance in a given context.⁷

[In] a striking image Bakunin used in letter to his "intimate" Richard ...[he wrote that the *International*] is a "*mother*" to us, while we are only a branch, a *child*." (p. 310)⁸

- b) He asserts a similarity between how the elements of these psychological objects are related and how, at another time in another context, another set of psychological objects are related.

The last thing [Bakunin] could tolerate was genuine control. It was only from a safe, "free," chaste distance that he--the "*child*"--could "compete" with Marx for the "*mother*" International, that he could attack all that *Marx* stood for, as he had attacked from afar all that his *father* and the equally "blind" *Tsar* had stood for. ... Public, explicit *authority* was still "the most dangerous and repulsive thing in the world." (p. 329)

- c) He asserts an analogous psychodynamic between the second set of objects as between the first set of objects.

Through a sequence of substitutions, ... the *International* ... came to symbolize for [Bakunin] the "body," *virile power*, his mask of omnipotence. ... Virile leadership, however, was just what was forbidden him: to try to acquire a powerful "body" through joining with and controlling the "*mother*" International meant to recreate the very danger that he had been running from all his life. (p. 333)

- d) He reintroduces the original phrase or text (out of its original context) as evidence for the newly postulated psychodynamic between the second set of objects.

⁷ This and the following three block quotations are all from Mendel at the pages cited. All words inside quotation marks are Mendel's citations of Bakunin's expression, *except* "father of the International" in the last block quotation, which is Mendel's own phrase. All emphases are added by the present writer to help explicate Mendel's technique of generating hypotheses on analogical cognitive structures through the use of psychoanalytic theory.

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To campaign vigorously against Marx's authority was one thing [for Bakunin]; to practice power, *to organize and direct an International, as Marx--the "father of the International"--did*, was something else again, and something unthinkable for Bakunin. ... Moreover, and more essential, were he to supplant Marx, he would *no longer be a "child" within the "mother" International*, he would be *a man in possession of that mother*, always "the most *dangerous and repulsive* thing in the world." (p. 390)

This argument, which depends upon juxtaposing phrases lifted from Bakunin's writings at different times in his life, and reinterpreting that juxtaposition according to a pre-established framework, seems almost plausible when compared with what can only be called Kelly's negligence.

Kelly's argument on the Bakunin-Marx conflict is biased by systematic fallacies, of the sort we have seen earlier, in her treatment of both primary and secondary sources. Her conclusions on the Bakunin-Marx conflict are unfounded; only their marriage with the misuse of psychopathological jargon relates them to her broader psychological case about Bakunin. She argues that Bakunin misled and betrayed Marx, undermining and destroying the International. Her argument contains several internal contradictions. For example, she asserts that when Bakunin and Marx met in London in November 1864, Bakunin "was impressed with the strength of the international working class organization that Marx had formed" (p. 174). This is improbable: the organization had been founded less than two months earlier, and its growth curve needed a bit longer to take off. Kelly further asserts that Bakunin was "so impressed that (as is clear from his subsequent letters to Marx) he took on some specific obligations to further the work of the International in Italy[, but] ... he appears to have done nothing to fulfill these promises" (p. 174). Yet just a few pages later, Kelly asserts that "it was through [Bakunin's] Alliance that the Italian working class movement joined the International in large numbers" (p. 187). These two arguments cannot both be valid at the same time.

In fact, Kelly's claim that Bakunin assumed obligations to Marx concerning Italy does not stand up to scrutiny. The only documents she cites in support are "his subsequent letters to Marx": of which there are two. Inspection of them reveals no evidence to sustain her contention. One of the letters, which Bakunin wrote in December 1868, contains no reference to Italy or to these putative obligations. In the other letter, a brief note sent from Florence in February 1865, Bakunin apologizes for not answering an earlier letter from Marx, and he describes the difficult conditions in Italy under which his revolutionary work is proceeding. Although Bakunin makes no mention of the International, it is possible to infer that he was excusing himself for failing to execute some unmentioned promise.⁹ Kelly's argument follows that line; she withholds important evidence that renders it suspect. This well-known evidence is the following. Marx, immediately after meeting Bakunin in late 1864, he wrote to Engels that "I liked him very much better than before," and that "he is one of the few persons whom I find not to have retrogressed

⁹ For the two letters, see *Materialy dlia biografii M. Bakunina*, edited and annotated by Viach. Polonski, 3 vols. (Moscow-Petrograd: Gosizdat, 1923-33), 3:136-39.

after sixteen years, but to have developed further."¹⁰ As Carr noted in his own biography of Bakunin, which is on balance unsympathetic to the anarchist, Marx's comments on Bakunin in this letter make *no mention* of "the First International, whose affairs are discussed by Marx at length in the earlier part of the same letter." Had Bakunin made any undertakings to Marx in 1864 with respect to the International in Italy, then Marx would most likely have mentioned them in that context to Engels. Carr observes correctly that the first time Marx gave the version of events that accuses Bakunin of perfidy was 1869, i.e., after the conflict with Bakunin inside the International had broken out into the open. That version, Carr correctly concluded, is "open to grave suspicion, being manifestly designed to magnify the turpitude of Bakunin's subsequent attack on the International by emphasizing his obligations to it."¹¹

Nothing has come to light in the half century since Carr wrote to change this verdict, yet Kelly chooses to rely exclusively on the version given by Marx for the first time in 1869. Her conclusion requires (1) acceptance of an unsupported hypothesis that she asserts to be confirmed by Bakunin's own letters, which do not in fact do so; and, at the same time, (2) neglect of disconfirmatory evidence from Marx himself, evidence available to any reader of the first full-length biography of Bakunin in the English language published a half-century ago. It is odd that so learned a scholar as Kelly, should, at so crucial a juncture, use so specious a device.

Kelly's discussion of the notorious tract *Catechism of the Revolutionary* is equally delinquent. The authorship of this text has been disputed since its very discovery. Kelly is the only modern scholar who attributes it entirely to Bakunin. She dismisses with a laconic footnote Cochrane's exhaustive study of internal and external influences on the text's composition, writing (p. 314, n. 24) that "[his] arguments for attributing authorship of the pamphlet to Nechaev betray a tenuous knowledge of Bakunin's writings." (Cochrane does not attribute the *Catechism* exclusively to Nechaev.) Kelly correctly notes that the tract's "comparison of Russian bandits with the comrades of Karl Moor [a principal character in Schiller's play *The Robbers*] would not come naturally to the primitively educated Nechaev." She thereupon asserts this (p. 271) as evidence for Bakunin's sole authorship of the whole document -- without even mentioning Cochrane's attribution of this very phrase, and for the identical reason, *to the poet Ogarev!*¹² Kelly writes that Pomper, who is hardly sympathetic to Bakunin, reaches conclusions similar to Cochrane's. Pomper's arguments differ from Cochrane's even as they lead him independently to a very similar

¹⁰ Marx to Engels, 4 November 1864, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, 39 vols. in 43 (Berlin: Dietz, 1956-68), 31:9-16; citation at p. 16.

¹¹ E.H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (London: Macmillan, 1937), p. 307.

¹² Stephen T. Cochrane, *The Collaboration of Nechaev, Ogarev, and Bakunin in 1869: Nechaev's Early Years*, Osteuropastudien der Hochschulen des Landes Hessen: Ser. 2, Marburger Abhandlungen zur Geschichte und Kultur Osteuropas 18 (Giessen: W. Schmitz, 1977), pp. 149-52. Because Cochrane denies any role of Herzen in the pamphlet's composition, it is unlikely that he wanted simply to spread the authorship around. N. Pirumova, "M. Bakunin ili S. Nechaev?", *Prometei*, no. 5 (1968): 168-81, reports uncorroborated testimony (by Enisherlov) that the ideas expressed by the *Catechism* actually originated within Russian student revolutionary cells, and that the document is actually neither Bakunin's nor Nechaev's but rather a collective work for the editing of which Bakunin assumed responsibility.

conclusion.¹³ Kelly appears to believe that her criticism of Cochrane obviates addressing Pomper.

Kelly asserts that "Steklov's reasons for attributing the pamphlet to Bakunin still carry much more conviction than Cochrane's arguments" (p. 314, n. 24), and she seems to believe that that is the end of the subject. However, she does not even summarize Steklov's argument. Nor does she ask whether any influences in Steklov's environment may have colored his argument.¹⁴ In fact they did. When Steklov wrote on Bakunin and Nechaev during the two decades following the Bolshevik revolution, studies of Russian history in the Soviet Union were themselves frequently political and polemic. A participant-observer of Soviet historiographic debates during those two decades testifies that Steklov sought to rehabilitate Bakunin in the Bolshevik Pantheon by "modernizing" his political thought and attributing to Bakunin ideas that he did not have.¹⁵ It thus appears that Kelly not only ignores evidence of which she must be aware, which disproves her argument on the Bakunin-Marx conflict. She also ignores how Steklov's motivations could may have affected his own treatment of evidence on the Nechaev affair.¹⁶

The Nechaev affair is key to Kelly's overall interpretation of Bakunin. She devotes her whole final chapter to it and depends upon it to sustain her psychological argument. For Mendel the Nechaev affair is less central. He devotes a brief appendix to his long book to it, and diagnoses an approach-avoidance ambivalence toward power, rooted in an unresolved Oedipal conflict. Ascertaining the authorship of the *Catechism* is less central for Mendel, because the Nechaev affair is almost incidental to his psychoanalytic hypothesis about Bakunin. Mendel observes that "the essential parts of the *Catechism* are entirely consistent with Bakunin's views," but he judges (p. 319) that "[f]rom the approach followed in this study, many statements throughout the *Catechism* do seem quite inconsistent with Bakunin's character." He thus comes down on the side of Pomper and Cochrane, and against Kelly, in ascribing principal authorship to Nechaev.

¹³ Philip Pomper, "Bakunin, Nechaev, and the 'Catechism of the Revolutionary': The Case for Joint Authorship," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 10, no. 4 (Winter 1976): 535-51.

¹⁴ In another instance, Kelly asserts (p. 277) that "there is truth in Steklov's assertion that Bakunin was the instigator of the whole Nechaev affair"; but Steklov asserts only that Bakunin was the "initiator" (*initsiatorom*). See Iu. Steklov, *Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin: Ego zhizn' i deiatel'nost', 1814-1876*, 4 vols. (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1926-27), 3:439. Rhetorical devices such as this, when used repeatedly, cease to be minor semantic points.

¹⁵ V. Varlamov (pseud.), *Bakunin and the Russian Jacobins and Blanquists as Evaluated by Soviet Historiography*, Mimeographed Series no. 79 (New York: Research Program on the U.S.S.R., 1955); reprinted, minus the valuable annotated bibliography, in Cyril E. Black (ed.), *Rewriting Russian History: Soviet Interpretations of Russia's Past*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), chap. 11.

¹⁶ Kelly's omissions are all the more odd in view of her passionate criticism of the view that Bakunin was "passionately opposed in theory and practice to all dictators and all élites." Reosrtng to *argumentum ad hominem* against editor Arthur Lehning of the *Archives Bakounine*, she does not hesitate to assert that his "motives for ignoring [evidence contradictory to this thesis] can only spring from the genuinely Bakunist faith that it is possible by an effort of will to transform reality into what one would wish it to be" (p. 241). Yet as the examples given here show, Kelly herself consciously omits evidence contradictory to her thesis from her citations of primary sources.

3. Lessons for the Marriage of Psychology to History

The shortcomings of the two psychobiographies are curiously complementary. Although Kelly paints Bakunin's cultural setting well, she implicitly denies that it produced a millenarianism with distinguishing characteristics. Yet Mendel is able to demonstrate that Bakunin's millenarian tendencies were indeed distinct from other millenarianisms by outlining a theory of Bakunin's psychodynamics. A separation between questions of historical method and questions of psychological method sheds light on the differences in approach and in interpretation between the two biographers.

3.1. Historical Method, or *Kto Vinovat?*: Problems with the Use of Sources in Biography

Biographies rely more heavily upon personal documents than do other kinds of history, and even when the subject of study is contemporary the pitfalls that these documents present for psychological interpretation have long been recognized.¹⁷ The principal problem with applying contemporary psychological concepts to an individual from another era is the possibility that the psychobiographer's own culturally conditioned categories of analysis are inappropriate to the earlier era's categories of experience. Only extensive historical research that establishes a cultural basis for interpreting a given historical figure can allow the psychobiographer to avoid fallacies resulting from the false identification of contemporary with historical frames of reference.¹⁸

Independent of one another, Kelly and Mendel treat in the identical uncritical manner a well-known set of Belinskii's letters from the late 1830s, which announce to Bakunin the former's break with him. Kelly, for her part, seems to apply generally an passing attitude expressed by Mendel, concerning an 1840 letter from Belinskii that castigates Bakunin: "What is true and what is baseless rumor in this indictment," Mendel writes (p. 151), "is less important here than the fact of [Bakunin's] reputation itself." Yet as the psychologist Allport correctly observed some time ago, the "use of letters in [psychological] research ... is complicated by the necessity of considering the personality of the recipient as well as that of the sender."¹⁹ Neither Mendel nor Kelly pays any attention to the person who *wrote* the letters. Both recklessly dismiss Bakunin's replies as insignificant because they are not extant, despite the fact that they can be at least partially reconstructed from Belinskii's letters themselves. Each uses the letters as the exclusive source for reconstructing of Bakunin's character. Yet both authors are erudite and must be aware

¹⁷ Louis Gottschalk, Clyde Kluckhohn, and Robert Angell, *The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology* (New York: Social Science Press, 1945); Samuel Novey, *The Second Look: The Reconstruction of Personal History in Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968).

¹⁸ James William Anderson, "The Methodology of Psychological Biography," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11, no. 3 (Winter 1981): 465-67.

¹⁹ Gordon W. Allport, *The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science*, Bulletin 42 (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1942), p. 108.

of Venturi's more sensitive conclusion that Belinskii's letters reveal more about his own psychological development than about Bakunin's.²⁰ The unfortunate result for both biographers here is a one-sided interpretation of Bakunin, disconnected from the historical record.

Kelly is less than careful about the context of direct quotations from original sources. For example, at one point she cites Bakunin's own words as evidence for his "need, frankly expressed in a letter to Natalie Beyer, for people 'who feel confident under my direction'" (p. 43). However, the complete passage in the original letter reads as follows:

You know me so well; and I am strong, and feel the need to serve as a support for one beloved. *I need a person who feels confident under my direction.* [*Ia nuzhdaius' v cheloveke, kotoryi chuvstvoval by sebia uverenno pod moim rukovodstvom.*] Still I love you so much, and it has become imperative for me to work for your future.²¹

The complete text immediately elucidates two points. First, Bakunin renounces, in the omitted sentences preceding and following Kelly's direct quotation, the sentiment that she ascribes to him. Second, Bakunin wrote "person" in the singular number (*cheloveke*), not the plural "people." Yet Kelly carefully sets the noun "people" outside her own direct quotation of Bakunin. To reproduce the original text so selectively only reinforces the misleading impression that Kelly created in the first instance: the impression that a sentiment explicitly renounced by Bakunin toward one person in fact characterized his general approach toward all persons.

In another passage, Kelly seeks to demonstrate that Bakunin's philosophical development predisposed him to solipsism. Her demonstration collapses when one fills in her ellipsis in a direct quotation from Bakunin. She cites (p. 58) Bakunin's famous letter where he states his admiration for and desire to emulate Fichte's ability "to go straight and tirelessly to the aim he had set himself, an aim illuminated *by self-conscious truth* [*samosoznatel'noi i istinnoi*] and blessed by God"; but she omits the words emphasized in this text here.²² Del Giudice's thorough study of Bakunin's early philosophical development reveals that the presence of the phrase "self-conscious truth" *in this very passage* reflects Bakunin's distinction between actual reality (the blessing of God) and empirical existence (self-conscious truth).²³ The omission of these words creates an imbalance, thanks only to which Kelly can assert that Bakunin's *exclusive* emphasis on "the blessing of God" illustrates *one-sidedness* and hence subjectivism. Only Kelly's conscious

²⁰ Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, translated from the Italian by Francis Haskell, with an Introduction by Isaiah Berlin (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1960; Universal Library ed., New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966), pp. 40-43.

²¹ Bakunin to Natal'ia Beer, April 1836, in M.A. Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem, 1828-1876*, edited with annotations by Iu.M. Steklov, 4 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vsesoiuznogo obshchestva politkatorzhan i ssyl'no-poselentsev, 1934-36), 1:291. Emphasis added.

²² Bakunin to Aleksandra Beer, February 1840, in *ibid.*, 2:306. Emphasis added.

²³ Martine Del Giudice, "Bakunin's 'Preface to Hegel's 'Gymnasium Lectures': The Problem of Alienation and the Reconciliation with Reality," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 180-82.

ellipsis enables her to argue that Bakunin's thought here moves "back to consoling fantasy rather than forward to a critical examination of reality" (p. 58). Restoration of the omitted words reveals Kelly's interpretation, not Bakunin's thought, as one-sided.

Unfortunately, other important elements of Kelly's argument exhibit similar lack of care. For example, she asserts that Bakunin's analyses of European history in the writings from his anarchist phase "were rarely more than rhetorical generalizations." She calls his *Godsudarstvennost' i anarkhiia* and *L'Empire knouto-germanique et la révolution sociale* "hastily written polemical tracts, full of vast and unsubstantiated generalizations ... [where] points are 'proved' by random allusions to the popular authorities of the time ... [and] theories are supported by trite and sweeping generalizations on the nature of man and society" (p. 200). Yet she does not cite these works. The proof for these sharp accusations, according to her own notes, depends almost exclusively upon reference to the *Principles and Organization of the International Brotherhood* (e.g., pp. 307-08, nn. 16, 18-19, 25-27).²⁴ This procedure does not represent the highest standard of care in the use of primary sources.

Such a suboptimal standard is present also in Mendel's treatment, but to a lesser degree. For his part, Mendel relies excessively on Bakunin's *Confession* to confirm his own psychological interpretation of Bakunin as of the 1850s. However, he is more systematic in his use of this text than is Kelly, who hardly mentions the often overlooked years of Bakunin's captivity, from 1849 to 1861 (pp. 144-50). Mendel is aware of the controversy over whether the *Confession* accurately represents Bakunin's ideas at the time of its composition. How much of it was sincere repentance and how much was intended to deceive the Tsar? Mendel's interesting argument for the authenticity of the ideas it expresses, is based exclusively upon the psychological character of its content. Mendel introduces an innovative application of traditional historical method to the psychological interpretation of documentary texts, when he divides Bakunin's statements in the *Confession* into "credibility categories."

By far the greater bulk of the work is a review of his revolutionary life in the 1840s ... [and] there is no reason to doubt its essential authenticity. Then, there are a whole series of fascinating self-analyses, probes into his own personality and the motivations for his actions. ...

Accepting as authentic his account ..., we are left with a final category of statements, his groveling, obsequious submission to the Tsar's grace. (pp. 246-47)

This is a most interesting procedure, entirely in line with the methods of internal criticism. Unfortunately, Mendel himself is content explicitly to concentrate on the second and especially the third of these categories of statements.²⁵

²⁴ Some of Kelly's citations cannot be found when traced using the references given, and some of the references have incorrect pagination.

²⁵ The most perceptive analysis of Bakunin's motives in writing the document is perhaps Eric Voegelin, "Bakunin's Confession," *Journal of Politics*, 8 (February 1946): 24-43, which supersedes the early twentieth-century Russian polemics in important respects.

3.2. Psychological Method, or *Chto Delat'?*: Problems with Cultural Context and the Individual

To the degree that the tension between psychological interpretation and historical investigation can be resolved, perhaps it is natural for psychobiography to be more successful on the psychological than in the biographical side. Thus Mendel's interpretive project is not fully connected with the historical Bakunin, but it is relatively successful from the standpoint psychoanalytic theory. The essentially idiographic nature of Mendel's enterprise helps to account for the relative success of his psychological interpretation. However, this idiographic impulse also prevents that interpretation from gaining wider relevance, because it is not "based on the requirements of a strict comparative method" and so transgresses "the methodological imperative in psychohistory."²⁶ Both these psychobiographies reach beyond the individual level toward social interpretation, but neither consistently realizes this potential.

Mendel concentrates more on the specifically intellectual milieu than does Kelly, but he pays less attention to Bakunin's broader cultural environment than she. Mendel's reconstruction of the cultural forces in Bakunin's environment relies on only a few secondary sources, often the same ones used by Kelly.²⁷ His evaluation of Bakunin's ideas is not weaker for this, but this reliance does weaken his principal argument about Bakunin's motivations. These motivations, he asserts, derived from "two sets of dynamics, oedipal and narcissistic[,] the relationship between [which was] ... the ultimate source of Bakunin's millenarian aims and destructive means, the roots of his apocalypse" (p. 31). What one looks for but does not find in Mendel is a specification of what it was about the culture of the nineteenth-century Russian aristocracy, if anything, that distinguished its familial relationships from those out of which the traditionally conceived Oedipal complex emerged.²⁸

Like Kelly, Mendel emphasizes psychopathology in his analysis of Bakunin. Like Kelly, he uses it also as a tool for criticizing his subject, though he does so more carefully. Neither Kelly nor Mendel seems to realize that psychobiographical explanations are tentative and cannot replace the explanations to which they add nuance. For example, when Mendel seeks to explain why Bakunin and Marx clashed over the abolition of inheritance inside the First International, he asserts that "[t]he answer, *once again*, is found in personality, not politics" (p. 325, emphasis added). This example demonstrates how Mendel is more prone than Kelly, to fall into the fallacy of "originology," i.e., the emphasis on childhood experiences at the expense of other factors.²⁹ What is most problematic, is that Bakunin's childhood is the only period of his life for which there is absolutely no documentation. Mendel's argument about Bakunin's psychological

²⁶ Saül Friedländer, *History and Psychoanalysis: An Inquiry into the Possibilities and Limits of Psychohistory*, translated by Susan Suleiman (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978), p. 79.

²⁷ For example, McLellan and Koyré for the Left Hegelians.

²⁸ As Bruce Mazlish, for example, did for Great Britain in *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

²⁹ Anderson, "The Methodology of Psychological Biography," pp. 456-57, 460-61.

development thus acquires a deterministic shape, whereas the case that he argues is frequently more thoughtful than that. To his credit, however, Mendel provides an appendix specifying in detail the dynamics of the psychopathological syndrome he attributes to Bakunin, "a composite of traditional Freudian drive theory ... and more recent theories of narcissism" (p. 436). Mendel thereby seeks to establish a general psychodynamic theory and to apply it sensitively to Bakunin's own concerns and preoccupations. His use of psychological terminology is thus more rigorous than Kelly's.

By contrast, Kelly is better at supplying the cultural context; where she fails is in her not adducing her understanding of that context to tailor contemporary psychological concepts an alien cultural milieu. Kelly presents herself as an iconoclast of the "self-image" that Bakunin "had striven so hard and so long to create." She seeks to be the iconoclastic anti-mythographer against the Promethean image that is the partisan of the oppressed, a myth that she acknowledges has "an independent vitality and resilience" and "deep roots in the human psyche" (pp. 290, 291). Yet she participates in the creation, indeed the reinforcement, of another myth about Bakunin.³⁰ Kelly says (p. 313, n. 13) it is not her intention to argue that her Bakunin and Dostoevskii's Stavrogin in *The Possessed* are cut from the same cloth. However, the model for her figure of Bakunin is just as fictional: her *leitmotif* is no less fictive nor any less artifactual: it is Turgenev's image of Bakunin as the title character in his novella *Rudin*. At critical junctures in the logical development of her argument, she invokes Turgenev's *Rudin* to justify her own depiction of Bakunin (pp. 72-75, 95, 151, 254-56, 282-83, 293-94): even though she must know, as Venturi himself notes, that Turgenev only "caricatured [Bakunin's] negative aspects" and indeed that Turgenev, as he himself said, "had not been successful" in portraying Bakunin. Kelly admits that she is concerned less with the historical Bakunin than with her own image of him, where he represents a type

with which his century was less familiar than ours: the intellectual apologist for despotism, the idealist who applies a combination of moral passion and dialectical ingenuity to the task of presenting cruelty, cynicism and the will to power as the selfless fulfilment of the purposes of history, appealing to his audience to share in his self-deception and his fantasies of self-realization, and to accept a simulation of paradise in place of the genuine article. (pp. 292-93)

Venturi observes that *Rudin* "is interesting as an example of how often Russian literature at the time was bound up with political realities, and of how little, on the other hand, we can use it for the real history of these men and movements."³¹ Kelly's book, too, despite its erudition, is as much artful invention as "real history."

³⁰ Compare A. Borovoi and N. Otverzhennyi, *Mif o Bakunine* (Moscow: Golos truda, 1925).

³¹ Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 730, n. 37. See also Marshall Shatz, "Bakunin, Turgenev and *Rudin*," in *The Golden Age of Russian Literature and Thought*, edited by D. Offord (London: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 103-14.

Kelly promises nothing less than a social psychology of millenarianism. She believes that the greatest merit of her study is to reveal "the formula behind the attraction of all millenarian ideologies: the simultaneous appeal to the alienated individual's need for self-assertion and his urge to identify with a meaningful collectivity which transcends the self" (p. 293). Her portrait of Bakunin as a static ideal-archetype does not make this interpretation of millenarianism convincing. Her caricature of Bakunin atrophies every attempt to set the historical Bakunin in relation to his real environment, and makes it impossible to judge the person who lived. "The study of types cannot replace ... the complex methods of investigation required by collective phenomena."³² The keystone of her argument would be to demonstrate that Bakunin's thought "illustrates with particular sharpness the despotic implications of a cult of spontaneity and personal wholeness whereby introverted, divided and unfulfilled personalities seek (whether consciously or not) to utilize mass movements as vehicles for the realization of their frustrated aspirations" (p. 4).

Her attempt to grapple with the "other culture" issue takes up most of her first two chapters, where she retraces Bakunin's immersion in German philosophy in the 1830s and early 1840s, his European *Wanderjahre* and Parisian sojourn of the mid-1840s, his capture following the revolutions of 1848-49 and eventual extradition to Russia, and his exile to and escape from Siberia by 1861. Kelly describes sympathetically the milieux through which Bakunin passed during his *Wanderjahre* only to juxtapose this with a vehement and unexplained antipathy toward Bakunin and his ideas. Drawing on such authors as Malin, Kojève, McLellan, and Manuel, Kelly (pp. 44-46, 83-86, 103-06) powerfully synthesizes the most authoritative portraits of the *Zeitgeist*. However, her magisterial description, which she focuses at the level of social psychology, becomes increasingly dominated by a peremptory critique of Bakunin's writings that confounds complaints over its style with complaints over its substance. Kelly masterfully weaves together the fascinating cultural tableaux through which Bakunin passed, only to conclude most abruptly and without demonstration, that his "highly personal interpretation of the philosophy of the act ... come[s] as close to solipsism as ... [did] Max Stirner, ... forc[ing] his message home in a barrage of aphorisms ... [that mix] the trite, the pretentious and the obscure, [and] are examples of Idealist discourse at its worst" (p. 111). This sharp accusation begs for extended textual exegesis but Kelly offers none. Nor is her assessment a "new interpretation" of Bakunin's thought as claimed. It merely extends the familiar *ad hominem* arguments against Bakunin the anarchist Bakunin the philosopher. Kelly's subsequent failure to fulfill her original promise to provide a social psychology of millenarianism is foreshadowed in the logical lacunae of this argument.

³² Friedländer, *History and Psychoanalysis*, p. 79.

4. Conclusion: Social Psychology, Psychobiography, and Mythography

4.1. Social Psychology at the Crossroads of Character and Culture

From the contrasting orientations outlined above, there follow two specific differences between Mendel and Kelly. First, Mendel includes the notion of Bakunin's personal "character," whereas Kelly deduces her argument from the unproven premise that Bakunin represents nothing less than a character archetype. Second, Mendel applies personality theory in an evolutionary fashion. His theoretical psychoanalytic formulations emerge from continuing reevaluations of how well his basic notions fit Bakunin's own experience. By contrast, Kelly's psychological profile of Bakunin is static and sterile as if cast from a mold. The paradoxical result is that Mendel produces a better culturally adapted psychological theory even though he pays less attention than Kelly to the significance of cultural milieu for psychological development. However, Mendel fails to show how the culture of the nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia may have contributed to those psychodynamics; he therefore does not account for that millenarianism's distinct characteristics. Kelly's in-depth treatment of the cultural and intellectual milieux through which Bakunin moved could have sensitized her to the multiplicity of causes behind behavior, but from her work Bakunin emerges as a straw man. In the end Mendel demonstrates evidences a greater appreciation of how complex personality really is.

Kelly argues that Bakunin is a particularly horrendous example of the self-deceiving ego-aggrandizing solipsism to which participants in millenarian movements are, according to her, especially vulnerable. In doing so she exaggerates a tendency in the English-language Bakunin historiography that can be traced back to Isaiah Berlin's famous essay, "Herzen and Bakunin on Liberty," where the author uses Bakunin mainly as a foil, the better to illuminate aspects of the former, one of his avowed heroes.³³ This interpretation she adulterates by assimilating Bakunin to Nechaev in a Church of Nihilism, effectively proclaiming him Christ to the latter's St. Peter and holding him responsible for all the injustices perpetuated in his name. She further claims that this is a new interpretation, but in fact it closely follows, repeats, and expands a polemic previously published by one Amfiteatrov in a relatively little known Russian *émigré* journal of the early twentieth century.³⁴ Of course, Berlin is not responsible for exaggerations by Kelly, who was also influenced by Carr's biography on Bakunin, which for all its faults and outdatedness must still be considered the standard English-language work, for lack of worthy competitors.³⁵ Carr subtly ridiculed Bakunin and by innuendo propagated the false rumor of his homosexuality, which had been used against Bakunin in Russian *émigré* circles during his lifetime. However, Marshall Shatz recently disproved this hypothesis through a painstaking and

³³ Isaiah Berlin, "Herzen and Bakunin on Individual Liberty," in Ernest J. Simmons (ed.), *Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), pp. 473-99.

³⁴ A. Amfiteatrov, "M.A. Bakunin", kak "kharakter", in *Literaturnyi al'bom*, 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg: Obshchestvennaia pol'za, 1907), pp. 1-39.

³⁵ E. H. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (London: Macmillan, 1937).

judicious examination of its origin, in an argument with Katkov in Moscow in 1840, and subsequent appearances in letters and published works down through the decades.³⁶

4.2. Psychobiography to Social Psychology: A Difficult Transition

Both psychobiographers transgress the methodological imperatives of historical study. In the case of each psychobiography, secondary literature exists which throws wholly different light upon the primary sources used, even disconfirming conclusions drawn from them. Each author simply ignores this secondary literature without justification. In Kelly's work especially, source materials are treated in a manner that can only be qualified as distortion. Her selection of evidence is biased in a manner that embarrasses the reader and should embarrass any author. Kelly's selectivity in her discussion of secondary studies is just as tacit and just as blatant; Mendel affirms, courageously or foolhardily, that his own argument depends "only sparingly on secondary sources" (p. 443, n. 1). It is possible that the selectivity of both biographers concerning the secondary literature, is due in part to their psychohistorical intentions. Perhaps, however, the selectivity derives not from the nature of the enterprise but rather from a decision (conscious or unconscious) to seek out only those interpretations that confirm the psychological conclusions drawn *in abstracto* from the primary sources. Yet the failure even to mention opposing views diverges from the standard practice of history as art, and the failure to refute them diverges from the standard practice of history as science. It does not follow that all psychobiography is doomed. It does not even follow that every use of psychohistorical interpretive techniques is inherently flawed.

Even if there remains some question as to the "fit" between the historical Bakunin and Mendel's Bakunin, Mendel's general respect for the integrity of primary historical sources reinforces the success of his work as an explicit attempt to develop psychoanalytic theory. Mendel's work is a real attempt to evaluate Bakunin's life by applying systematically a novel psychoanalytic theory that combines pathological narcissism with an unresolved Oedipal complex. As an explanation of the anarchist's behavior, Mendel's psychodynamic hypothesis is flawed, because he does not demonstrate convincingly the connection between the psychological syndrome and Bakunin's revolutionary activity. Nevertheless, as a development in the theory of psychopathology, Mendel's innovation deserves serious attention. This is why Mendel is finally more successful than Kelly, who simply fails to validate her contention that Bakunin's mature revolutionary activity expressed a "quest for wholeness" that she asserts dominated his early life.

³⁶ It is, further, often asserted that Bakunin's first revolutionary and antipatriarchal project was his supposed leadership of a campaign by his siblings to liberate his sister Varvara from betrothal to a man she did not love. The judicious conclusion by Edward J. Brown, *Stankevich and His Moscow Circle, 1930-1940* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966), chap. 5, that Bakunin was neither sole instigator nor main leader of this project, contravenes the widely accepted interpretation that this was B's first or among his first struggles for human freedom and moreover first of his conspiracies. See also the meticulous study by Marshall Shatz, "Mikhail Bakunin and the Priamukhino Circle : Love and Liberation in the Russian Intelligentsia of the 1830s," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 33 (Spring 1999): 1-29.

The dominant technique in Kelly's study is "proof" by pejoration. Anderson describes the trap into which she has fallen:

There is a tendency for psychobiographers to be disparaging. The most thoroughly developed parts of the theories commonly employed in psychobiography deal with psychopathology. Pathologically oriented theory offers a ready conduit for an author who wishes to denigrate his subject.³⁷

Kelly writes as if the mere use of psychological terminology can explain Bakunin's behavior. At one point, for example, we read that Bakunin's political ideas were "fantasies" which animated him with a "mystical ecstasy," which he described in "ecstatic terms, bordering on the mystical," and sought to realize with "quasi-religious ecstasy" (pp. 252-55). This example typifies Kelly's discourse: at another passage (pp. 161-72), in the course of only a dozen pages covering two years, Bakunin gathers around himself a "circle" in London and a "band" in Florence -- both of them "motley" groups! To summarize: Kelly alters the sense of citations from primary sources by quoting of context and by selective ellipsis within cited phrases. She engages in *ad hominem* attack upon the most notable figures in serious Bakunin scholarship, and when she uses psychological language at all, it is almost like an afterthought: her vocabulary in this respect is drawn exclusively from *psychopathology* and seems to be introduced only when she has temporarily exhausted other forms of pejorative and innuendo. She engages in no systematic or serious analysis of Bakunin's psychodynamics, and does not fulfill her own promise to provide a social psychology of millenarianism.

This being so, what can explain the rather high regard in which the monograph is, at least in some circles, held? First, the level of erudition is extremely high. Kelly has done her work, and her style and expression are quite polished: indeed it is by history as *art* that she fills the holes that plague her historical as *science*. There is no doubt as to either her talent or her erudition. Arthur Mendel's psychobiography of Bakunin is a much more serious project. To Mendel's credit, he proposes, in an Appendix to his long work, an explicit theory of Bakunin's psychodynamics which draws on recent developments in the study of narcissism. This is an innovative contribution to theory. Mendel makes a serious attempt to demonstrate its application to Bakunin but he is seriously hampered by the lack of any documentation from Bakunin's childhood. Moreover, he tends to mix his sources. As a biography, his work is organized chronologically, but Mendel, for example, uses citations from 1837 to prove a point with reference to 1863. These he strings together to create structural oppositions, between his own theory of Oedipal narcissism and the implied psychogenesis of Bakunin's personality. Mendel's work is more serious and earnest than Kelly's, and fails for different reasons, but not without some redeeming features. They both fail to connect the individual personality with broader social phenomena, though for Kelly this is an avowed, and for Mendel an implicit, goal. Their failures and successes, in fact, complement one another.

³⁷ Anderson, "The Methodology of Psychological Biography," p. 461.

4.3. Mythography and Its Link to Social Psychology: The Contemporary Relevance of Bakunin Historiography

Given the foregoing criticism, it is perhaps appropriate to offer some conclusions about Bakunin's historic *persona* and the contemporary social psychology of Europe. Let us recall that the Romance-language literature, primarily French, is the most sympathetic to Bakunin; the Germanic-language literature, principally English, the most unsympathetic; and the Slavic-language literature, primarily Russian, the most controversial. On a map of the linguistic fields of Europe, East Central Europe is greatly underrepresented: the so-called "third Europe," the "Europe of Small Nations" between *Deutschland* and *Russland*. It was to this region that Bakunin devoted the greatest part of his revolutionary activity, nearly equal to combined efforts in Switzerland, Italy, Spain, and France. Moreover, today his dream of 1848 is finally accomplished: he had written that the liberation of the peoples of this Europe of small nations would require the destruction of both the Austrian and the Russian empires. Bakunin advocated nationalism only to break up these multinational empires, and he renounced all nationalism after 1863. Taking their place, Bakunin foresaw the free federation of inter-associated communes. He stressed the agricultural-territorial basis of social organization but toward the end of his life anticipated this to be carried over into the industrial sphere, a development later known, and practiced, as anarchosyndicalism.

He borrowed the term "anarchy" from his great friend Proudhon, who had neologized it not as a synonym for "disorder" but as an antonym of "hierarchy." *Anarchie* was, in fact, his attempt to translate into French the English word *self-government*. It should be less surprising to recognize, then, that Bakunin was fundamentally a federalist. One of his most famous programmatic tracts from the 1860s had for its title the three terms of his revolutionary credo: *Federalism*, [cooperative-collectivist, not authoritarian-communist] *Socialism*, and *Anti-Theologism*. Federalism simply *looks* like anarchy when it is posited in opposition to unitary, autocratic, multinational empires such as those of Russia and Austria. Yet if Bakunin was a federalist, he was also opposed to the institution of the State. Is he then, perhaps, also a fitting figure for the present era of decreasing state sovereignty? Could one go so far as to say that Bakunin is a precursor of the principle of *subsidiarity*? Only if one adds that he would also have been the most fervent opponent of any possible United States of Europe. For Bakunin, the basis of the state or super-state, was the principle of authority, *viz.*, the asserted "right" of a ruling minority to profit at the expense of a ruled majority and to pass onto their heirs the advantages of this same inequality. As to the social psychology of Europe today, the russophone tradition would see him as a personality of conflicted yet visionary brilliance; the anglophone tradition would scorn him as a self-aggrandizing charlatan using "federalism" only as a slogan to mask his monomania; and the francophone tradition would see in Bakunin the consistent protest against inherited privilege, whether inherited by individuals, families, or nations. The parallels are most striking. When Bakunin was expelled from Paris by French government in 1845, he fled to Brussels.

If Bakunin is a more enduring figure than Marx, this is because his protest was based on human insight, whereas Marx's was based only scientific insight. Bakunin would today champion the

breakdown of state sovereignty through syndicalist cooperation and the increasing responsibility of non-national regions, including transborder regions. Most of all, he would insist on the extension of the advantages from this program, to East Central Europe *and* Southeastern Europe, not merely through the physical relocation of the geographic concentration of industry and capital, but also through the full participation of the whole of Eastern Europe in decisions which affect them. Bakunin would decry the evolution of an economic and commercial empire, including the co-optation of financial elites there into transnational structures that oppose the interests of the greater part of those populations. He would urge the East Europeans to assault "fortress Europe" if those inside the castle did not lower the drawbridge in welcome. This is the actual relevance to contemporary social psychology, of the historical example of his biography. His legacy is truly European from the Atlantic to the Urals, insisting always on the special character of Russia that makes it a partner, if never fully a member, of Europe. It deserves further serious attention even today.