Teaching Freud in the Language of Our Students: The Case of a Religiously Affiliated Undergraduate Institution

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Diane Jonte-Pace

If the psychoanalyst must speak in the language of the patient, we, the teachers of Freud and religion, surely must teach in the language of our students. Who is Freud—and what is religion—in this language? The answer depends in part on academic context: Freud is taught in religious studies departments at public universities, private unaffiliated colleges, and religiously affiliated seminaries, colleges, and universities. This essay describes a course on “Religion in the Theories of Freud and Jung” at a religiously affiliated West Coast university with approximately four thousand undergraduate students.

Curriculum and Context

The students at Santa Clara University, a Catholic and Jesuit institution in northern California where I have taught for more than fifteen years, are predominantly (nearly two-thirds) Roman Catholic in background and practice. Most of the students come to my course through university requirements rather than pure interest: all students at the University are required to take three religious studies courses during their undergraduate careers, one at each of three levels.

Our first-level courses, such as “Ways of Understanding Religion,” “Religion and Modernity,” and “Religions of the Book,” introduce the study of re-
ligion by moving beyond the notion of religion as “belief” to probe the question of what religion reveals about human beings and societies. These first-level courses, primarily for first-year students, attempt to integrate, affirm, challenge, and develop the “big questions” brought by students to their earliest courses at the university. Second-level courses are intended for sophomores and juniors. They focus on a specific and coherent body of material, typically a religious tradition or a methodology. Examples include “Hispanic Theology,” “Japanese Religions,” and “Psychology of Religion.” These courses aim to provide a set of texts, data, and tools, offering a context for sustained efforts at analysis and interpretation. Third-level courses, for juniors and seniors, encourage critical engagement with current issues in religion, focusing on existential, social, or political problems and controversies. The third-level courses model a variety of ways of continuing to think about religion in the contemporary world as students prepare to leave the university. My course “Religion in the Theories of Freud and Jung” is a third-level course for juniors and seniors; other third-level courses include “Ethical Issues in Asian Religions,” “Theology of Marriage,” and “Biblical Poetry and Ancient Myth.”

We have structured our course offerings with this tripartite developmental framework in order to address the kinds of issues, concerns, and questions students have at the beginning, middle, and end of their college years. In addition, we attempt to build on the increasingly complex cognitive and intellectual skills they bring to the classroom at each stage of their college careers (Perry 1970). But this developmental framework is not our only organizing principle: our courses are structured by content and method as well as by level. At each level, courses are offered in three “areas”: “Scripture and Tradition”; “Theology, Ethics, and Spirituality”; and “Religion and Society.” We constructed these “areas” to ensure breadth in the curriculum of our majors. Religious studies majors take at least three courses, including at least one seminar, in each “area”; nonmajors take courses in any “area” they wish. My course is in Area III, “Religion and Society.”

Only a few of my students in this course are majoring in religious studies: their majors are more likely to be finance, biology, or communication. Yet when I teach this course I can assume that all students have some prior familiarity with religion and religious studies through their backgrounds or their required coursework on the first and second levels. Typically, they also have some familiarity with Freud: before the course begins many students already “know” that they dislike, reject, and disagree with Freud. Their distaste for Freud is a point to which I’ll return: indeed, it is the point at which I like to begin the course. But there is another source of potential resistance to Freud that must be acknowledged.

Structural and Administrative Resistance to Freud?

While one might imagine that a course on Freud and religion would be viewed with hesitation or suspicion at a Jesuit and Roman Catholic university, I’ve experienced primarily interest, enthusiasm, and support from the Department
of Religious Studies and the university. Never have my courses been challenged as insufficiently Catholic or insufficiently religious. Rather, they have been welcomed as serious attempts to engage the tensions between religious and secular voices in modernity.

Through my course on “Religion in the Theories of Freud and Jung” (and various courses at the first and second levels, such as “Religion and Modernity,” and “Psychology of Religion”), I’ve been drawn into a number of projects at the heart of the university. In the Western Culture Core Program for which Santa Clara University has received high acclaim, I’ve offered interdisciplinary “common lectures” on “Augustine as the First Psychoanalyst” and on “Freud and Nietzsche as Critics of the Enlightenment Project.” In addition, I’ve organized well-received interdisciplinary “lunch-time conversations” for faculty on psychology and religion. And I’ve received teaching and research grants to support course development and scholarship in this area. Far from fearing Freud as a demon of unorthodoxy, the faculty and administration of the university have welcomed the course, acknowledging Freud as an important voice in the discourse on religion in modernity.

This welcoming attitude could change in the future. The approval in 1999 of the Vatican document Ex Corde Ecclesiae (National Conference of Catholic Bishops 1990) by the American Catholic bishops may seriously undermine courses addressing contemporary thinkers on religion at Catholic universities. The president and provost of the university have assured faculty, students, and trustees that Santa Clara University remains committed to academic freedom, yet it is possible that a day may come when one dare not “speak Freud” in the religious studies departments of Catholic universities. In the meantime, the conversation continues.

**Speaking in the Language of the Students**

Although the university itself is currently open to Freudian conversations, a number of other questions must be voiced: Are there other forms of resistance at work? What of internal, self-created forms of resistance? Are there subtle techniques of censorship or self-censorship that shape my course? Have I created a course that carefully sidesteps controversial questions in order to avoid the unsettling dimensions of Freud’s challenge to religious faith for my students, my colleagues, and my administration? I think not. My sense is that the only censorship at work is the shaping that occurs when one begins a course by speaking in the language of one’s students, by addressing the fact that these students feel that they already “know” Freud, and by acknowledging that the Freud they “know” is indeed a foolish and authoritarian figure, an archaic theorist whose outmoded ideas are sexist, reductionistic, and unscientific. My students will come to know many other Freuds before the quarter is over, but I begin my course by inviting a discussion of the Freud whom they know and whom they dismiss. (Such discussions are the norm. Our upper-division classes are usually limited to thirty-five students, a good size for interaction, conversation, and debate.)
One of my goals in inviting students to describe their dismissal of Freud is to demonstrate to the class that in spite of their distaste for him, “we all speak Freud” (Gay 1999, 68). I invite the students to discover that they inhabit a world in which notions of inner life, interpersonal relationship, pathology, and health are shaped by a Freudian vocabulary that permeates institutions and social practices, from therapies to advertising to popular culture. Typically, as the class continues, the language of dismissal will begin to shift into a language of self-recognition: students will become conscious of their near-fluency in the language of everyday psychoanalysis.

Our common language gives us a starting point for a set of introductions to other Freuds: the “dissed” and dismissed Freud is not negated (he will be encountered again and again), but he is joined by a Freud who is the creator of a psychological language and worldview, an astute observer of inner life and interpersonal interactions, and a thoughtful and persistent, although critical, interpreter of religion.

Encountering Many Freuds: Interpretation, Critique, Life, and Culture

My course is divided into four units. In each unit, Freud is the primary focus; Jung provides a contrast, establishes a parallel, or becomes a partner in dialogue. We first encounter Freud and Jung as interpreters of religion; we then turn to Freud and Jung as critics of religion. Our third unit, on the intersections of life and theory, introduces Freud the Viennese Jew, child of recent immigrants from Eastern Europe to Vienna, and Jung the son, grandson, and nephew of Swiss Protestant pastors. This unit examines the impact of religious background—and its loss—on the rise of psychological ideas. In the fourth unit, on psychoanalysis, culture and theology, we encounter Freud and Jung as products and creators of modernity, exploring their ideas in relation to the perspectives of their contemporary interpreters and critics.

Freud and Jung as Interpreters of Religion

The unit on interpretation introduces our foundational interpretive frameworks, the Freudian Oedipus complex and the Jungian theory of archetypes and individuation. Freud’s short essay from 1928, “A Religious Experience,” an Oedipal interpretation of an American doctor’s crisis of faith, illustrates with clarity Freud’s theory of the powerful incestuous and parricidal fantasies influencing us in social relations and religious beliefs. A close reading of this essay also provides an opportunity to encourage both critical thinking and psychoanalytic thinking among students. I ask them to observe gaps and absences in the text, such as Freud’s failure to attend to the American doctor’s and his own castrative imagery (“removal to a dissecting room of the dead body” [SE 21: 170]) even as he theorizes the American doctor’s return to faith as a classic Oedipal sublimation (“the outcome of the struggle was displayed once again in the sphere of religion . . . complete submission to the will of God the Father” [171]).
I encourage students to ask why Freud neglected to mention in this text a theme he emphasized so strongly elsewhere: the role of castration anxiety in the renunciation of incestuous and parricidal/deicidal fantasies. Students eagerly discover repressions and evasions in Freud’s texts. I suggest that the presence of a dead mother in the text of the American doctor was nearly as unsettling to Freud as it was to the American doctor he analyzed. Freud transformed a dead mother in the text into an erotic mother in the theory, substituting sex for death. Freud was quite comfortable with fantasies of dead and murdered fathers, but he did not easily tolerate images of dead mothers. I use this text for several pedagogical reasons. It introduces the Oedipal theory and illustrates the application of the theory to religion. In addition, it provides an opportunity for students to “think like Freud” at the same time as they “think against Freud.” They critique Freud, asking what’s absent or problematic in his texts, using, in their critiques, the psychoanalytic tools and methods he developed.

Our discussion of the Oedipal sources of religious belief in “A Religious Experience” is followed by a discussion of the final chapter of Totem and Taboo (SE 13), where Freud applied the Oedipal theory to the prehistorical origins of culture, morality, and religion. This provides an opportunity to demonstrate Freud’s evolutionary assumption of a parallelism between individual psychology (the psychological context of the faith of the American doctor) and cultural psychology (the historical and cultural context of belief, ritual, and morality). Fantasies or enactments of parricide structure both “A Religious Experience” and Totem and Taboo. My students tend to dislike Freud’s all-encompassing theory of a primal murderous and cannibalistic act at the origins of culture and religion repeated periodically in a ritualized “totem meal.” A few, however, have acknowledged that elements of “A Religious Experience” echo their own changing views of God and religion, their crises of faith, or their relations with their own fathers.

I juxtapose Freud’s analyses of the parricidal sources of individual and cultural religion with a set of Freudian readings that depart from the incessant Oedipal theorizing of these two texts. Freud’s discussion of the origins of “the oceanic feeling” in the first chapter of Civilization and Its Discontents (SE 21) and his analysis of the mythologies of death and desire in a 1913 essay “The Theme of the Three Caskets” (SE 12) provide examples of “another Freud” who abandons, if only briefly, his Oedipal theory. The analysis of the oceanic feeling represents a foray into the pre-Oedipal followed by a return to Oedipus: Freud traces the source of mysticism (religious experience) to the earliest experience of the pre-Oedipal child at the mother’s breast, yet he reaffirms the Oedipal origins of religious ideas. He states, for example, “an infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish his ego from the external world. . . . We are perfectly willing to acknowledge that the ‘oceanic’ feeling exists in many people and we are inclined to trace it back to an early phase of ego feeling. The further question then arises, what claim this feeling has to be regarded as the source of religious needs. To me the claim does not seem compelling. . . . The derivation of religious needs from the infant’s helplessness and the longing for the father aroused by it seems to me incontrovert-
ible” (SE 21: 66–67, 72). Students enjoy the opportunity to critique Freud’s inconsistencies. Yet, their “dissing” of Freud is contextualized by their experience of reading his texts with care.

The “Theme of the Three Caskets” offers a more sustained non-Oedipal interpretation. Freud constructs a psychoanalytic reading of the mythological and literary theme of the hero whose choice among three women (or three caskets, or three forms of the mother) involves a choice between sex and death. I use this essay to show that Freud is not monolithic in his Oedipal analyses and to engage students in a conversation about contemporary cultural phenomena—films, literature, social practices—that replicate these mythological and literary themes associating women and death. I ask about what kinds of ideas about gender and sexuality are promoted by such patterns. I invite the students to compare this essay from 1913 to the essay “A Religious Experience” from 1928, where we found that Freud was unable to theorize associations of women and death. In anticipation of our third unit on life and theory we speculate on what biographical or social factors might have allowed Freud to dismiss or displace his insights of 1913 about unconscious fears and fantasies associating maternity with mortality when he wrote the 1928 essay in which he turned away from analysis of theme of a dead mother.

I suggest to my students that Freud’s interpretation of the theme of the three caskets in myth and literature initiated the sort of analyses of cultural misogyny that contemporary feminist thinkers have now taken up (Mitchell 1974; Buhle 1998; Van Herik 1982; Jonte-Pace 2001a). Students often find contemporary parallels to the myths Freud analyzes in recent films such as So I Married an Axe Murderer, Basic Instinct, and Three Weddings and a Funeral, where women, sex, and marriage are dangerous and potentially deadly to men. Many students who found Freud’s Oedipal theories easy to dismiss now begin to perceive a new Freud, a thoughtful interpreter of myths, legends, and cultural ideologies, a Freud with feminist or protofeminist ideas.

I use these interpretive texts for a number of pedagogical reasons. Most important, they allow me to expose the presence of a number of different “Freuds.” First, as noted above, they not only introduce the Oedipal theory in relation to religion but also illustrate the gaps in that theory. In addition, they demonstrate that a non-Oedipal theory occasionally emerges in Freud’s writings, a theory that anticipates feminist interpretations of mythic and cultural misogyny. And, as I’ve suggested, they provide an opportunity for students to “speak Freud” and to “think like Freud.”

The Jungian texts I set in dialogue with these differ from year to year; my main concern is to illustrate Jung’s concepts of the archetypes and the collective unconscious, and to offer an interpretation of religious experiences or symbols that will contrast clearly with Freud’s approach. Max Zeller’s brief account of Jung’s interpretation of a dream of building a temple provides an example of Jung’s notion of the progressive, transformative effect of the collective unconscious on religion (1982); Jung’s interpretation, in Aion, of Christ as the archetype of the Self (CW 9, 2) offers a complex interpretation of Christian symbolism. Alternatively, I’ve used Jung’s
description of the archetypes of the collective unconscious in *Two Essays On Analytical Psychology* (CW 7).

Particularly successful in the classroom as archetypal interpretations of religion are selected passages from Jung’s writings on the hero myth (Segal 1998). On occasion I’ve shown segments of Bill Moyers’s video *The Powers of Myth: Volume 1, The Hero’s Journey* (1988) as an illustration of Jungian myth interpretation. Joseph Campbell’s discussion of the film *Star Wars* in Moyers’s video exemplifies beautifully the archetypal and mythic stages outlined by Jung. The video, with clips from Lucas’s film, allows a pedagogy in the “language of the students”: these students have grown up on *Star Wars*. Ann Bedford Ulanov’s 1971 essay outlining an archetypal analysis of anima/animus issues in the film *Wizard of Oz* is nearly as effective, although *Oz* is not as deeply embedded as *Star Wars* in the language and experience of our current students.

I conclude this unit on interpretation by asking students to apply their new Freudian and Jungian interpretive skills by writing an interpretation of a film with some connection to religion. We watch the film together, either in class or in an evening outside our class schedule. A viewing of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* provides an opportunity for a discussion of the themes of mortality and immortality, death and desire, castration anxiety, and the male construction of the female image. Alternatively, I’ve shown Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski’s *Decalogue 4: Honor Thy Father and Mother*, a powerful narrative involving a young woman whose discovery, on “Easter Monday,” that her father may not be her biological parent leads her to consider a sexual relationship with him. Kieslowski’s film invites oedipal interpretation, although some of my students have explored the theme of maternal absence and others have found a Jungian “heroic journey toward individuation” below the surface of the text. A different film I sometimes use at this point in the course is Australian director Peter Weir’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (the 1998 director’s cut is superior to the 1974 release), which links death with forbidden desire in a narrative set in a fin-de-siècle school for girls. Juxtaposing the forces of nature and civilization, the film examines the dangerous powers of forbidden erotic fantasies and the numinous qualities of a phallic sacred site. I teach the course often enough that I find it necessary to vary the writing assignments and the films we view. I particularly like Kieslowski’s *Decalogue 4* because of its length: at fifty-five minutes, it allows both a viewing and a preliminary discussion on the same day. Students typically write a short interpretive essay over the weekend, returning to class the following week for a more extended discussion of the film.

*Freud and Jung as Critics of Religion*

With the second unit we turn from an interpretation of religion to a critique of religion. It is important to differentiate interpretation and critique: they are interrelated but separable. I began with interpretation rather than critique because I wanted the students to understand the theories before encountering
the critical challenges to religion that are likely to generate defensive reactions. I also began with interpretation because the interpretive material is more specifically psychoanalytic. The critique, especially in *The Future of an Illusion* (*SE* 21) with which we start this second unit, expresses an Enlightenment-based rationalism that is only occasionally “Freudian,” psychoanalytic, or Oedipal in the narrow sense.

*The Future of an Illusion* is our first “critical” text. We read selectively, focusing on three major issues: Freud’s definition of illusion as wish-based thoughts that may (or may not) be true; his Enlightenment-based critique of religion as a moral system promoting fearful obedience to an Oedipal authority; and his insistence on the need for a new system of morality based on rationality, self-knowledge, justice, and community, rather than on castrative fears of paternal/divine punishment. I introduce a fourth issue as well, which connects with our previous unit on interpretation: like a psychoanalyst watching for subconscious patterns in the words of a patient, we watch for subtextual patterns in the rhetoric of Freud’s writings. I am particularly interested in religious subtexts. A few examples are Freud’s use of terminology like “our God Logos” (*SE* 21: 54) with its echoes of the Logos theology of the Gospel of John; his fantasy that, in another era, he would have been martyred as a religious heretic (36–40); and his use of biblical structures and paradigms. We note the way Freud begins *The Future of an Illusion* with a Genesis-like inquiry into our “origins” (*SE* 21: 5) and ends the volume with a utopian and salvific vision in which “life will be tolerable for everyone and civilization no longer oppressive to anyone” (50): he moves from creation to redemption, as it were. Students discover that Freud’s rhetoric and vocabulary provide a hint that he harbored grandiose religious fantasies about the future of his own ideas—fantasies he held firmly in check, allowing them expression only in verbal play and metaphor.

I enjoy bringing to class a three-page review by T. S. Eliot of Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion*. Eliot, writing in 1928, the year after the publication of the book, found it quite “stupid” (1988, 575). I use this review as a basis for group projects: students work in small groups to discuss what Eliot understood and what he missed (he focuses on the theme of religion as illusion, missing completely Freud’s larger concern with morality and community). Students have an opportunity to write a response to Eliot in the voice of Freud on an exam later in the quarter. My pedagogical goal here is to cultivate a kind of critical thinking that invites students to defend Freud against his detractors. They soon realize how far they’ve come from knowing only one distasteful and easily dismissable Freud.

*Civilization and Its Discontents* is our next text. Again, we read selectively. Our main focus is Freud’s critique of the excessive suffering and guilt caused by a religiously enforced superego. Freud’s critique of the “love commandment” as dangerously unrealistic provides a nuanced entrée into the question of the tension between Eros and Thanatos, Love and Death, in the context of morality and civilization (*SE* 21: 109–16). We also read the chapter on individual and cultural responses to suffering, a chapter in which Freud sounds
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nearly Buddhist in his analysis of the various ways we encounter, resist, or embrace the suffering inevitable in life (74–85). He states, for example, “in the last analysis, all suffering is nothing else than sensation; it only exists insofar as we feel it and we only feel it in consequence of certain ways in which our organism is regulated” (78). Here, as in The Future of an Illusion, students observe an implicitly religious subtext in Freud’s explicitly antireligious tract.7

As in our first unit, we conclude this unit with a set of readings from Jung. Jung is often seen as the friend of religion, a thinker who defends religion against Freud’s hostile attacks. I allow Jung, however, to present himself as a more complex figure—sometimes a reformer, sometimes a defender, sometimes a critic. Jung the critic of religion emerges in selected passages in Memories, Dreams, Reflections (1963): he presents religion as a rigid and unchanging institution, out of touch with the deeper patterns of the collective unconscious. See, for example, his discussion of his famous childhood fantasy in which God destroys the Basel cathedral with an immense turd (39) and his dream of the underground sacred phallus on a golden throne (12). Jung the reformer of religion, on the other hand, emerges in later chapters, where he states clearly that religion can and must be reinvigorated and transformed: “Our myth has become mute and gives no answers. The fault lies . . . solely in us who have not developed it further” (332). Clips from videos provide a portrait of Jung as supporter and defender of religion. In Aniela Jaffe’s nearhagiographic remarks in the film The Mystery That Heals, Jung is “the most religious man I ever knew.” Similarly, in a BBC interview, an elderly Jung, in response to an interviewer’s question “Do you believe in God?” answers “I do not believe, I know.” While some students find Jung confusing and contradictory, others are able to tolerate such ambivalence. And some, uncomfortable with Freud’s harsh criticism of religion, find Jung’s stance(s) deeply reassuring.

At this point in the course, some students typically express anger and resentment because Freud and Jung challenge their previously unquestioned religious and cultural views. I try not to meet their challenges defensively or interpret them as personal attacks. Rather, I invite and encourage their critiques, acknowledging that, indeed, the theories are often bizarre, problematic, and counterintuitive. Their angry responses are sure to initiate class discussion and debate; other students will often come to Freud’s or Jung’s defense. I’ve sometimes observed that anger toward the course content can be transformed into critical thinking and insight. Angry students, finding their anger legitimated, often undergo a shift: they become careful critics and analysts of the texts, rather than angry denouncers of the ideas. One of my recent students who entered the class with a strong anti-Freudian animus came to my office at the end of the term to tell me his new “mantra”: “the unconscious is real, and everything can be interpreted.”

A word about the erotics of pedagogy may be important at this point. More troubling than the angry students are students who fall in love with the professor. The pedagogy of the erotic is often more complex than what might be called
the pedagogy of anger. Sometimes this “falling in love” seems to be a result of the open discussions of Freud’s ideas about sexuality; at other times it involves students’ discoveries that their inner lives are filled with rich new meanings; sometimes it has a religious or spiritual component. I try to communicate to these “loving” students that their love is for the text, not the teacher. Good pedagogy often involves a disentangling of students’ attitudes toward teachers from their attitudes toward texts—pedagogy, in other words, utilizes the transference relationship. Freud’s insights into the transference (and the dangers of the countertransference) are as applicable to the desk as they are to the couch.

**Intersections of Life and Theory**

Unit three introduces the complex intersections of life and theory. In this unit we will encounter more secondary literature than we’ve previously seen. We begin not with the childhood or early years, which we’ll read at the end of this unit, but with the Freud-Jung relationship as it is presented in Jung’s chapter on Freud in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963). Jung describes Freud as a brilliant but troubled thinker who, during the early years of their friendship, repressed his religiosity and projected it inappropriately onto his theory of sexuality. Jung describes himself as a calm, reasonable witness to the older man’s rantings and obsessions. I pair Jung’s account—written decades after the events described—with a set of letters written in 1910, in the midst of the years of intense yet conflicted friendship. These famous letters paint a rather different picture of the relationship: in 1910, Jung was quite evidently an immensely enthusiastic devotee, projecting grandiose religious expectations onto Freud and his theory, and proclaiming prophetically that psychoanalysis would change the world through a Dionysian and liberatory rediscovery of the sacrality of sex: “The ethical problem of sexual freedom really is enormous and worth the sweat of all noble souls. But 2000 years of Christianity can only be replaced by something equivalent. . . . I imagine a far finer and more comprehensive task for psychoanalysis. . . . We must give it time to infiltrate into people from many centres, to revivify among intellectuals a feeling for symbol and myth” (in McGuire 1974, 294–95). A concerned, cautious Freud emerges from these letters, gently chiding Jung for his excesses and warning him not to expect psychoanalysis to become a system of salvation: “You mustn’t regard me as the founder of a religion. . . . I am not thinking of a substitute for religion; this need must be sublimated” (295).

Many students experience disorientation as they struggle with the contradictions in these texts. Is Freud the neurotic figure, denying religion and projecting it into a sterile theory? Or is Jung the one who projects religious meanings into psychoanalytic ideas? A historical framework provides a preliminary path out of the contradictions. Students often decide that Jung’s view of Freud in 1910 should not be expected to be consistent with his view of Freud in the 1960s when he penned or dictated his autobiographical remarks. A chapter from Peter Homans’s *Jung in Context* (1995) provides an additional frame-
work within which these contradictory texts make sense. Through a close reading of the letters and the *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung 1963) chapter, Homans uncovers elements of a narcissistic transference in the Freud-Jung relationship. Both the religious ideation so evident in the 1910 letters and the sense of betrayal and disillusionment so evident in Jung’s chapter on Freud published half a century later are typical of narcissistic transferences, involving idealization and merger, and their dissolution. Homans shows that “the conventional views . . . that Jung resisted Freud’s theories or that Freud could not tolerate Jung’s innovations address only the surface of their relationship. The letters reveal a far richer, more complex situation . . . [involving] Jung’s idealization of Freud and his thoughts about religion” (1995, 55–56). Again, students are invited to think psychoanalytically about psychoanalysis, and the psychoanalytic perspective provides a larger view in which the contradictory texts make sense.

After introducing the notion of the narcissistic transference through Homans’s analysis of the Freud-Jung relationship, I ask students to read B.D.’s (Hilda Doolittle’s) poem “The Master” (1981), an evocative account of the feminist poet’s brief analysis with Freud in the mid-30s. This poem serves several pedagogical and curricular goals: it provides an intimate look at Freud’s unconventional analytic style; it is rich with religious images and symbols (Miletus [407], the Stone Sphynx [414], the Lord [416]); and it can be read in terms of the same theme introduced by Homans’s essay, the theme of the narcissistic transference. Freud’s unconventional style of practicing psychoanalysis is evident throughout the poem: “He was rather casual” (413). References to the sacrality of the “ritual” of psychoanalysis abound: “each vestment had meaning, every gesture is wisdom” (407). Prominent in the poem is a spiritual sense of the therapeutic relationship: “I knew wisdom, I found measureless truth in his words” (407).

B.D.’s poem expresses a complex attitude toward Freud. H.D. is deeply grateful to Freud for the healing she experienced. Her gratitude to Freud contains spiritual and erotic components. Both of these are tempered by anger. She writes, for example,

His tyranny was absolute, for I had to love him then  
I had to recognize that he was beyond all-men  
nearer to God. (408)

H.D.’s poem also deals with the problem of bisexuality:

I had two loves separate.  
I asked him to explain the impossible  
which he did. (410)

Students today—far more than students ten or fifteen years ago, when I started using this reading in the course—find this theme an important and moving one.

H.D. raises important questions about whether psychoanalysis has become rigidified into an institutional “religion” (“his pen will be sacred” [413]) or
whether it escapes such hardening, remaining a source of psychological and spiritual healing and liberation. She writes:

They will found temples in his name,
his fame
will be so great
that anyone who has known him
will also be hailed as master,
seer,
interpreter;
only I
I will escape. (413)

In H.D.’s portrayal, Freud emerges as a sagacious but sometimes enraging therapist and midwife to the soul who tolerates, or even encourages, a fair amount of religious projection. Avoiding conflict, he accepts her portrayal of his wisdom, stating, “We won’t argue about that. . . . You are a poet” (413). An exam question later in the quarter will give students the opportunity to grapple further with the meanings of the poem and its religious, sexual, and narcissistic components. I often ask students to compare Jung’s 1910 letter to H.D.’s poem, speculating about why Freud might have brushed aside Jung’s religious projections in 1910 but tolerated H.D.’s religious projections in the mid-30s.

We then look into the pasts of both Freud and Jung, focusing on their youths and their religious backgrounds. The first two chapters of Jung’s *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963) dramatically portray Jung’s struggles with his pastor-father, his boyhood visions, and his increasing alienation from the Calvinist Protestantism of his youth. Freud’s religious background is introduced through Dennis Klein’s *Jewish Origins of the Psychoanalytic Movement* (1985). Klein’s work allows us to examine the complex effects of Jewishness and anti-Semitism on Freud’s life and thought. I supplement Klein’s text with passages from Freud’s highly autobiographical masterwork, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (SE 4)—specifically, his account of his father’s story of being forced off the pavement with an anti-Semitic taunt. This provides an opportunity for broader discussions of anti-Semitism, of differences among religious, ethnic, and cultural Jewishness, and of Freud’s self-identification as a “godless Jew.”

We conclude this unit with a short reading from the introductory chapter of Homans’s *Jung in Context* (1995), in which both Freud and Jung are presented as paradigmatic modernists. Homans’s argument is that both theorists experienced loss of a religious common culture, both withdrew into introspection, and both developed a new vocabulary to articulate their experiences of the inner world. Both “originative psychologists,” in other words, developed their depth psychological theories out of personal experiences involving the losses of Jewish and Protestant religious traditions and communities. This reading serves to locate Freud’s and Jung’s theories within the context of their own lives and within the context of the broader historical forces of modernity. It provides a segue into the next unit.
Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Theology

Our final unit, "Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Theology" introduces reactions from Freud's and Jung's critics, supporters, and interpreters. I show Luis Buñuel's short 1927 film Un Chien Andalou as an illustration of the incorporation of psychoanalytic ideas and imagery into surrealist and avant-garde art and culture. I ask students to consider not only how Freud's ideas contribute to the film but also how Freud and Jung might interpret it. We discuss the dreamlike nonchronological narrative structure, the nightmare imagery, the intertwined themes of Eros and Thanatos, and the sense of "discontent" with civilization. Students understand clearly that Buñuel's imagery—for example, a man dragging a piano draped with a dead horse and two helpless priests—evokes Freud's sense of our "discontent" with civilization in general and with religion in particular.

We then move to Paul Ricoeur's question, "Can psychoanalysis purify religion?" A brief reading from Ricoeur's Freud and Philosophy (1970) is paired with David Miller's essay "Attack Upon Christendom! The Anti-Christianism of Depth Psychology" (1986). Miller describes the importance and value of the psychoanalytic challenge to religious authoritarianism, infantilism, and literalism. In his view, Freud and Jung, as well as James Hillman and Jacques Lacan, are authentic religious thinkers who avoid the trap of being inauthentically religious. As a companion piece to Miller's article I use a short section of Julia Kristeva's 1991 Strangers to Ourselves in which psychoanalysis is described in almost soteriological terms as a new foundation for relational ethics. In contrast to these readings I introduce Martin Buber's critique of Jung in The Eclipse of God (1957). In Buber's antimodernist view, Jung's psychology makes God a function of the unconscious rather than a Transcendent Other. I invite students to struggle with Ricoeur's question and with the tension between Buber's and Miller's/Kristeva's interpretations of the relation of depth psychology and religion. These tensions are not new, but these issues remain important in our culture, in our universities (especially, I think, in our religiously affiliated universities), and in the lives of our students.

Our final reading brings us to the heart of current debates over Freud's legacy. I introduce the controversy over the recent show on Freud's life, work, and influence sponsored by the Library of Congress. I ask students to read a packet of magazine articles and newspaper clippings, along with a chapter from Freud: Conflict and Culture (Roth 1998), a volume edited by the curator of the controversial exhibit. The intensity and duration of this debate over Freud's scientific, ethical, and professional legacy provide a measure of the importance of Freud's contested place in our culture. I invite students to join in this debate, taking a position on this topic in a short essay at the end of the quarter.

We end the course with a "symbolic feast." Each student brings an item of "symbolic" food to share with the class; each offers a brief Freudian or Jungian interpretation of the food. We've shared Freudian phallic pretzel sticks;
mandala cookies with Jungian themes of *conjunctio oppositorum* illustrated in their chocolate/vanilla patterns; numinous “oceanic” juices (with straws for sucking); gingerbread primal fathers ready to be consumed cannibalistically; and bubblegum cigars. This symbolic feast reiterates in a humorous but embodied way the “totem meal” we encountered during the first unit. It provides a reminder to the students that they now “speak Freud” with some fluency; that they know several Freuds; that these multiple Freuds have complex and interesting relations with religion and modernity; that they themselves are part of a modern world that Freud helped to shape; and that the course has provided them with “tools for thinking” about religion and culture that may be particularly valuable as they leave the university. We thus end the course with a “tasting” of Freud, in direct contrast with the “distaste” with which we began.

**Notes**

1. Santa Clara University has been ranked second among public and private regional universities in the West for thirteen consecutive years (*U.S. News and World Report* 2002). The core curriculum is an important part of this ranking system.

2. One such grant, the Presidential Research Grant, 1998–2000, has provided support for this very project. A Dialogue and Design grant from the Bannan Institute for Jesuit Education and Christian Values supported the lunchtime conversations on psychology and religion. I am grateful for this support.

3. According to the document produced by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Ex Corde Ecclesiae: Application to the United States* (2000), this would apply only to professors who are Roman Catholic. Many, however, have suggested that the enforcement of the policy would, at least indirectly, influence all faculty in departments of religious studies and theology at Catholic universities.

4. Occasionally I pair this material with the famous chapter in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in which an infant (Freud’s grandson) plays the game of “fort” and “da,” presence and absence, or life and death. This provides a poetic and touching example of the conflict between the life and death drives, a conflict that takes shape in the experience of the presence and absence of the mother. Some students have pursued this further as a research paper topic. I direct students to other readings on death in Freud’s corpus: “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death,” “On Transience,” “Why War?” and “Medusa’s Head.” Occasionally I use my own 1996 essay at this point in the course.

5. I make available to the students a number of articles offering psychoanalytic interpretations of religious phenomena: Julia Kristeva’s 1987 analysis of the Nicene Creed from *In the Beginning Was Love*; Alan Dundes’s 1980 psychoanalytic essay “The Hero Pattern in the Life of Jesus,” selected psychological interpretations of Augustine’s *Confessions* from Don Capps and Jim Dittes’s 1990 edited volume, *The Hunger of the Heart*, etc.

6. He hints that his ideas would have led to his martyrdom: “In former times utterances such as mine brought with them a sure curtailment of one’s earthly existence” (*SE* 21: 36). He also draws parallels between those who foolishly fear psychoanalytic ideas and the pagans who, in earlier centuries, feared Christianity: “Everyone is frightened [of psychoanalysis] as though it would expose one to a still greater
danger. When St. Boniface cut down the tree that was venerated as sacred by the Saxons, the bystanders expected some fearful event to follow upon the sacrilege. But nothing happened and the Saxons accepted baptism" (40). He leaves the conclusion unstated: psychoanalysis is parallel to Christianity; the contemporary “bystanders” will eventually accept psychoanalysis.

7. I frequently integrate a short reading from Moses and Monotheism to complement The Future of an Illusion and Civilization and Its Discontents. While The Future of an Illusion sets up a contrast between Christian belief and rational morality, and Civilization and Its Discontents critiques the “love commandment” central to Christian morality, Moses and Monotheism contrasts Christian belief with Jewish morality. My students (mainly Catholics, as noted above) tend to respond defensively to Moses and Monotheism. They bristle at Freud’s definition of Christian ritual and belief as superstition. I ask them to situate Freud’s argument historically, imagining what Viennese Catholicism would have looked like in the 1920s and 1930s, prior to the changes accompanying the aggiornamento of Vatican II.

8. Bakan’s Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition (1958) offers a complementary perspective. In a semester-long course, I’d include both Klein and Bakan, as well as Boyarin (1997), Geller (1993, 1997), and Gilman (1993), important contemporary theorists of Freud’s Jewishness.


10. See also Jonte-Pace 1997.

11. Alternatively, I’ve used Philip Rieff’s 1966 volume, Triumph of the Therapeutic, a text tinged with nostalgia for an earlier culture of the “religious man,” for a discussion of the psychologizing of modernity enacted by both Freud and Jung.

References


