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The Memoirs of the Hitler Family Doctor: Eduard Bloch

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Dr. Eduard Bloch (1872-1945) is well known to historians of twentieth century Germany, especially to Hitler scholars. As the Hitler family physician during Adolph's childhood and adolescence, he treated Hitler for various minor complaints, and was the first to diagnose then treat his mother Klara's breast cancer. This essay is a review of "The Autobiography of Obermedizinalrat Dr. Eduard Bloch,"

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Philip Pomper: A Psychohistorical Scholar of Russia

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Philip Pomper is a distinguished scholar of Russia and Communist leaders as well as the William F. Armstrong Professor of History at Wesleyan University. He was born on April 18, 1936 in Chicago

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Reflections on Civilians in Warfare

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My essay explores the experience of civilians in war and its implications for them and society. It is also about the effects of war on my family, my friends, and me. Though I have never fought in war, I have always lived with its effects. Upon reflection, it is apparent to me that, even in the U.S., few people have avoided its influence.

My own experiences with war placed me at the periphery of the "Italian Theatre" during WWII. A unit of the German army (the *Wehrmacht*) was stationed in our village, Afers (Eores), in northern Italy. We children enjoyed the fun of playing with the soldiers, including sitting on their laps as they shot their cannons at American and British planes droning overhead on their mission to bomb Austria and Germany. The FLAK (anti-aircraft artillery) hit some of the planes, sending them crashing into our mountains and forests. As soon as we deemed the situation safe, we children ran to investigate what was left of these unusual "things." I remember one plane in particular that had gone down in a forest near our farm in the spring of 1945. It remained relatively intact and we crawled all over it for hours; the cockpit was especially intrigu-

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turned out that he had a history of petty crimes and scams; currently he was advising another inmate on faking his feelings while planning for escape. He is now seen as sociopathic or as suffering from a dissociative disorder. There is also paranoid grandiosity in his screed to "destroy" America and wistful fantasy in his shared scheme to extract several million dollars from the government to enable him and Muhammad to found a utopian colony in Canada. It was this scheme that apparently fueled the sniper killings. The jury found him not insane by reason of parental abandonment and abuse, but trial experts speculated that this testimony may have helped spare him the death penalty. The pathway from his childhood deficits and trauma to his adolescent crime wave was no doubt long and winding, no doubt leaving him susceptible to the manipulations of Muhammad, who had his own issues over parenting. A psychologist's report not used in the trial, concluded Muhammad "endured several traumas as a child: [at age three], his mother died of cancer, his father abandoned him, unloving caretakers beat him often" (Josh White, "Early Trauma Altered Sniper, Psychologist Says," *Washington Post* [February 10, 2004]:B3). Thus his remarks at sentencing about having had a wonderful childhood are strangely dissociated. To his friends he could be erratic as well as supportive and kind. To his beleaguered defense attorneys, he could be charming and even humorous. Both he and Malvo seemed capable of evoking different personae as circumstances changed.

Equally feasible, they were prone to identity-altering anxieties. Yet at various points along the way, a degree of choice should be granted to both killers; and parenting, if not decisive, factors in to the total equation. For it may be inferred that on deeper levels, the absences and failures of good-enough caregivers leave fissures in the psyche which are filled in with fantasies of rage, revenge, and magical self-regeneration. So well-fitted to Muhammad's own inner reality, the movie *Savior* (1998) was viewed often enough to be known by heart. In it, "Dennis Quaid plays an American whose family is killed in a Muslim terrorist bombing in Paris. He avenges them by slaughtering people in a local mosque, and then winds up as a mercenary and a sniper in Bosnia. But, in the end, he is redeemed by nurturing an infant born to a raped Serbian refugee" (Horwitz, *Sniper*, p. 46). In this variant on classical American fantasies of rebirth-through-violence, Muhammad's and Malvo's needs fuse in the image of self-reparenting. Toward this overarching ideal, all else is subordinated – and permitted.

Dan Dervin, PhD, *emeritus professor at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia, is a prolific author and frequent contributor to psychohistory. His book, Father Bosetti in America: A Biographical Study, is due out in August from Cache Glade Publications. Professor Dervin may be contacted at* <ddervin@mwc.edu>.❑

David Beisel
Hitler's Doctor Bloch

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Leo Baeck Institute Year Book Vol. XLVII (2002), pp. 217-245 (ISBN 1571815821, $45.00).

Over the years – and not surprisingly – different studies have given different weight to Klara's importance, to her breast cancer, and therefore to Dr. Bloch. They range across the spectrum from biographies in which Bloch hardly shows up at all (Bullock, Fest, George Victor's psychological study), to those in which he puts in an occasional appearance (Toland, Waite, Kershaw, Langer's OSS psychiatric profile, Redlich's psychiatric profile, and Bromberg and Small's psychological study), to Rudolph Binion's psychohistory, *Hitler Among the Germans*, which argues that Bloch figured centrally in the development of Hitler's murderous anti-Semitism. Due to the important psychological issues raised by Binion's 1976 study, Bloch has, in general, figured more significantly in the historiography of psychohistory than in narrative history, where, if at all, he appears usually in connection with his observing the unusual closeness which existed between Adolf and Klara, or his comment on the extreme emotional impact her death had on the adolescent Adolf – or both.

According to Binion's re-construction, after a mastectomy in 1907 (performed by another physician with Dr. Bloch in attendance), Bloch himself treated her remaining cancerous breast with massive

amounts of iodoform, a highly toxic but at the time widely used compound, which, Binion's evidence proves, resulted in her long, painful death by iodoform overdose. Adolph, by her side every minute during the days and weeks of her dying, was still symbiotically linked to her, as he had been since childhood, and absorbed her symptoms as if they were his own, unconsciously blaming the Jewish Dr. Bloch for her death. Several of those symptoms of iodoform overdose later reappeared in Hitler's October 1918 wounding by mustard gas on the Western Front. This second trauma awakened memories of Klara's death and stirred the repressed murderous hatred he had harbored against Dr. Bloch since 1907. His wish to avenge Klara, by using the symbolic German Motherland as a fantasized Klara, was shaped by a third trauma, the intolerable news of Germany's defeat in November 1918, itself accompanied by a psychosomatic relapse, a hallucination calling upon him to avenge Germany's defeat, and the final displacement of his murderous rage from Dr. Bloch onto the Jewish people as a whole.

A single paragraph cannot do justice to the rich detail in Binion's work, which needs a full reading to appreciate both sources and arguments. Since other psychological historians and psychobiographers have weighed in on the Bloch issue, the appearance in print of a new Dr. Bloch memoir – even one 60 years old – is a matter of some importance.

The newly published memoir, written in 1941-1945, should be seen against the first, much smaller Bloch reminiscence, printed after his escape from Nazi Germany to the Bronx in 1940. That earlier memoir, "I Was Hitler's Doctor," published as a two-part as-told-to article in *Collier's Magazine* in March 1941, has since served as an important primary source for some historians. The *Collier's* piece mentions the extraordinary closeness between Klara and Adolph cited above, a fact corroborated by Hitler's boyhood friend Kubick and repeated in the newly printed memoir, where Dr. Bloch writes of Hitler: "He was his mother's darling and [he] idolized her."

Bloch's recently published memoir also offers some brief details of the Klara/Adolf story, stating that there came to him "at the beginning of 1907, a fifty-year-old woman…[who] complained about pains in the chest occasionally so intense as to keep her from sleeping." He remembered her as a "pale woman," recalling that the adolescent Hitler, who, Bloch judged, was "in no way different from other young people," had to be "especially… console[d]" after hearing the bad news about her "rather difficult" operation, so "totally shattered" was he by the news.

Scholars looking for more extensive revelations about the mother–son relationship will be disappointed, since this is about all one finds in the newly printed memoir. Bloch says nothing about his iodoform treatments, nothing more of Klara's breast cancer, nor of its impact on Adolf beyond stating that following her death on 21 December 1907 Hitler came to his "office to thank me for my efforts," pressing his hand while saying: "'I will be eternally grateful to you, doctor.'" The memoir mentions in passing the well-known two postcards sent to Bloch from Vienna in 1908, one signed "your always grateful Adolf Hitler," the other: "In eternal gratitude, Adolf Hitler," both of which point to an important factual issue, not just for psychological, but also for narrative historians – Hitler's anti-Semitism in his Vienna years.

Specialists need no reminding how recent studies have shown that Hitler's anti-Semitism during the Vienna period was relatively mild and has been over-exaggerated by historians – as Hitler did himself in *Mein Kampf* as in several other statements. This in turn suggests that the conscious, murderous hatred, which (as Binion shows) was manifest only *after* the double trauma of 1918, was the result of something more than just, as the traditional argument maintains, the anti-Semitic pamphlets he encountered in the Austrian capital. Psychohistorians need no reminding either that Hitler's conscious gratitude toward Dr. Bloch, during this period and after, was an additional defense covering over his repressed rage and unconscious desire for revenge, which later emerged in displaced form in his conscious mind after the double "retraumatization" of 1918.

Bloch's memoirs, combined with the two "gratitude" postcards from Vienna, thus serve as mutually reinforcing, if somewhat circumstantial, reminders which support the findings of recent his-

torians and Binion's argument.

The major value of the newly published memoir, however, centers not on the early Bloch/ Hitler connection, but on some broader implications, many already well known, which pertain to the social, political, and intellectual life of nineteenth – and early twentieth-century Central Europe. For Dr. Bloch personally, the memoir emphasizes three things that were important to him. First, there is the deep pride at becoming a successful, caring physician, which he communicates by telling us that he received a doctoral diploma "awarded *summa cum laude*," ran an office "open at all times to all who needed help" regardless of social distinction, and made house calls, answering "the call of every sick person, even in the coldest winter nights."

Second, the memoir shows evidence of his pride in his patriotic service to the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a soldier before and during The Great War. As a student, he was a "a one-year volunteer with an infantry regiment," then, after becoming a physician, found himself posted on 1 April 1898 to the Garrison hospital in Linz, the town where he later established his own private practice and met the Hitler family. Then, at the start of World War I, he left that practice to volunteer as a regimental physician, serving through the entire war with the rank of captain, and receiving numerous decorations.

Finally, there is Bloch's repeated emphasis on his special pride at being a Jew who overcame many of the obstacles of being Jewish in the later years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He learned "the sacred writings of Jewish history" from his father, which generated, in turn, his love for history in general, but, since, he says, "a teaching position at a secondary school was nearly hopeless for a Jew," he decided to study medicine instead, achieving his goals despite the difficulties Jews had in getting into clinics dominated by "anti-Semitic university teachers." In Linz, he "visited the house of God almost daily" and proudly received a "special degree for the profession of rabbi and teacher." He mentions that he had been given the title *Medicinalrat* in 1917 and was given the title *Obermedicinalrat* several years later, "thereby becoming the only Jew in the Alpine countries with this title."

One of the most interesting aspects of the memoir for historians, as for general readers, will probably be Bloch's comments on life in Austria after the Nazi annexation of March 1938, and how his connection to Hitler helped him through this calamity. The memoir does not break new ground here, but adds to the long-list of earlier testimonies by others detailing the many persecutions and humiliations Austrian Jews suffered at the hands of the Nazis, which always make for distressing reading. Bloch reports, for example, that conditions during the first weeks after the *Anschluss* produced eight suicides alone in the small Jewish community of Linz.

But while Bloch's memoir is slightly guarded, it is still open enough on the issue of how the Hitler connection bestowed upon him a number of special privileges. Even before the *Anschluss,* he had heard that Hitler asked after his old physician, calling Bloch "an exception, an *Edeljude*," quoting him as saying: "If all Jews were like that there would be no Jewish problem." (Knowing Hitler, one finds this statement hard to believe, although Bloch does present it as hearsay evidence.) Bloch reports that during Hitler's triumphant entry into Linz, he looked up toward and saluted Bloch's window as his motorcade passed by his apartment house, and later asked about Bloch when he got to the Linz Town Hall.

Later, Bloch was obliged to turn over to the Munich *Hauptarchiv* some photographs, the aforementioned postcards, and his book of medical records, "which contained the medical history of Frau Hitler" so that an official Nazi biography could be written. Thus, Bloch's connection to Hitler was well known, and, as the memoir goes on to point out, if the connection became known, it allowed for some special treatment at the hands of local Nazi officials.

When all Jews were forced to move to Vienna, for example, he was allowed to stay in Linz, Eichmann himself promised he would vouch for Dr. Bloch's personal safety. "By order of Berlin" the Gestapo removed the sign "Jewish Doctor" from the nameplate of his office. Although several visits to and by the Gestapo had given him opportunities to gain more special favors as "Hitler's doctor," (including, he says, the opportunity to have

himself declared "An Honorary Aryan,") he turned them all down, always maintaining, he says, his status as a *Volljud.* Nevertheless, unlike those who had to abandon their dwellings, he was able, also "by order of Berlin, to hold on to his apartment," an apartment which, he claims, became a refuge for Jews with sometimes as many as eight people staying the night. He had the "J" removed from his ration card (which meant his "servant did not have to stand in line at the grocery store"). He was able to send telegrams to America. When Jews were required to surrender their passports, he kept his ("I was the only one not affected by that measure," he says).

Dr. Bloch even had open supporters. It is now a commonplace among historians to recognize that while the Third Reich was a totalitarian state, it was not always as tightly controlled as we have been led to believe. Several kinds of dissent, both overt and covert, were sometimes openly enacted, or expressed through "hidden transcripts," or even tacitly permitted at various times. Bloch tells us that while many colleagues saw him as an outcast, tuned away, and refused to talk to him, others did not. Former patients visited him often, many denouncing the anti-Semitic measures enacted under the Nazis. "A high-ranking active officer who maintained his most loyal friendship and devotion to me until I left Linz visited me openly every week in full dress uniform. Many families from the nobility remained just as loyal," while some friends, parodying the Nazi salute, would meet him on the street by extending their arms and shouting "*Heil,* Dr. Bloch!" These examples, as with his references to Hitler, may suggest a need to show his importance, or are merely descriptive, but in any case, the memoir has the merit of reminding us that there were a few good Austrians.

Because Bloch strongly identified with being Jewish, it is clear that the humiliations he witnessed, even heard about, were experienced as his own, even if they were not directly perpetrated on his person. Bloch, in fact, says as much. When a colleague later wondered why he was trying to take care of other Jews, he says he told him: "The suffering and fate of my co-religionists affect me as if they were my own." In another place, he states how "I not only witnessed the full misery and misfortune of my brothers, but shared the depth and gravity of their pain."

Taking Bloch at his word, one wonders how he squared these feelings with the contradictions produced from his special relationship with the *Führer*, one that had provided him with the "special treatments" he was enjoying. The psychological historian has to ask: Was there guilt? How much? How was it handled?

Bloch's memoir repeatedly tries to show that he was a good Jew, one who stood up to insult, one who helped others. But what additional conscious and unconscious processes were really at work? All historians know that memoirs must be handled with extreme care, and can never be taken at face value. To what extent was he putting a good face on his own motivations? Was there some secret pleasure in having known Hitler, which he hid even from himself? By itself, the memoir cannot answer these questions, only raise them, yet one hesitates even to raise them (or the many other tough analytic questions psychological historians are supposed to ask) given the real sufferings experienced by Dr. Bloch and his family.

For, like so many other victims of the Nazis, the family did suffer. When his daughter, "my only child," left for America in October 1938, Bloch says: it was "as if part of my heart was being ripped out"; there followed some apparent psychosomatic symptoms as he "experienced actual pain in the heart for weeks." At one point the family was scattered to the four corners of the world: his "grandchildren were in England, my son-in-law in Africa, my daughter in America, and I and my wife in Austria." As it happens, one of those grandchildren in England, who Bloch says "had to endure the stress of the bombings" in the war's early days, was the late historian George Kren, (1926-2000) who became a Holocaust scholar, was a pioneering psychohistorian, a Professor of History at Kansas State University, a long-time Contributing Editor to *Clio's Psyche* and *The Journal of Psychohistory*, a writer for and Featured Scholar in this journal, and the guardian of his grandfather's memoirs. Through his widow, Professor Margo Kren, George has donated that memoir, here under consideration, to the archives of the U.S. Holocaust Museum.

The scattered family was fortunate enough to

eventually reunite in New York. Dr. Bloch's account of his escape from Nazi Europe during the early months of The Second World War is harrowing in its own right, and matches scores of similar testimonies, with the exception that he had the benefit of his Hitler connection, although it is not quite true, as one scholar has mistakenly stated, that Hitler helped Dr. Bloch escape from Europe.

"Assistance" for Dr. Bloch was not mandated by Hitler, nor was his escape a matter of being overseen by the *Führer*. It can be called "assistance" only in the sense that Dr. Bloch possessed what proved to be a valuable document, a Hitler decree first seen by his son-in-law at Gestapo Headquarters in Linz, a decree which had helped at earlier times and was important (at least once) during his flight from Austria in 1940. The document, an *Erlass des Reichsministers und Chefs der Reichskanzlei*, dated 14 September 1938, stated that "all permissible easing of restrictions, including those affecting foreign currencies, are to be granted to Obermedizinalrat Dr. Ed. Bloch, Linz." This by itself wasn't enough to get the Blochs out of Europe, for, as was the case with so many other survivors and escapees, luck played a substantial role, either the luck of circumstance, or what in retrospect looms as the right decision at a timely moment. But the "Hitler decree" proved to play a pivotal role during the dreaded luggage inspection at the border between Germany and Belgium.

With ports blocked due to the war and a long Siberian journey virtually impossible, the plan shifted to escape by train to Lisbon, via Berlin, Belgium, France, and Spain, then into Portugal, and on by ship to the U.S. According to the memoir, "we left Vienna aboard the first transport for emigrants." It was a dreary day in November 1940. After a stopover in Berlin, the train took a different route from the one announced, and a swarm of S.S. thugs assaulted the passengers on the Belgian frontier, removing them from their compartments, kicking and beating them in order to prolong "the luggage examination as much as possible" in order to allow the uncoupling of cars "so that the emigrants would miss all other connections." Bloch claims he "screamed at an S.S. man," was brought to the commandant who was then shown "a copy of the decree from the Reich Chancellery." It was "like a stroke of magic"; everything suddenly turned around, the bullying stopped, luggage and passengers were politely returned to their compartments, and the train soon moved away.

Thereafter there was uncertainty, uncomfortable accommodations, and a number of attempted successful and partly successful shakedowns by others before taking ship to America, this part of the memoir reminding the reader that the Nazi regime, and its occupation of Europe, encouraged theft of every imaginable kind, and that those who were able to sneak money away from the watchful eyes of the Gestapo were the ones who had at least some slight chance of success.

Bloch's Hitler connection, concretized in the Berlin decree, tuned out to be several times worth its weight in gold. That, and being at the right place at the right time, allowed for the escape. Like so many others who have come through an intense, long-term crisis, Dr. Bloch could not believe it all had been the result of mere circumstance and concluded that events had "been directed to a clear and certain aim."

The very length of a review (as long as this one has become) runs the risk of suggesting that what is under consideration may be of greater historical importance than is actually the case. Bloch's memoirs are, of course, important. Scholars will want to look at the original German manuscript, as well as the full text of H.J. Schmeller's English translation, published here only in excerpt by the *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*. Some specialists may want to mine Bloch's memoir for the many telling and colorful anecdotes not mentioned in this review, others for the insights it may provide into several psychological issues, not the least of which, as implied by Block's emphasis on being Jewish, is the question of identity so problematic in the multi-national Austro-Hungarian Empire, a subject which has been addressed by psychohistorian Peter Loewenberg's "Austrian Portraits" in his *Decoding the Past.* Beyond that, the memoir holds interest for those who are beginning to learn about what it was like to live in the Austrian Empire and survive under the Nazis.

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new book, The Suicidal Embrace: Hitler, the Allies, and the Origins of the Second World War, was published early this year in paperback and will be released in hardcover for $30.00 on September 15th. Professor Beisel may be contacted at <dbeisel@sunyrockland.edu>. ❑

Elovitz: Pomper as a Psychohistorian of Russia

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and he took his degrees in history at the University of Chicago in 1959, 1961, and 1965. In 1964 he started teaching history at Wesleyan University where in 1992, he assumed the Armstrong professorship. At Wesleyan he teaches World History: A Psychohistory of the Modern World, Russian History, The Intelligentsia and Power, Stalin and Stalinism, *and* The Historical Evolution of Power and the Human Psyche. *He also has held important positions of faculty leadership including the coordination of freshman courses and the chair of the History Department.*

Professor Pomper is the author of a number of important books by well-respected presses. These include The Russian Revolutionary Intelligentsia (1970); Peter Lavrov and the Russian Revolutionary Movement (1972); Sergei Nechaev (1979); The Structure of Mind in History: Five Major Figures in Psychohistory (1985); (editor) Trotsky's Notebooks, 1933-1935: Writings on Lenin, Dialectics, and Evolution (1986); Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin: The Intelligentsia and Power (1990); (Editor, with Elphick and Vann), World History: Ideologies, Structures and Identities (1998); and (Editor, with Shaw), The Return of Science: Evolution, History, and Theory (2002). Among his many articles and chapters are "Problems of a Naturalistic Psychohistory," History and Theory, Vol. 12 (1973), pp. 367-388; "Nechaev, Lenin, and Stalin: The Psychology of Leadership," Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Vol. 26 (1978), pp. 11-30 and "Trotsky and Martov" in The Trotsky Reappraisal, edited by Brotherstone and Duke (1992). Currently, he is working on a book on Lenin's older brother, Alexander Ulianov.

In the course of his career, Professor Pomper has received a National Defense Education Act grant at the University of Chicago (1960-1962); Travel Grant at Moscow State University (1962-63); Ford Foundation Grant at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam, continued in New York City (1963-1964); Social Science Research Council Grant for one semester for postdoctoral training in the applications of psychology to history at Yale University with Robert Jay Lifton (1968); International Research and Exchanges Senior Scholar Exchange at Moscow State University (1973); Visiting Scholar at the Russian Research Center, Harvard University (1984-1985); Title VIII Fellowship at Hoover Institution (summer, 1987); Visiting Scholar at the Russian Research Center, Harvard University (September 1987-March, 1988); Fellow, Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies at the Wilson Center, Washington, D.C. (March-August, 1988); and a Fellow of the Russian Research Center,(July-August 1989 and 1991-1992). He is an associate editor of History and Theory. Dr. Pomper (PP) was interviewed in April by Paul Elovitz (PHE). He may be reached by e-mail at <ppomper@wesleyan.edu>.

PHE: What brought you to psychoanalysis and psychohistory?

PP: I found it difficult to explain the revolutionary career of Peter Lavrov without resorting to psychology. In 1963-64 I was in Amsterdam doing research at the International Institute of Social History and a few historians used to gather informally to discuss our work. One friend of a friend named Max Lesnik Oberstein suggested at one such gathering that Lavrov belonged to a category, *homo religiosus*, delineated in Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther*. He highly recommended the book. I took his advice, read it, and saw the resemblance. However, I understood that any systematic effort to psychoanalyze my subject would be difficult, that I didn't know very much, and that my best course at the time was to take a broadly psychological approach but not to try to insert into the narrative systematic psychoanalytic comments. It was perfectly clear than Lavrov had an outsize superego that translated nicely into the doctrine of the Russian intelligentia's "debt to the people," an idea that served "repentant nobles" very well. I began to think sys-