Teaching Freud: A Symposium

Teaching Freud Today?

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In 2017, the United States Library of Congress announced that it had completed, with the support of The Polonsky Foundation and with assistance from the Sigmund Freud Archives, the digitization of the Sigmund Freud Papers. The Library houses the most extensive collection of Freud's psychoanalytic and personal papers. Its digital collection includes Freud's handwritten manuscripts, his correspondence with family, friends, and colleagues, his notes and memorabilia, related biographical records, and hundreds of interviews and recollections. It is now fully available to scholars and teachers of Freud at the Library's website.

The creation of the digital Freud Papers at the Library of Congress seemed a propitious moment to consider Freud's place in contemporary psychoanalytic scholarship and education. With this event as immediate inspiration and bearing in mind a context of cultural and scholarly ambivalence toward Freud, the Sigmund Freud Archives organized the symposium "Teaching Freud Today" at the American Psychoanalytic Association's National Meeting in January 2017. Two considerations motivated the choice of topic. First, although psychoanalysis began as the creation of a single visionary, Freud's ideas have become so deeply ingrained in our culture and practice that their influence can be overlooked. Second, Freud's place in education—both within our institutes and beyond—has been in dispute for years, perhaps never more so than in the present. The panelists whose contributions are published in this issue of *American Imago* therefore addressed several timely questions: What elements of Freud's thinking remain vital today, for psychoanalytic clinical training, and for scholarship in other fields of study? How might the clinical application and academic

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exploration of Freud's ideas inform each other? How might we help students of Freud to develop their own attitudes, both appreciative and critical, toward his work? What does Freud's vision of humankind have to offer, as we move through the twenty-first century?

Each contributor to the symposium has taught Freud in multiple settings, both within and outside psychoanalytic training institutes. Each believes in the possibility of a mutually productive exchange between clinical psychoanalysis and adjacent fields of study. Though there is currently much interest in the juncture between psychoanalysis and neuroscience, we confined our focus to neighboring disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. It is in these fields that most of us—and many of our students—first encountered and formed opinions of Freud's work. Some have been urged to dismiss Freud wholesale. More fortunately, some have learned to appreciate the power of unconscious motivation in shaping literature, arts, and politics. As contributors to this symposium, we were united in feeling that current scholarship in the humanities and social sciences should inform how Freud is taught in our institutes and that balanced, clinically informed, contemporary presentations of Freud should be of interest to academics. We believe it is essential—both for practicing psychoanalysts and for scholars across disciplines—to read Freud in cultural and historical context, and to consider what in Freud's work remains eternally true, what must be adapted for a new place and time, and what is perhaps best left behind.

As practicing clinicians, we have found that teaching Freud (like any other topic) in a classroom setting requires a stance different from what is usual in clinical practice for many psychoanalysts. Just as a clinician must form a "working alliance" with a patient, a classroom instructor must form a "teaching alliance" with students.[1] Toward this end, several of us have found it useful to engage students through our own, evolving relationship to Freud and his ideas. In evaluating Freud's work, we bring personal experience to bear; by making ourselves available to students in this way, we invite them to engage Freud on their own, experiential terms. Some of us explicitly invite students to *identify with* Freud, to join him as

he sets about making theory from what he observes of his patients' lives *and his own life*. Freud wrote not only with conscious aims—to make specific arguments—but also (like any author) with unconscious motives. He wrote, at least in part, to work through personal conflicts and to metabolize encounters with patients, which were—for Freud, as for any analyst—stimulating and sometimes disturbing. In teaching Freud's work, we help students to see how the author reveals himself both intentionally and unintentionally. This makes reading, teaching, and learning Freud into a participatory sport. Though structured differently from clinical practice, teaching Freud in this way shares with clinical work a heightened alertness to subjective experience and to various forms of identification (and counter-identification). In asking that students ground their opinions in an understanding of Freud's personal position—as a turn-of-the-twentieth-century Viennese man, as the inventor of a new discipline—we discourage both unthinking idealization and reflexive condemnation.

As an example, I have taught Freud in multiple settings, from before the start of my clinical training (first as a psychologist, then as a psychoanalyst) through my present position on the faculty of a psychoanalytic institute. My approach to teaching Freud bears the mark of my first encounter with his work, during my freshman year of college. I have always been grateful that my introduction came through a scholar of both Freud and history: the late Peter Gay, whose keen interest and respect balanced his critical appraisal of both the man and his ideas (see Gay, 1988). It was in Peter Gay's class that I first encountered the Dora case (Freud, 1905 [1901]), and also Janet Malcolm's description of that work as Freud's "well-known case of transference-burn" (1981, p. 93). Malcolm called Dora a "messed-up little Viennese teen-ager," and surmised that Freud nonetheless reacted to her as if she were "Original Woman, in all her beauty and evil mystery." I am still indebted to both Gay and Malcolm when I help candidates to read the Dora case as Freud's unwitting record of the *countertransference* struggle that led him to the discovery of *transference*—but not, alas, to the simultaneous discovery of its correlate in the analyst!

I have found "Dora" to be a singularly useful text in teaching undergraduates, doctoral students, and analytic candidates.

More than once, I have encountered students who have learned elsewhere that Freud's treatment of Dora disqualifies him from serious study. I make clear that doubt and questioning are welcome in my classroom, and that I share a contemporary perspective from which Freud's ideas about women seem embarrassing, his grasp of the clinical situation naïve, and his analytic technique outright counterproductive. This is *not,* I emphasize, how contemporary psychoanalysts—even "Freudians"—think about women; when we interpret our patients' dreams, associations, and mannerisms, whether in the consulting room or in writing, we are not nearly so cocksure as Freud seems to be. Why study "Dora" at all, then? *Because* it captures Freud in a stance offensive to contemporary sensibilities, his work on this case highlights his position as a man of his particular time and place, unable to see clearly the influence of context on either his theory or his reactions to patients. This approach raises a question of particular importance for students of clinical psychoanalysis: What cultural and historical conditions work, unseen, to shape how *we* understand and approach our patients? This is an unsettling question; usefully so, I think!

The Dora case is also of interest for a property it shares with much of Freud's work (as other contributors to this symposium attest): in it we see Freud's active use of his writing to forge theory. When teaching Dora, I start by presenting his conscious, stated motives for writing the case. In a January 25, 1901, letter to Fliess, Freud writes that he has just completed his "fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria, in which the explanations are grouped round two dreams," and that he regards this case as "a continuation of the dream book," i.e., *The Interpretation of Dreams,* which he had just published (cited in Freud, 1905[1901], p. 4). In the Dora case, Freud sets out to illustrate the utility of dream interpretation in the treatment of hysteria. Hysterical neurosis, as Freud here understands it, originates in the repression of forbidden wishes. The hysteric cannot give a complete, historical account of her own life; the purge of offending wishes has left gaps in her memory. Neurotic symptoms—like dreams—simultaneously conceal and reveal what has been repressed. Given symptoms, dreams, and the patient's associations to both, the psychoanalyst—equipped

with interpretive methods laid out in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900)—can find what patients have hidden in plain sight. The analyst, in other words, makes conscious what was previously unconscious and helps to restore what has gone missing from the historical record—and therein lies the cure.[2]

What gets Freud into trouble—with Dora herself and with legions of readers—is his no-holds-barred approach to the construction of a complete historical record. He rushes to fill gaps in the patient's story using the material he has at hand—no doubt a composite of actual events, distorting memories, and fantasy (both patient's and analyst's). My favorite segment of the case, for teaching purposes—a few paragraphs on pp. 47–49 (Freud, 1905[1901])—is one that readily commands the attention of readers, even those new to Freud. Here we encounter Freud in a cantankerous stance, parrying others' anticipated objections to his treatment of Dora. He has just informed his patient that her nervous cough functions as a symbolic reaction to thoughts of "sexual gratification *per os"* between her father and his mistress, Frau K. The context for this interpretation includes Freud's insistence that Dora must be attracted to Frau K's husband, Herr K, whose sexual advances she has rebuffed. Most contemporary readers (even undergraduate students) readily grasp the formal similarity between Freud's approach to Dora and that of Herr K; each man presses himself upon her—one verbally, the other physically. And most readers can see, hidden in plain sight, *Freud's* discomfort with what he has said to Dora when he justifies it to those who may react with "skepticism . . . astonishment and horror." Freud famously claims for himself the right of the gynecologist, who "after all . . . does not hesitate to make [women] submit to uncovering every possible part of their body." He continues: "The best way of speaking about such things is to be dry and direct . . . I call bodily organs and processes by their technical names, and I tell these to the patient if [the names] happen to be unknown to her. *J'appelle un chat un chat"* (Freud, 1905[1901], p. 48).

This passage appears more than once in a volume of essays titled *In Dora's Case: Freud – Hysteria – Feminism* (Bernheimer & Kahane, 1990). Most essays in the collection come from the late 1900s and most are by scholars in the humanities. When

I teach the Dora case, I cite the observations of two of the volume's contributors, Jane Gallop and Steven Marcus, and I take care to impress upon students—especially psychoanalytic candidates—that both are scholars in English and Comparative Literature.[3] Students especially enjoy Gallop's insight that just when Freud "defines nonprurient language as direct and noneuphemistic, he takes a French detour into a figurative expression . . . and calls a pussy a pussy" (1982/1990, p. 209). Freud's self-defense does not end here; he continues,

> I have certainly heard of some people—doctors and laymen—who are scandalized by a therapeutic method in which conversations of this sort occur, and who appear to envy either me or my patients the titillation which, according to their notions, such a method must afford. But I am too well acquainted with the respectability of these gentry to excite myself over them . . . The right attitude is: *"pour faire une omelette il faut casser des oeufs."* (1905[1901], p. 49)

To make an omelette, Freud insists, one must break some eggs. As Marcus observes, "in this splendid extended declaration about plain speech . . . [Freud] feels it necessary to disappear not once but twice into French." The spirit in which I teach this passage accords with Marcus's exegesis of the text: that "Freud would have been the first to be amused" by this observation, and "would have said that such slips—and the revelation of their meanings—are the smallest price one has to pay for the courage to go on" (Marcus, 1974/1990, p. 83).[4]

Students readily understand, if not spontaneously then when it is pointed out to them, that however the reading public might actually receive his work, Freud is for the moment conjuring critics' voices from his own head. This sleight of rhetoric—anticipating and arguing testily against possible objections—may be read as a symptomatic feature of his writing, which inadvertently reveals what it strives to conceal. One wonders how far Freud could have been, when he wrote this passage in the Dora case, from recognizing what seems clear to contemporary readers: that he had rammed an interpretation

down Dora's throat, and in so doing, had replicated troubling features of her relationship with Herr K.

Dora assented to much of what Freud said, and she showed some symptomatic improvement (although Freud was unsure how much therapeutic credit to claim).[5] However, she left treatment prematurely—after just a few months—and in a manner that must have pained Freud. They had spent two hours working through Dora's second dream. From that dream and associations to it (both Freud's and Dora's, it seems), Freud had inferred psychological motives for prior episodes of somatic illness: a dragging foot and abdominal pains. In unconscious fantasy, Freud now insisted, Dora had taken a "false step" with Herr K. when he propositioned her, and was (again, in fantasy) "delivered of a child" nine months later. Her "love for Herr K.," he concluded, had "persisted down to the present day," though Dora remained "unconscious of it." With this, Freud writes, "Dora disputed the fact no longer." Instead, she announced at the start of their next session (on December 31, 1900) that it would be their last. Two weeks prior ("a fortnight ago"), she had decided that she would "put up with" Freud's treatment only until the New Year. Freud observed that the "fortnight's notice" might put Dora in league with "a maidservant or governess." However, students regularly guess that Freud might have felt *he* had received a maidservant's treatment, or worse: *not even* a fortnight's notice, but the length of a single session. Students in clinical practice know the sting of this situation, and readily understand what Malcolm meant when she wrote of "transference burn."

"Transference." George Makari traces the evolution of the term from its first appearances in Freud's works—as early as 1888, when it referred to a displacement of energy at the neuronal level. In *The Interpretation of Dreams,* Makari writes, Freud "integrated the biologic and psychologic possibilities inherent in prior usages" of the term, so that by 1900, transference could also refer to "the psychological phenomena Freud observed occurring between him and his patients" (1994, p. 559). When Dora snubbed Freud, "this newly empowered theory was in the metapsychological wings waiting to make meaning of her failed treatment" (p. 559). So *psychological* transference

was poised to take center stage in psychoanalysis; if Dora's abrupt departure had not occasioned this development in Freud's thinking, some other puzzling turn of clinical events might have done the job as well. But the provocative nature of Dora's departure may have been particularly generative for Freud; "transference burn" *hurts*. What led Freud to his first, full articulation of the transference concept—as we now know it—was bitter experience.

Freud is thought to have written the bulk of the Dora case soon after it ended—early in 1901—and to have altered it little, other than by adding the "Postscript," before its eventual publication in 1905. Reasons for the delay in publication are unclear.[6] In teaching the Dora case, I have found that students can readily join me in imagining this scenario: Freud wrote the body of the case—the clinical history and the two dream analyses—in a rapid flurry, soon after Dora left. Alongside his intellectual motives—to illustrate parallels between symptom formation and dream formation, and the clinical utility of his interpretive method in analyzing both—Freud was perhaps compelled by his emotional reaction to Dora's abrupt departure. He must have wondered, as any of us would in his position, "What *happened*?" And he may well have felt something on the order of shame. Freud might have been reluctant to publish a case that ended badly, until he could make something useful of his own, apparent failure. With time and reflection, he came upon an explanation for Dora's departure that satisfied *him* (though in its blindness to countertransference and enactment, it does not fully satisfy us), crafted the postscript, and published the case. Freud's words are consistent with this view: "I have been obliged to speak of transference, for it is only by means of this factor that I can elucidate the peculiarities of Dora's analysis" (1905[1901], p. 118). The "great merit" of the case—its "unusual clarity," which owes partly to its brevity—"is closely bound up with its great defect, which led to its being broken off prematurely. I did not succeed in mastering the transference in good time" (p. 118).

Ideally, I tell my students, we read Freud as we might hope to *be read* ourselves: in a spirit of empathic, constructive criticism. Our admiration is tempered with critical thought, and our

criticism is tempered with respect for the integrity of Freud's effort and with appreciation for the restrictions imposed by his being a man of his particular time and place. I encourage my students to emulate the restless, relentless questioning that exemplifies much of Freud's writing. When turned on his own theory and technique—rather than on, say, Dora—this practice leads Freud, over and over again, to the development of new ideas *through his writing*. At my psychoanalytic institute, a course on "Dora" and "Little Hans" (Freud, 1909) serves, in part, as prelude to a clinical writing sequence in the curriculum. With this in mind, I explicitly ask candidates to identify with Freud *as a writer,* who—when writing about his patients—inevitably reveals more of *himself* than he knows. So it is for all of us, I say—whatever our theoretical commitments and conscious intentions. To write, knowing that one *will* reveal more of oneself than one knows, required courage from Freud, and requires courage from us as well. I also teach in our clinical writing sequence. There I remind students of the attitude we have developed toward Freud's clinical writing. I encourage them to expect, accept, and appreciate the fortuitous accidents in their own writing. By sharing clinical interactions that puzzle and trouble us—not just those which show our mastery of the already-known—we may advance our understanding of our patients, and inevitably (like it or not) ourselves.

In the pages that follow, fellow contributors to this symposium discuss particular ways of engaging students with one or more of Freud's texts. We all share a deep appreciation for both Freud's struggles and his achievements, and we all feel that by guiding students through their first encounters with Freud, we have grown in our own understanding. Perhaps you will find some particular use of a text that suits your purpose as a teacher of Freud; or perhaps (better yet) the examples we have set here will inspire your creative use of a favorite text—to help your students make *their* own, generative use of Freud, whether as clinical psychoanalysts or as participants in adjacent fields of study.

Notes

1. In fact, the concept of "working alliance"—known to me and to many colleagues through literature on psychoanalysis and psychotherapeutic research—has crossed over into the field of education research. See for example Rogers (2009).
2. Freud writes, "Whereas the practical aim of the treatment is to remove all possible symptoms and to replace them by conscious thoughts, we may regard it as a second and theoretical aim to repair all the damages to the patient's memory. These two aims are coincident. When one is reached, so is the other; and the same path leads to them both" (1905 [1901], p. 18).
3. Both Gallop's and Marcus's contributions to *In Dora's Case: Freud – Hysteria – Feminism* first came to my attention through a piece Janet Malcolm wrote for *The New Yorker* (1987, April 20).
4. In their preface to *In Dora's Case: Freud – Hysteria – Feminism*, Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane write that Marcus's reading of *Dora* "was the first, and probably still is the best, reading of the case as a literary work" (1990, p. xi).
5. Freud writes, "A very short time after [Dora] had tacitly accepted this explanation [of her cough as symbolic expression of an idea about oral sex] her cough vanished—which fitted in very well with my view; but I do not wish to lay too much stress upon this development, since her cough had so often before disappeared spontaneously" (1905 [1901], p. 48).
6. In their introduction to the Dora case, the editors of the *Standard Edition* (James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson), write, "We have no information as to how it happened that Freud . . . deferred publication" (1905 [1901], p. 4).

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Teaching Freud's "On Narcissism"

Michael Shulman

"On Narcissism" has long been a favorite Freud text for me, but it is a difficult one, in particular in its opening sections. Freud's considerations of perversion, megalomania, paranoia, hypochondria, and ego-libido versus object-libido are complex and quite abstract, sometimes abstruse. Freud ruminates over his own distinctions between the sexual and the self-preservative instincts, considering whether revisions to his theory of the libido are needed in light of the phenomenon of narcissism. But "On Narcissism" is not only difficult, it is outright strange, almost mad-sounding even, as when Freud raises the question "what makes it necessary at all for our mental life to pass beyond the limits of narcissism and to attach the libido to objects?" (1914, p. 85), and insofar as, if we take him seriously, the only reason that we love is in order not to fall ill.

How to *teach* "On Narcissism"? The level of difficulty and paradox in this paper is such that candidates reading it sometimes pass into a dim twilight of odd thoughts and vague musings—and perhaps on to intellectual or literal sleep. This was true of my own experience of "On Narcissism" on certain re-readings. But an extraordinary series of images, three human and one animal, would always wake me half way through the essay's second section (see pp. 88–89). For me these images burst on the scene, like a bunch of characters jumping on stage through a curtain, and it is in their company that I try to engage my students in the service of their beginning to deal with the difficulties and riches of "On Narcissism." Pairing Freud's paper with a reading of the Narcissus myth, and using these vivid images, we can help students of psychoanalysis extract from Freud's paper an *essence* of what he meant by narcissism, and recognize what can be considered an *original scene of narcissism*—if not the "primal scene," a second scene of primary psychological importance.

Freud's characters bursting on the scene are first, the beautiful woman who loves only herself but cannot give love (Freud describes her as "rated very high" for the erotic life of

mankind); then, the charming, self-contented but also inaccessible child; next, certain animals that seem not to concern themselves about us, such as the cats and large beasts of prey; and last, criminals and humorists in works of literature who, with what Freud calls "narcissistic consistency," manage to keep away from their ego anything that would diminish it (see p. 89). Not only these last two characters but perhaps also the child and the beautiful woman appear capable of maintaining a blissful state that is only to be envied.

After reading this passage aloud, I ask two questions in the classroom: What do these characters evoke? What is Freud underlining about the nature of narcissism when he puts them before us? To these questions I add, "I want us to get all the meaning out of them that we can." I intend in our discussion to gather back in response such observations as the following: that the characters evoke power, invulnerability, a self-contained quality, one or another form of "splendid isolation." I hope to hear ideas about such beings that they seem not to need anything or anyone. Additionally, I hope to hear characterizations of them, at least the beautiful woman, beautiful child, and regal large cat or beast of prey, as *beings to be beheld*. If my students do not recognize this aspect, I underline as common features of these characters that they exist to be seen and that they stir a kind of reverence, potentially the greatest envy, just by being seen. Further, they seem perfect, and "to have it all." They are unavailable yet endlessly desirable, and their desirability exists, paradoxically, precisely because it is a part of their perfection that they depend on no one. They are beheld as objects of desire but always elude their beholders.

Although Freud in his essay nowhere discusses details of the Narcissus myth, the essence of narcissism gathered in Freud's characters can be linked back to Narcissus's difficulties, and so I will ask: Where is Narcissus in relation to these characters? What might they have to do with the myth? I will hope that we get to how beholding, gaze, and the visual modality matter decisively here, as they did in the myth of beautiful, vain Narcissus who was sentenced to fall in love with his own image in punishment for making others fall in love with him; that we consider how Narcissus seeks love, but does not want to have

to love, like Freud's beautiful woman; and that we examine how Narcissus's narcissistic strivings are a self-protection. Freud calls the blissful and enviable state of mind maintained by the narcissistic being an "unassailable libidinal position" (p. 89). The fortressed, unassailable self does not need to "give"; it only "gets." This narcissistic position has more appeal than we, who adopt the customary point of view that we should "give" our love, might wish to think. In a very real way, however, Freud implicitly identifies himself with the narcissistic position, as is suggested, I argue, when he elaborates four kinds of narcissistic love and only two types of attachment love (p. 90), and when earlier in the paper he asks his question about why it is necessary for our libido to pass beyond the limits of narcissism and so attach us to others.

From here the class moves to one of the most vividly memorable longer passages in all of Freud: "His Majesty the Baby." This passage, which I read aloud in a manner designed to body forth its poetry, is a stupendous evocation of the relation of parents to the child as the bearer of the parents' wishes:

> The child shall have a better time than his parents; he shall not be subject to the necessities which they have recognized as paramount in life. Illness, death, renunciation of enjoyment, restrictions on his own will, shall not touch him; the laws of nature and of society shall be abrogated in his favor; he shall once more really be the center and core of creation—'His Majesty the Baby', as we once fancied ourselves. The child shall fulfill those wishful dreams of the parents which they never carried out—the boy shall become a great man and a hero in his father's place, and the girl shall marry a prince as a tardy compensation for her mother. At the most touchy point in the narcissistic system, the immortality of the ego, which is so hard pressed by reality, security is achieved by taking refuge in the child. Parental love, which is so moving and at bottom so childish, is nothing but the parents' narcissism born again, which, transformed into object-love, unmistakably reveals its former nature. (p. 91)

I ask our candidates: What kind of relationship is being described here in this particular parent-child drama, Freud's "original scene" of narcissism? Could there be a downside to parents taking "refuge" in their child? Do you think of Freud's description of the wishful relationship of parents to children here as a "*normal*" one? As a *healthy* one for the child?

These last questions typically give us a great deal to discuss. What discussion typically yields is a picture of a child in fact burdened by the parents with their "gift" of narcissistic compensatory wishes. What we can get to directly is the concept of child as a narcissistic extension of the parent, and the discussion almost always brings up stage-parents. Thinking of the mother whose daughter is to marry a prince, someone is likely to mention the reality show about mothers and their five-year-old pageant princesses, *Toddlers and Tiaras* (which if you have not seen but want to witness the damage stage-parents do, you must see). "On Narcissism" easily becomes a commentary on the present.

In teaching Freud I take the approach that it is my job to help psychoanalytic candidates do their best to understand what Freud is trying to get at in any given text. It is a goal of mine that students of psychoanalysis should develop, if not a love of Freud, or a sense of affiliation with him in a great quest, at the very least some sympathy with him. To whatever extent is individually possible, I would like them to *be moved by* the phenomena he was trying to capture, to put before us, and to understand. In some cases, they may hate his way of writing or his ideas, but they must at least contend with him in my classroom. In this case, I put the argument in front on my students that I believe Freud is in touch with a deep part of himself, a part of each of us that is fortressed, a domain in which we wish not to have to feel love or to give love, in which we seek protection from its risks. I also argue that there is something marvelous and fascinating about Freud's insistence, over and over in this essay, that it is our own lost narcissism

* Sometimes I bring to class some memorable quotations concerning narcissism from popular songs, literature, and television. For example, I quote Oscar Wilde ("to love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance"); or we might consider the lyrics of "I Did It My Way" as read through the lens of Freud's paper; or we would view and contemplate the latest words of Eric Cartman on *South Park*, as his character ever-freshly inhabits the narcissistic position.

that we are trying to get to in the other, even in trying to love that other. I highlight the further paradox that, per Freud, this very narcissism may itself be a piece of our parents' narcissism! "Whose narcissism is it anyway that we are endlessly seeking?" I ask. But I also argue before candidates that Freud's idea of our loving *only* in order not to become ill is both a constricted and an extremely peculiar idea.

The issues Freud puts forth so vividly in these two teaching passages embody the complex matters that run through "On Narcissism." The two selections resonate with and clarify his struggles to differentiate the sexual instincts from the self-preservative ones, to elaborate the relationship between loving, or absence of loving, and illness, and to advance his own thinking about problems of gender and envy. With an in-depth reading and discussion of these passages, students and their teacher can engage Freud in his theorizing process. Additionally, we can consider Freud's narcissism in dynamic action—in the creation of another baby, a beginning of a theory of narcissism, a new concept to add to his majestic invention, psychoanalytic theory. I suggest that Freud himself is as much present here as in his most explicitly personal readings like the dream book, and that he is hardly not "tendentious" in this paper, a claim he makes in commenting on the "feminine form of erotic life," reporting that he has no desire to "depreciate women" (p. 89). We can consider the psychic riches he was trying to grasp, and, after we think we have explored the points of weakness in his system, contemplate whether paradoxes remain. We can also recognize certain dead-ends of thought in Freud's best explanations of phenomena, dead-ends that may have been the result of the social forms of his time and that have been reshaped since. For instance, as I teach, I argue that the ideas he puts forth about ordinary parents and their children in "his majesty the baby" may have reflected a longstanding cultural understanding of the parent-child relationship—an understanding that elaborated parental wishes but overlooked children's developmental needs not to be burdened by such wishes—just as his theorizing of female and male did not represent matters of biological nature cast indelibly into psychological nature, as he wished to set forth, but instead reified historic cultural habits of distinguishing male from female.

Finally, it is my wish to show that when we read Freud's "On Narcissism" we can behold him as "the center and core" of his own "creation," psychoanalysis, and can recognize the prerogatives of narcissistic striving alive in this creative product. At the same time, we can also recognize the problems inherent in Freud's theoretical position, which is not, after all, and however devoutly he may have wished it, an unassailable one.

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Reading Beyond *The Interpretation of Dreams*

Sarah Ackerman

Over the last nine years, I have had many occasions for "teaching" Freud in the context of an interdisciplinary faculty seminar on psychoanalysis that is sponsored by the Leslie Center for the Humanities at Dartmouth College. In that context, I bring my clinical understanding of Freud to professors who are often deeply engaged with applying Freud's ideas to texts. Our discussions compare the experiences of interpreting a patient with interpreting a text.

Most recently, I taught a ten-week class on *The Interpretation of Dreams*. I had proposed the class as an elective at the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, and a clinician who lives near me—two hours from Boston—asked if I would consider teaching the class locally. The opportunity to teach without the commute was most attractive, so in lieu of the BPSI class, I taught a small group that included two students of BPSI's Advanced Psychotherapy Training Program, one recently graduated clinical psychologist with an interest in psychoanalysis, and my reading partner, a retired English professor. My reading partner expanded our methods for reading this text, including framing it as literature, reading it as memoir, and interpreting ourselves as its readers.

The class built upon the premise that *The Interpretation of Dreams* can be viewed from many angles. It is a primer on how to think about dreams in psychoanalysis. It is a manifesto on the nature of unconscious processes. It is the first text in which Freud spelled out his model of the Oedipus complex. And for students of literature, it is a brilliant treatise on the nature and process of interpretation. *The Interpretation of Dreams* is also an autobiography, written unconsciously. We could argue that it is in fact a case study of Sigmund Freud. As Freud himself confessed in the preface to the second edition of this book:

> For this book has a further significance for me personally—a significance which I only grasped after I had completed it. It was, I found, a portion of my own self-analysis,

> my reaction to my father's death—that is to say, to the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man's life. Having discovered that this was so, I felt unable to obliterate the traces of the experience. (1900, p. xxvi)

It is this lens that I find most important to employ with clinicians, because while opening up an understanding of Freud's psychology, it also teaches much more.

Woven throughout the text are a vast number of Freud's own dreams. While they are often included to highlight some aspect of dream interpretation or unconscious dreamwork, they also build on and relate to one another. Through close attention to Freud's dreams as they are described in the text, my students are able to see the unconscious in process. Biographical materials on Freud (Anzieu, 1959/1986; Grinstein, 1968; Schur, 1972) enrich Freud's associations to the dreams, but we, as readers, can make connections ourselves, enacting the process of interpretation, rather than just reading about it. Further, when considering these latent contributions to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the manifest intentions of the book become far more forceful and compelling.

A close reading of four dreams that appear in Chapter Five—culminating with Freud's first articulation of the Oedipus complex—will serve to illustrate the teaching method I am describing. Each dream presents a part of Freud's unconscious process of working through his resistance to writing *The Interpretation of Dreams*, as he wrote the book. That resistance reflects conflict around competing wishes both to better his father and to earn his father's love.

In the Professor Extraordinarius dream we see Freud in conflict with his ambition. The dream reveals an intense drive for recognition, which we know was stirred up when he embarked on the book. In the dream, the wish to be appointed Professor Extraordinarius brings Freud into competition with older men and generates an urge to denigrate those mentors. Freud feels compelled to interpret the "pathological ambition" in this dream, and in so doing, he is led back to two childhood memories in which authorities made grand pronouncements about Freud's future success in the company of his parents.

This dream then leads Freud back to a time when his parents seemed eager to endorse him and he felt excited by his own potential.

Through the Botanical Monograph dream, Freud presents alternating portraits of a father who feels both pride and shame in his son. Once again, the dream spurs memories of early childhood. Freud recalls his father's encouragement, which his father expressed by giving him a book to tear apart when he was a young boy. This association is immediately followed by a recollection of his father's criticism for being a spendthrift when in his adolescence he ran up a bill for book purchases. Freud notices that the dream functions as self-justification directed at his father, an effort to say, "I may allow myself to do this." Students are able to examine this justification in the context of Freud writing his own very ambitious book.

In one of his Rome dreams Freud uncovers yet another layer of his relationship with his father: shame toward the man that his father was. This dream takes Freud's associations back to an occasion when, as a boy, Freud perceived his father as a cowardly and unheroic man, and, disappointed in him, turned to thoughts about Hannibal as an alternate ego ideal.

Finally, in the Count Thun dream, Freud admits to a desire to better his father. The dream forcefully plays out Freud's "megalomanic" ambition and brings him into contact with childhood memories that express this ambition in the context of his father's pronouncement that "the boy will come to nothing." Freud regards the dream as an effort to say, "You see, I *have* come to something."

Together these four dreams prepare us for what comes next, which is Freud's articulation of the Oedipus complex. Although Freud makes no effort to link his dreams to the Oedipal conflict, they function together to illustrate Freud's ideas before he has even laid them out. We are well prepared to understand Oedipal dynamics because they have been rendered emotionally available to us as we worked through Freud's dreams. Freud is not just a rival to his father in relation to his mother's love. He is fighting for a higher position of power and authority than his father had been able to achieve, and he is doing this by writing the very text that we are reading.

Through this approach to Chapter Five, we are able to see Freud's ambition, his disavowal of his ambition, his competition with his father, his disappointment with his father, his wish to prove himself to his father, his sense of being a source of both pride and disapproval for his father, and ultimately, his ownership—in the theory of the Oedipus complex—of his hatred of his father. In this way, Freud is unconsciously working through blocks to writing *The Interpretation of Dreams* as he is conceiving and composing the text.

Ultimately, I hope to teach how Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* evokes a postmodern reading decades before postmodernism came into being. By presenting so many personal asides and self-references, while also pursuing the intellectual focus of the text, Freud generates a surplus of associations: there is always more to interpret. Interpretations build on each other and speak to each other. In this way, the book demonstrates what it tries to explain. Readers are themselves drawn into the act of interpretation, so that we come to understand firsthand the infinite nature of interpretation. We become active learners, performing psychoanalysis rather than just studying it. Perhaps Freud might have better titled the book "Interpretation*s* of Dreams."

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Teaching Freud, Teaching Psychoanalysis: From College Students to Professionals

Lawrence Blum

Teaching Freud, for me, is always part of a larger project of teaching psychoanalysis. My inclination, perhaps informed by students' expectations of Freud as a historical footnote, and psychoanalysis as a famous cadaver, has been to emphasize how Freud's ideas are alive in the present, in contemporary psychoanalysis. My colleagues writing in this issue provide wonderful illustrations of the use of Freud's work to show the discovery and development of psychoanalytic ideas in Freud's own thinking, as he wrestles them. Their students have the opportunity to observe the process of discovery, see Freud's bravery and defenses in action, and meet him as a person. In contrast, I will present an approach that honors Freud's ideas by showing students not only how those ideas continue to exert influence but also how later and current thinkers extend them into the present. To do this, I will first discuss some broader issues in teaching Freud and psychoanalysis to different groups of students. I will then discuss Freud's "Irma" dream, the "specimen dream" of psychoanalysis, and a variety of educational uses it can afford to teachers and students. Finally, I will present a couple of classroom exercises not directly related to teaching Freud *per se*, but which can be useful in engaging students in a participatory psychoanalytic thought process.

College Students in Contrast to Mental Health Professionals. After many years of teaching psychoanalytic candidates, psychotherapy students, and trainees in the mental health disciplines, I have in recent years also had the opportunity to teach undergraduates. I was curious to learn what the experience would be like and what adjustments would be necessary. Overall, I have found the experience of teaching this younger age group surprisingly similar to teaching their elders. With either mental health professionals or undergraduates, one is likely to have a class that is heterogeneous with regard to personal background, psychoanalytic knowledge, and especially aptitude for psychoanalytic learning. As an instructor, one has

the same tasks of trying to assess what "levels" the students are at, including how open or defensive they may be, and of trying to teach to multiple levels at once.

On the other hand, there are some phenomena that are more necessary to address with college students than with, say, analytic candidates. One of these is that, unlike many other subjects that one may try to learn, when learning psychoanalytic ideas the most serious obstacle is typically our own emotional reactions. Candidates are usually at least partly familiar with this difficulty, but for college students it needs to be discussed explicitly. I mention that we may differ in the material that makes us uncomfortable, but that there is likely to be some of one variety or another. For some students, it may be one or another aspect of sexual material, for others murderous wishes, and for yet others cannibalistic fantasies may be a challenge. In these days of "trigger warnings" about supposedly offensive or hurtful ideas in American college classrooms, I let the class know that we will talk about aspects of human nature and human psychology that will provide ample opportunity for emotional and intellectual discomfort, as well as the opportunity to learn from it. At the same time, I also let the class know that we will discuss these matters in a manner that is both as respectful and as direct as possible.

For some college students, the frank discussion of the usual domains of psychoanalysis (love, hate, sex, aggression, envy, intimate relatedness, primitive fantasies) is a new experience that brings anxiety, relief, or both of these. In conducting a seminar, my co-teachers and I do not want the class to veer toward group therapy or an encounter group, and we ask students not to say anything that they are uncomfortable with or feel is too personal. We are, however, pleased when the students allow themselves to be introspective and become more open to their own emotional experiences. In addition to being respectful of the differences in our personal feelings and cultural backgrounds, we also hope to learn from them. To foster an atmosphere of candor in which relatively open conversation is possible, we have found it useful to have all of us in the class introduce ourselves and provide a bit about our backgrounds and interests in psychoanalysis. To set an example,

the instructors speak first. It is important for psychoanalysts to recognize the differences between running a classroom and conducting a therapy. Some principles are the same (e.g., not being inappropriately familiar or seductive), but among other differences the classroom also calls for a greater degree of relaxation about self-disclosure and a firmer hand in guiding the discussion.

Teaching Freud: The Specimen Dream (Irma). One might think it necessary to return to the subject of teaching Freud, but in an important way, we have not really left it. The question of dealing with the emotional reactions stirred up by Freud's ideas has been present from the beginning, and of course informs Freud's discussion of the Irma dream, as it does *The Interpretation of Dreams* as a whole, and much of Freud's work (see 1900, pp. 96–121). I will assume that the reader is familiar with Freud's presentation of this "specimen dream," now one of the most famous and studied of all dreams. Freud was well aware that the same resistances he had met in himself were present in others, and often much more so. In his interpretation of his Irma dream, his solution is to offer an explanation that is compelling but which stays relatively on the surface, a technique for handling readers that he would soon extend to clinical work with patients. Likewise, the surface is a good place to start with students, with the opportunity to extend and deepen the comprehension then occurring in the course of the discussion.

Freud's analysis of dreams was central both to his own analysis and to his development of psychoanalysis as both a science and a therapy. Dreams are not only a tried and true path to psychoanalysis (and the "royal road to the unconscious"), but also often a subject of great interest to college students as they seek to expand and understand their own minds. Thus the Irma dream, the introductory dream in the book that introduces psychoanalysis, is for students a logical point of entry into the world of psychoanalytic thought. From this point lead paths to understanding basic psychoanalytic principles, theories of mind, theories of dreaming and dream interpretation, methods of psychoanalytic technique, and the ways in which these ideas and methods introduced by Freud have been explored

and expanded by later psychoanalytic contributors. Which of these educational paths are traversed depends on the subject of the class and the interests of the students. I will make some comments about each of them.

Freud begins the Specimen Dream chapter with a discussion of then current views of dreams and dream interpretation, remarkable for how similar they are today. He mentions the scientific authorities of the day who deny that dreams are meaningful (in our era, compare Hobson & McCarley, 1977), and also the popular dream interpretation books that rely on putative universal symbols or decoding keys—just as now, when one can still find a bookstore, the Psychology/Self Help section remains filled with these. This historical continuity provides a good early opportunity to help students see how unusual psychoanalytic thinking is, and how strongly people defend against it. Freud goes on to suggest that some of the ancients were much closer to understanding dreams than were many of the moderns, insisting that the interpreter had to know the personal details of the dreamer and his circumstances. He finally sets forth his own method of observing the themes that emerge from having the dreamer associate freely to each element of the dream. Freud's dream, and its interpretation, then allow for a more fine-grained examination of layers of defense. At the end of the chapter, Freud's discussion ends with his famous comment, "*When the work of interpretation has been completed, we perceive that the dream is the fulfillment of a wish*" (1900, p. 121, emphasis in the original). The view that students get of defenses against the meaningfulness of dreams, of defenses within dreams, and of underlying unacceptable wishes quickly illustrates the most basic psychoanalytic principles of intrapsychic conflict, and of unconscious mental life and defenses against it. Dream interpretation moves, via the dreamer's associations, from the manifest dream to the underlying, unconscious wish. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* this leads, of course, to the first explicit psychoanalytic schema of the mind, the conflict-based topographic model, a few chapters later.

Freud dreams the Irma dream following a friend and colleague's partly critical comments about the state of Irma's health, and as Freud's associations to his dream proceed, stu-

dents can readily see Freud's accumulation of self-accusations and self-exculpations. They easily recognize his competition with his fellow physicians. In my experience, most students find Freud's inference that his dream represents a wish not to be blamed, but instead a desire to blame others, relatively compelling. Further understanding of the dream (and it seems to me this often applies to candidates as well as other trainees and undergraduates) usually requires more assistance from the instructor. Questions to the students regarding Freud's comment about the "navel" beyond which lies the unknown and his remark, "Frankly, I had no desire to penetrate more deeply at this point" (p. 113), and attention to what elements he refrains from commenting further about, along with questions about the competition between the men, the position of the women, spritzers, etc., help students to recognize the Oedipal and sexual aspects of the dream that Freud has left just beyond direct commentary. This line of discussion then explores layers of defense and inference from what is more acceptable to what is less, and from that for which we have the most data to that for which we have merely a great deal of data and now require a slightly greater degree of inference. In other word, the principles of moving from surface to depth, and also of moving from the observation of what is more certain to inquiry about what is less certain, are illustrated in the discussion. The Irma dream thus serves as a useful starting point for discussions of dreams, dream interpretation, psychoanalytic principles of conflict and compromise, psychoanalytic technique, and a psychoanalytic model of the mind, among other purposes.

Erikson and the Specimen Dream. I like to pair Freud's Irma chapter with Erik Erikson's seemingly neglected classic, "The Dream Specimen of Psychoanalysis" (1954). This long article, which many students (of all levels of preparation) find challenging, brilliantly extends the interpretative process of the Irma dream begun by Freud. In the course of his interpretation, Erikson incorporates knowledge of Freud's early life and the culture in which he grew up, showing intricate connections between the cultural and the intrapsychic. While Freud began the application of psychoanalytic ideas to the study of anthropology, biography, history, and sociology (as well as art and

literature), Erikson demonstrated the interactions of culture and psyche in a way that remains surprisingly contemporary and which also clearly show such interactions to be two-way: not only do psychoanalytic ideas inform the study of adjacent fields, but knowledge of those fields informs psychoanalysis. Thus the article is useful for the anthropology classes I teach, and, in my view, essential for candidates.

Ego psychology can be said to have begun formally in 1923, with Freud's publication of *The Ego and the Id*. In 1936, Anna Freud propelled a developmental leap with *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (1936/1946), and not quite two decades later, Erikson, who was one of Anna Freud's first analysands, demonstrated in his Specimen Dream essay all that can be done with ego psychology, in its triumphant maturity. In addition to the unconscious wishes that may be conveyed in a dream, Erikson focuses on what can be learned about a person's mind from the manifest dream and on the dreamer's means of adapting to intrapsychic challenges as they are influenced by personal and cultural history. The method for this expansion of both dream interpretation and psychoanalytic psychology is a broad and deep extension of Freud's interpretation of his Irma dream.

Erikson notes Freud took care to interpret explicitly his conflicts with his colleagues and his wish to be blameless, while he refrained from directly commenting on further aspects (e.g. Oedipal competition) that might have been visible to more sophisticated readers, however few in number they may have been in Freud's day. Writing fifteen years after Freud's death, Erikson extends Freud's interpretation, step by step. In very brief summary here, Erikson shows the competition with his colleagues that Freud focuses on is closely connected with Freud's father, and the household and culture in which Freud grew up. Erikson (like Sarah Ackerman in her contribution to this symposium) treats other dreams and comments in *The Interpretation of Dreams* as meaningfully connected, associations of a sort to his specimen dream, and notes the relevance of Freud's recollection of, and reaction to, his father's critical comment, "This boy will come to nothing," after young Sigismund had urinated in his parents' chamber pot (Freud, 1900, p. 216). Erikson also suggests the influence of a tendency in

the culture in which Freud was raised to shame boys as a way to spur their competitive development. He thus understands Freud's "positive Oedipal" conflicts, his rivalries with men, and competition with them for women within the framework of Freud's life history and cultural background, about which there is a great deal more in Erikson's paper. Thinking further about both Freud's early life and his adult challenges as he was struggling through his self-analysis and trying to develop psychoanalysis, Erikson draws on additional, if less plentiful, material in Freud's dream and dream book to suggest that Freud may have regarded the matter of the dream itself as an ideal, desired woman to be understood, seduced, and conquered. Readers will recall Freud's famous note to Fliess, placed in a footnote in the *Standard Edition* at the end of this chapter, "Do you suppose, that some day a marble table will be placed on the house, inscribed with these words: In This House, on July 24th, 1895 the Secret of Dreams was Revealed to Dr. Sigm. Freud" (1900, p. 121). Erikson's discussion of Freud's relation to women and his transference to the dream takes him to a final brilliant point regarding the feminine identifications with which Freud was so uncomfortable. Erikson connects the births of Freud's many siblings into the cramped Freud household when Freud was little to the part of the dream in which Freud as the dreamer is directly equated with his subject, Irma, as well as to the (circumspectly discussed) homophilic aspects of Freud's idealization of Fliess as a partner who would help him to germinate his ideas. Those connections, Erikson argues compellingly, suggest a feminine, maternal Freud in the process of giving birth to psychoanalysis.

For students of the history of psychoanalysis, the pairing of the Freud chapter and the Erikson article traces the first half-century of the development of psychoanalytic ideas, from the beginnings of the topographic model and id psychology through the structural model and the new powers of ego psychology. For students of technique and of dream interpretation, we have a model of step-wise interpretation, from the surface—that which is most conscious and for which we have the most observable evidence—through "layers" that need greater degrees of inference and for which we have less mani-

fest evidence. For undergraduates, we have a demonstration of the further development and application of Freud's ideas beyond the period in which he lived. Some college students, by the way, when told of the Sigmund Freud—Anna Freud—Erik Erikson connection, with little additional assistance will now recognize Erikson's paper as a very worthy Oedipal challenge by Erikson to father Freud. Graduate students might recognize this kind of challenge also as a necessary part of the dissertation process (Blum, 2010).

Dreams and Technique: Toward the Present. When teaching courses on dreams and dream interpretation, among many other possible materials, I like to assign chapter six of Charles Brenner's *Psychoanalytic Technique and Psychic Conflict* (1976). Although many years have now passed since its publication, it offers a concise update of the technique of dream interpretation, situating the dream not only within a sequence of associations that precede and follow the report of the dream per se but also directly within the transference relationship. In this way, Brenner illustrates the development both of the technique of dream interpretation in particular and of analytic technique in general. Further, the chapter offers vignettes of two different patients who would now be considered to have the same diagnosis, "panic disorder," but who have entirely different dynamics underlying their anxiety, a useful teaching point in this day and age.

Despite Freud's pronouncement that "the dream is the fulfillment of a wish" and despite the frequency with which this principle can still be observed analytically, some controversy persists as to whether this explanation applies in every case. One of the most common questions students raise in response to psychoanalytic teaching about dreams is how to square the idea of dreams as disguised expressions of wishes with the frequent occurrence of anxiety dreams. Brenner's discussion of dreams as compromises helps with this perhaps still unsettled question, as do illustrations of anxiety dreams in which wishes are clearly discernable. Still, students sometimes ask: What about post-traumatic dreams? A paper by Abby Adams-Silvan and Mark Silvan (1990), which offers an excellent example of a soldier's repetitive post-traumatic dream, bears importantly

on that question. As the essay recounts, in the course of the soldier's therapy, it became clear that the dream not only replayed traumatic war experiences, but also, in disguised form, traumatic childhood and adolescent experiences, including a variety of conflicted vengeful wishes. Not all students find the article persuasive, but it is a fine demonstration of the importance of looking for wish and compromise where they are often overlooked.

I hope that the preceding has illustrated how the discussion of Freud's Specimen Dream can be used to introduce students of all ages to basic psychoanalytic ideas, their continued use and validity, and their development and expansion over time. Further, the specimen dream can facilitate discussion of the history of psychoanalytic technique, both generally and in its specific relation to dreams. Finally, it helps to illuminate methods of psychoanalytic interpretation apart from dreams, including, as we have seen via Erikson, the relation between the intrapsychic, the biographical, and the cultural.

Additional Classroom Ideas. In closing, and returning again to the topic of introducing psychoanalytic ideas to college students, I will mention two "lesson plans" that I have found useful. The first of these is specifically related to dreams, about which, as noted above, students are typically curious. Professor Greg Urban and I begin our undergraduate seminar on Psychoanalysis and Anthropology (at the University of Pennsylvania) with a kind of psychoanalytic exercise; rather than telling students about psychoanalytic ideas, we invite them to try to think psychoanalytically. We read aloud together the first few pages of Mark Plotkin's *Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice* (1993). Plotkin is an ethnobotanist who traveled through the Amazon River basin learning about medicinal plants from the indigenous experts, the shamans. The book opens with an anxiety dream of the author's—"a terrifying dream," in his words—that occurred shortly after his explorations had begun: "An enormous jaguar strode into my hut and stared deeply into my eyes, as if trying to divine my thoughts. Powerful muscles tensed in its back as it arched its body to spring. So vivid was the apparition that I awoke with a scream" (1993, p. 1). He asks his translator to tell the dream to the shaman, who had

recently told him he would no longer teach him. The shaman breaks into a big smile and responds with a *de facto* transference interpretation, "'That was me!'" (p. 2). In the text that follows, Plotkin discusses, in sensually rich terms, the college lecture that introduced him to Amazonia, developmental conflicts in his adolescence, and the "sleepy swamps" surrounding his childhood home, New Orleans. The text reads like a set of associations to the dream, gradually moving from the present to periods further back in time. In class, additional aspects of the dream, together with the students' own associations, especially to the jungle, usually lead to the Garden of Eden, the search for hidden and forbidden knowledge, and typical conflicts about knowing and about sexuality. Students get a sense of both the method of psychoanalytic thinking and a bit of what it comprises. It is worth noting that while many students find this subject and approach intriguing, a few find them to be a signal that other, often more quantitatively oriented courses, are of greater interest to them. One cannot, while staying true to psychoanalytic ideas, proceed with sufficient didactic care and caution for everyone to remain comfortable with them.

I would like to mention a final exercise that has intrigued some students as an introduction to psychoanalytic thought: it is to ask a class, "Why do kids love dinosaurs?" This is a useful question because it can only be answered with psychoanalytic ideas. Students' own thoughts about dinosaurs—they were big, they are dead, they ruled the world, they were voracious—lead them, with a small amount of assistance, to recognize dinosaurs as displaced images of fearful, omnipotent parents, as well as disguised versions of kids' own angry, orally aggressive selves. Freud's ideas not only are alive, but they are essential if we are to understand our present day experience.

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Teaching Freud's "Project"

Robert A. Paul

Freud's "Project for a Scientific Psychology" was never published in Freud's lifetime; we only know of it because he had sent it to Wilhelm Fliess, whose widow sold it to a Berlin bookseller. Marie Bonaparte acquired the manuscript together with the treasure trove of Freud's letters to Fliess, and, over Freud's wishes that it be destroyed, sent it to safety in Britain during the war. When it became available to the reading public in 1950, reactions to its appearance were mixed. Some regarded it as a dead end, a misguided attempt to translate psychological facts into a desiccated and purely conjectural model of the mind as an electrical system—a system basically designed to turn itself off, or divest itself of energy or excitement, as symbolized by the letter Q (quantity) followed by the Greek letter η (*eta*, energy). Others, however, saw in the Project a text that, whatever its shortcomings as a representation of the actual nervous system and its operation (something that was barely beginning to be understood when Freud put pen to paper), serves as a skeleton key that unlocks a great many mysteries about his subsequent writings. I belong to this latter camp. I cannot see, for instance, how one can gain a full comprehension of Chapter 7 of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), or of the metapsychological papers written during the First World War, or of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) without seeing that the models of the mind presented in those well-known texts rest on an unseen foundation of assumptions that find their first and baldest expression in the Project. I thus find this text both worthwhile in its own right and illuminating as an entrée into Freud's later works, and I take real pleasure in helping students and candidates get past the arcana of its surface and come to grips with its essence.

In this brief communication I want to focus on Sections 14 and 15 of the Project (1950[1895]). In earlier sections, Freud has proposed the hypothesis that there are two kinds of neurons: ψ (*psi*) neurons, which are unconscious and which regulate behavior in response to affects of pleasure or pain; and

φ (*phi*) neurons, which are those involved in the perception of stimuli from the outside. The organism wishes for pleasure and is repulsed by pain. Pleasure is understood as the release and reduction of energy flowing through the system, while pain is the accumulation of such energy. (One can see here the rudiments of Freud's persistent attachment to the basic polarity of attraction and repulsion, or the affects of love versus hate, which will emerge much later in his theorizing as the polarity of Eros and the death instincts.) The Project conceives of "repression" or "defense" as the turning away of the flow of Qη from a pathway that the mind has learned from past unpleasant experiences will lead to pain.

Now, in Section 14, titled "Introduction of the 'Ego,'" Freud directly addresses the fact that differing pathways through the nervous system, consisting of separate neurons with varying levels of "facilitation," or ability to pass energy across the "contact-barriers" between them (synapses, in today's jargon), must form an organized system or network. Wishful attraction and repression, he argues,

> indicate that an organization has been formed in ψ whose presence interferes with passages [of quantity] which on the first occasion occurred in a particular way [i.e. accompanied by satisfaction or pain]. This organization is called the '*ego*'. . . The ego is to be defined as the totality of the ψ cathexes [that is, charges of flowing energy], at the given time, in which a permanent component is distinguished from a changing one. (p. 323; the first two brackets appear in the original, the third is the author's)

Here, then, is Freud's early theoretical attempt to posit and define something called the "ego," a concept that will go on to play a starring role in the evolution of his theory of the mind and of his approach to therapeutic technique. At this point the ego is first and foremost an organization or interlocking system of neurons, which, in opposition to the neurons' wish to discharge Qη, is required to create a store of permanent "cathexis" or energy charge. It is out of the varying amounts of stored or "bound" energy charge that the pathways to be sought

or avoided, in accordance with the pleasure/pain principle, are constructed. (Cathexis is Strachey's ungainly translation of the plain German word *Besetzung*, meaning a charge or investment such as the investment of a fortification with troops; one may also see here the origins of Freud's fondness for an "economic model" of the mind. The concept of bound versus unbound cathexis originated with Josef Breuer in Breuer and Freud's *Studies on Hysteria*.) To accomplish the task of thus organizing itself, the ego has at its disposal the power of "inhibition." That is, it has the ability to prevent the free flow of unbound cathexes of Qη and thus build up contact barriers greater in quantitative strength than the Qη that is trying to continue its flow towards discharge. Freud explains:

> the Qη current will divide up in the direction of the various contact-barriers [synapses] in inverse ratio to their resistance; and in that case, where a contact-barrier is impinged upon by a quotient which is inferior to its [the contact-barrier's] resistance, nothing will in practice pass through there. (p. 323; the first bracket is the author's, the second appears in the original)

In this passage we find a first introduction to the idea that the ego operates as an organized system with preferences and avoidances thanks to its power of resistance, a concept that will, of course, become a centerpiece of Freud's clinical approach to the neuroses. Resistances, as formulated here, result from (unnecessary) repressions or defenses made possible by the system's capacity to produce inhibitions by "binding" Qη. The idea behind talk therapy is to overcome, with the analyst's assistance, the resistances in the synapses of the "painful" neuron chains and thereby allow the flow of neuronal energy to proceed down previously proscribed pathways. Here we can plainly see how the clinical concept of resistance originates in the analogy of the mind to an electrical wiring network. Freud's direct analogy was to the newly invented telephone exchange; today we would liken his model to a computer. Indeed, his model seems quite compatible with a connectionist understanding of the mind based on computer models. After all, the mind as a

system of neurons *is* an electric wiring system. (For an appreciative recent study of the Project by two very eminent neuroscientists, see Robin L. Carhart-Harris and Karl J. Friston's 2010 article, "The Default Mode, Ego Functions and Free-Energy: A Neurobiological Account of Freudian Ideas.")

To recapitulate, in Freud's proposed model resistance works as follows. If a quantity of Qη superior to the contact-barriers at the synapses cathects a neuron—a quantity capable of passing freely through the chain of connected or "associated" neurons—the system can inhibit the flow by immediately shunting some of the Qη into "side cathexes," that is, to associated neurons close by. This distribution of the Qη weakens it and at the same time enables the ego to create a store of Qη that can be used in the future either to initiate action or to ward off Qη from proceeding down pathways of interconnected neurons that would otherwise lead to unpleasure or pain.

Freud writes: "if an ego exists, it must *inhibit* psychical primary processes" (p. 324, emphasis in the original). What he means by this statement, in which he now employs the newly introduced concept of the "primary process," is that an uninhibited flow of Qη aims at the quickest path to discharge; this aim follows the pure pleasure principle, leading to the illusory pursuit of wish fulfillment without regard to real-world consequences. This conception becomes the basis of Freud's theory of dreams. As Freud explains in Section 15, secondary-process thought is distinguished by its being subject to inhibition by the ego, which uses "the *indication of reality*" to determine whether a perception is genuine or simply the memory of an earlier instance of satisfaction (p. 325, emphasis in original). Freud then posits a third form of neuron, the ω (omega) neurons, whose function it is to add "quality" to the otherwise purely quantitative operation of the ψ (psi) system and in that way present the perception to consciousness. Freud has already established that the quantities of Qη that constitute external stimuli received by the φ (phi) neurons are much greater than those that operate within the ψ system itself. The ω neurons produce an experience of quality when confronted with an actual perception of external reality (as opposed to an internal perception of a memory or imaginative creation), and

their discharge serves as a signal to the ego that the perception is of something real: "*The information of discharge from* ω *is thus the indication of quality or of reality for* ψ*"* (p. 325, emphasis in the original).

But when a stimulus arises from within the system, as happens with a wish, a memory, or an idea, the ego is able to inhibit it so that it does not reach the required threshold of producing the sensation of quality. The perceived object—whether seen as attractive or repulsive (in Freud's technical sense)—is not taken for real, and as a result the stimulus is prevented from leading to action. This is the crucial adaptive function that inhibition plays for the ego and therefore for the organism as a whole. The failure of the "reality principle" to inhibit the pleasure principle leads those suffering from neurosis to take their fantasies for reality and so to behave in ways that are grounded not in a realistic assessment of their situation but in their wishes and fears.

At the same time Freud is writing the Project, in1895, his case studies in *Studies on Hysteria* also utilize the concept of the ego. There the ego is described as an interconnected mass of associations (connections) capable of either inhibiting each other or producing adaptive facilitations of pathways leading to pleasure and avoiding pain. Repression, the primary defense in hysteria, causes ideas that are incompatible with the great mass of associations in the ego to be excluded from that system. They continue, however, to function with their original, excessive quantity of cathexis—or Qη in the language of the Project—until, through the method of free association, the repressed idea is brought into the ego and thence to consciousness, where the process of inhibition and association to the side-cathexes of the other neurons "wears away" its excessive energy. As Freud and Breuer write in the "Preliminary Communication" that introduces *Studies on Hysteria*:

> A memory of . . . a trauma [in a normal healing process] enters the great complex of associations, it comes alongside other experiences, which may contradict it, and is subjected to rectification by other ideas. After an accident, for instance, the memory of the danger and the

> (mitigated) repetition of the fright becomes associated with the memory of what happened afterwards—rescue and the consciousness of present safety . . . In this way a normal person is able to bring about the disappearance of the accompanying affect through the process of association. (1893–1895, p. 9, bracket is the author's)

Analytic therapy simply replicates this process, with the analyst's help, in cases where the normal wearing away has not occurred. It should be clear, then, how the idea of the ego as a system that produces inhibitions through side-cathexes is translated into psychological terms and becomes the basis for a therapeutic strategy of bringing repressed ideas into the mass of associations in the ego, where the process of wearing away through association with side-cathexes may do its work.

It should be evident, too, how in a few brief pages Freud lays the groundwork for his entire later theoretical system with the concepts of the ego and defense, and the focus on resistance. Ego psychology, far from being a late development of Freud's, had in fact been there all along, ever since the Project. Understanding this lends coherence to the student's subsequent exploration of the development of Freud's thought.

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