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Introduction - Misogyny and Religion under Analysis Masterplot and Counterthesis in Tension

Diane Jonte-Pace

Santa Clara University, djontepace@scu.edu

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INTRODUCTION

Misogyny and Religion under Analysis

Masterplot and Counterthesis in Tension

Freud's Oedipal paradigm, characterized by death wishes for fathers and by erotic desires for mothers, constitutes what has been called his "masterplot" (Brooks 1989). It is the thesis for which he is best known and which he saw as his "immortal contribution" to Western culture (*SE* 5: 453). The Oedipal masterplot, articulated in Freud's earliest psychoanalytic writings and frequently reiterated during the forty years of his psychoanalytic career, provided the foundational structure for his analyses of psyche, culture, and religion.

Freud was deeply committed to pursuing and promoting the Oedipal thesis. Although he did not formalize it as a "complex" until 1910 (*SE* 11: 171), he described his earliest discovery of the Oedipal paradigm as a "revelation" (*SE* 1: 265), and he found Oedipal solutions to most of the riddles he encountered. But below the surface of this Oedipal masterplot, particularly in his writings on religion, lies another thesis, which might be called a "counterthesis." This counterthesis differs from the "pre-Oedipal" thesis evident in Freud's late texts and developed further in the work of object-relations theorists like D. W. Winnicott (1972).¹ It differs as well from the "anti-Oedipal" argument

of Deleuze and Guattari (1983). Often interruptive and subversive, this counterthesis haunts Freud's writings as if to challenge the dominance of the Oedipal paradigm. It appears most frequently in images and metaphors which, although intended as support for the Oedipal masterplot, actually decenter it.

The Oedipal theory gives centrality to the father: the "father complex" is a term Freud often used as an abbreviation of sorts for the "Oedipus complex." In the Oedipus or father complex, death wishes, hostility, and parricidal fantasies are directed toward the father. Concomitantly, the mother is beloved: the mother-son relationship is "altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships" (*SE* 22: 133), and the mother is the object of erotic, incestuous fantasies of sexual union. But there are exceptions to this pattern. On rare occasions, and with hesitation, Freud discusses death fantasies in relation to the mother, rather than the father, exploring matrophobic and misogynist fears and fantasies: fears of the mother, desires for her death, and fantasies of immortality. These Freudian explorations of matrophobia and matricide do not represent misogyny on Freud's part. Rather, they represent analyses and interpretations of psychological and cultural misogyny. The hesitant non-Oedipal speculations in which Freud analyzes death and the fantasy of immortality in association with the mother are part of what I call the counterthesis. They occur most visibly in Freud's writings on religion.

MISOGYNY AND RELIGION UNDER ANALYSIS

In this work, I expose the shadowy presence of this non-Oedipal counterthesis in the cultural texts on religion. My sources are not only Freud's four major "cultural texts," *Totem and Taboo*, *The Future of an Illusion*, *Civilization and its Discontents*, and *Moses and Monotheism*, but also some of his shorter writings related to religion and mythology ("Medusa's Head" and "The Theme of the Three Caskets," for example), and some of his writings which address religious themes and issues

only indirectly (such as "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" and *The Interpretation of Dreams*). All of these are "cultural texts" in a larger sense (Homans 1989: 196). They are not only about intrapsychic or interpersonal dynamics, but also about the intersections of body, psyche, and society. They address the sources and meanings of the fragile "achievements of our civilization" (*SE* 14: 307) embodied in art, literature, philosophy, ethics, religion, science, and education. Within these cultural texts, broadly defined, the counterthesis is apparent at several sites: it is particularly evident in Freud's writings on the maternal body, death and the afterlife, Judaism and anti-Semitism, and in his writings on mourning and melancholia.

Religion is not only the subject of the texts in which the counterthesis emerges most vividly, religion is also part of the counterthesis itself. Although it is never fully developed in Freud's writings, the counterthesis points toward a psychoanalytic theory of the loss of religion and the absence of God: it represents a step toward an analysis of religion in absentia, of Jewishness in the context of secularism, assimilation, and modernity. When one becomes attentive to the eruptions of this second thesis into the more immediately apparent Oedipal narrative, Freud's theory of religion emerges as a more complex theory and as a theory which points toward a feminist analysis of deeply rooted forms of cultural misogyny and xenophobia.

The counterthesis intrudes into Freud's texts in three ways. Some intrusions interrupt and subvert an Oedipal analysis. Others explicitly acknowledge the limitations of the Oedipal paradigm. Still others tentatively and hesitantly begin to develop non-Oedipal analyses. Although these three kinds of intrusion are sometimes overlapping, they can, at least heuristically, be differentiated.

In his first major work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, discontinuities in an Oedipal argument reveal elements which have no place in the parricidal and incestuous paradigm. In the "dream book," Freud is quite cognizant of the limitations of the Oedipal theory. He discusses the point at which one must turn aside from dream interpretation, the

“spot in every dream at which it is unplumbable, a navel as it were, that is its point of contact with the unknown” (*SE* 4: 111, n. 1). Freud’s essay “A Religious Experience,” written fairly late in his life, illustrates another sort of intrusion: non-Oedipal themes interrupt and subvert an Oedipal analysis almost against Freud’s will. Still other texts, many of which date from the middle period of his psychoanalytic career, like “The Uncanny,” “Mourning and Melancholia,” and “On Transience,” represent subversions of the Oedipal masterplot which enact explicit, yet hesitant explorations of the counterthesis.

The counterthesis within Freud’s texts, a trajectory incompletely developed by Freud and virtually unnoticed by his previous interpreters, points suggestively toward new directions for the psychoanalytic psychology of religion, initiating a feminist “analysis” of Freud’s cultural texts on religion. By pursuing Freud’s analysis of religion, we encounter not only God, but also the absence of God; not only the afterlife, but also the rejection of the afterlife; not only Judaism, but also the loss of Judaism. The absence of religion thus proves as significant as its presence in Freud’s work.

This introduction situates the project in relation to other feminist responses to Freud in religious studies. In addition, it describes the tenacity of the Oedipal masterplot in Freud’s work and suggests how his incompletely developed counterthesis enables a feminist analysis and critique of misogyny and xenophobia in culture and the unconscious. The first chapter exposes the counterthesis in both an early text, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and the much later “A Religious Experience.” At sites that bracket the entire span of Freud’s career, the limitations, interruptions, and subversions of the Oedipal masterplot, the points at which Freud turned aside from Oedipal interpretation, thus become evident.

The second chapter focuses specifically on the themes of death, immortality, and the afterlife, revealing in Freud’s texts, in addition to an Oedipal theory of patricidal fantasies, a set of images involving dead mothers, mothers as instructors in death, and “uncanny” (*unheimlich*)

maternal bodies. Freud's analysis of "the uncanny" as a term which "comes to mean its opposite" is pivotal for the counterthesis. Death, immortality, and the mother's body are all described as "(un)canny": Freud used similar terminology to describe the fantasy of a heavenly afterlife, a "home in the uncanny," and the genitals of the mother, an "uncanny home."

The third chapter turns to the notion of the "uncanny Jew" as a widespread trope in Central Europe and as a subtext in Freud's essay "The Uncanny." Freud initiated a fragmentary analysis of the unconscious intersections of Jewishness, assimilation, death, and the mother in which the (un)canniness or (*Un*)*Heimlichkeit* of Jewishness to Jews is a central theme. This becomes evident in Freud's writings on his own Jewish identity, especially through an analysis of two presentations to a Viennese Jewish men's group, the B'nai B'rith, to which Freud belonged for many years.

The fourth chapter examines Freud's comments on the entanglement of anti-Semitism with misogyny. Freud's description of castration anxiety and circumcision as central to both the fear of the Jew and the fear of the mother leads to a set of speculations on the "abject" as the source of both xenophobia and misogyny.

The fifth chapter turns to two texts written in 1915, reflections on mourning and melancholia, showing that the themes of the uncanny mother and Jewish identity lie just below the surface of these texts. Freud here shows himself as a successful mourner of religion in transition, but an unsuccessful or "melancholic" mourner of the lost mother. Freud's inability to mourn the mother is far from idiosyncratic, however, for we are all melancholy mourners of maternal loss. Freud's incomplete forays into this terrain offer fragmentary and provocative interpretations of the unconscious associations of mortality and maternity and a promising step toward bringing to consciousness the sources of the twin plagues of misogyny and xenophobia.

The epilogue moves beyond Freud, raising questions about the forms taken by the counterthesis in contemporary culture and asking

how our expressions of the counterthesis can be transformed from rage and hostility into awareness and reconciliation. Anti-abortion web sites on the Internet today provide a vivid illustration of the counterthesis in contemporary culture: dangerous and deadly mothers, in the rhetoric of the web sites, are closely associated with immortality, and Holocaust imagery appears in projected and distorted form. Yet acknowledgment of the “unspeakable” of the counterthesis may offer the possibility of reconciliation between the opposing voices in the abortion debates. Concluding remarks consider the implications of Freud’s counterthesis for the study of religion in modernity.

FEMINISM, FREUD, AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Freud has been criticized frequently, and correctly, for the male bias or androcentrism of his Oedipal theory of religion and culture. Without doubt, his Oedipal paradigm situates woman in a secondary role. She is the object of incestuous desire in the fantasy of the male child, she is a morally inferior being without a strong superego, and she is excluded from the work of culture. The Oedipal theory, many have argued, rests upon an assumption of female inferiority. Freud’s analyses, these theorists conclude, seem to support a broad-based misogynist ideology. His remarks on the origins of religion and morality in *The Ego and the Id* are often cited as illustrations of this Oedipal androcentrism: “Religion, morality, and a social sense — the chief elements in the higher side of man — were . . . acquired phylogenetically out of the father-complex . . . the male sex seems to have taken the lead in all these moral acquisitions” (*SE* 19: 37; see Rizzuto 1979: 42). Similarly, many have pointed critically to Freud’s remarks in *Civilization and Its Discontents* suggesting that women are the enemies of culture. Less capable than men of renunciation and sublimation, Freud argued, women “come into opposition to civilization and display their retarding and restraining influence.” Instead, “the work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and

compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable" (*SE* 21: 103). This exclusion of women from the "capacity for cultural production" has troubled feminists for generations (Garner 1985: 29). From this critical feminist perspective, Freud is seen as a misogynist thinker.

Nor have Freud's speculations about morality and gender escaped critique. Many have noted the androcentrism in his assessment of women's morality in "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," where he states, "I cannot evade the notion (though I hesitate to give it expression) that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men" (*SE* 19: 257; see Van Herik 1982).

In Freud's Oedipal writings on civilization, religion, and morality, then, his androcentrism stands out in vivid relief. The psychologist of religion David Wulff summarizes the foundations of the feminist critique: "Freud's psychology of religion is . . . clearly centered in masculine reactivity. It is the male's ambivalent relationship with his father, both in his own and in the race's childhood, that lies at the core of religion as Freud views it" (Wulff 1997: 285). This androcentrism is clearly evident in Freud's Oedipal analyses of religion. His critics are correct to challenge and critique his approach. Freud's texts, however, can be read in other ways. My project is what I call "analytic," rather than "critical" or "inclusive" (Jonte-Pace 1997b, 2001).

Feminist scholars have reacted to Freud's androcentric accounts of culture and religion in one of these three major ways. Feminist "critical" reactions have challenged psychoanalysis for its androcentrism, dismissing Freud for constructing a virtually "womanless" theory, for assuming masculine normativity, and for portraying women as physically, morally, and intellectually deficient (Friedan 1963, Millet 1970, Greer 1971, Sprengnether 1990, Kofman 1985, 1991). Sarah Kofman, for example, a French theorist interested in literature, gender, and psy-

choanalysis, rejects many of Freud's interpretations of literary texts: "If literature, after a reductive treatment, can seem to bend itself to a [psycho]analytic reading, is it not because Freud's conceptions about women coincide with those of the literature that he exploits? An adequation between the literary and the analytic which, far from being an index of truth, is merely an index that both are in the grip of the same cultural and ideological tradition" (1991: 82). According to Kofman and other feminist critics of psychoanalysis, Freud simply perpetuates misogynist cultural ideologies.

Feminist "inclusive" reactions to Freud, on the other hand, seek a psychological theory of religion which incorporates and attends to women's knowledge and experience. These theorists have often turned away from Freud and toward the alternative methodologies developed by object-relations theorists (Winnicott 1972, Klein 1975) and self psychologists (Kohut 1971). This vein of psychoanalytic feminism attends to the maternal-infant bond in the earliest, "pre-Oedipal" months of life (Chodorow 1978, 1989, Benjamin 1988, Flax 1990, Sprengnether 1990).² Mary Ellen Ross and Cheryl Lynn Ross, for example, argue that many aspects of religious ritual and liturgy "can be comprehended within the psychoanalytic interpretation of ritual if such interpretation is extended to include the pre-oedipal period of life" (1983: 27). These authors show that the characteristics of the Roman Catholic Mass "flow from what is essentially an experience of God as Mother" (1983: 39). By investigating the mother-child relationship in the pre-Oedipal period as the psychological source of religious ideas and experiences, feminists have succeeded in avoiding psychoanalytic androcentrism by developing more "inclusive" psychologies of religion, ritual, morality, and belief (Gilligan 1984, Ross and Ross 1983, Jonte-Pace 1987, 1993, Jones 1996, Lutzky 1991, Raab 1997, Goldenberg 1990).

Feminist theorists in the psychology of religion who pursue the "analytic" project, the project which most directly informs this study, have initiated a rather different enterprise. Developing a partnership between psychoanalysis and feminism, these theorists have inquired

into the role played by gender in shaping experience and epistemology. They have investigated the cultural construction of gender, and, as theologian Rebecca Chopp puts it, they have examined the ways in which “different categories and structures are marked and constituted through a patriarchal ordering of gender division” (1993: 38). Mari Jo Buhle’s volume *Feminism and its Discontents: A Century of Struggle with Psychoanalysis* reflects this analytic perspective, showing that feminism and psychoanalysis have been engaged in a “continuous conversation” about the possibilities for “human liberation” in America throughout the twentieth century (1998: 3).

An important voice in the analytic project is that of Juliet Mitchell. In her groundbreaking *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), Mitchell cautioned feminist critics against dismissing psychoanalysis, arguing that “psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but an analysis of one.” She insisted that “a rejection of psychoanalysis and of Freud’s works is fatal for feminism” (1974: xiii). In her view, Freud’s goal was to show how a patriarchal culture creates hierarchically gendered beings and how a phallogocentric and patricentric world turns infants into gendered women and men. Mitchell suggested that Freud’s notion of penis envy, often rejected by feminist critics of psychoanalysis, could be reconceptualized in social and cultural terms. If the phallus is a symbol of the systems of social power and authority from which women in patriarchies are excluded, then penis envy is a way of describing a feminist concern for equality in the social, political, and economic arenas.

Mitchell’s concern was to defend Freud’s theory of the construction of gender in patriarchal culture. Her focus was not religion. Her work nevertheless points toward new possibilities for the psychology of religion. Influenced by Mitchell’s approach, feminist theorists in religious studies have begun to consider how psychoanalysis might provide the methodology appropriate for an analysis of gender, of androcentrism, or of misogyny in religion and culture (Goldenberg 1997).

Julia Kristeva, another analytic theorist well known for her work in

feminism and post-structuralism, has introduced into psychoanalytic thinking a concern with the effects of language and power on subjectivity and culture. Many of Kristeva's writings from the 1980s enact feminist revisions of Freud's religious and cultural texts. In *Powers of Horror* (1982), for example, she undertakes a rewriting of Freud's study of the origins of ritual and a rethinking of his interpretation of the sources of anti-Semitism (Jonte-Pace 1997a, 1999b). She goes beyond Freud by pursuing an analysis of the horror of the "maternal object" at the foundations of the experience of the sacred.

Particularly significant in the "analytic" project is the work of the psychologist of religion Judith Van Herik. In *Freud on Femininity and Faith* (1982), Van Herik examined the role of asymmetrical gender categories in psychoanalysis, demonstrating that in Freud's Oedipal theory of religion, belief is equivalent to femininity, wish fulfillment, and Christianity. Morality, on the other hand, is equivalent to masculinity, the renunciation of wishes, and Judaism. Her work represents a "gender analysis" of belief and morality in Freud's work.

A group of scholars in Jewish cultural studies, among whom are Jay Geller, Sander Gilman, and Daniel Boyarin, has recently produced another set of important feminist analyses of Freud, gender, and religion. The work of these scholars has been instrumental in demonstrating that Freud's writings represent a response to an anti-Semitic ideology widespread throughout fin de siècle Europe within which male Jews were coded as feminine, effeminate, or homosexual. Freud attempted to portray a masculinized Judaism, they suggest, in reaction against this feminization of male Jewishness.

This book is a contribution to the analytic scholarship in the feminist study of religion and psychoanalysis in that it does not simply dismiss Freud as a theorist whose attempt to rethink culture and the unconscious has no relevance for feminism, as the feminist critics of psychoanalysis have done. Nor does it dismiss Freud by looking elsewhere for theoretical models more "friendly" to women, as the inclusivists have done. Instead, it interrogates the Freudian corpus, discovering ways in

which it challenges its own hegemony and the hegemony of its culture and uncovering patterns of subversion whereby Freud's counterthesis undermines his own dominant paradigm. This project thus builds upon (and sometimes critiques) the work of Mitchell, Kristeva, Van Herik, Geller, Gilman, and other analytic theorists.

Like Mitchell, I believe that feminists cannot afford to neglect Freud's work. We can benefit from close attention not only to the Oedipal interpretation of the construction of gender in patriarchal culture defended by Mitchell, but also to the associations Freud traced in an incompletely developed non-Oedipal counterthesis. Just as Mitchell reframed the notion of penis envy as a feminist and social category, I suggest a rethinking of the notion of castration anxiety, arguing that it often slips beyond the boundaries of the Oedipal theory into the realm of a pre-Oedipal pattern of misogyny and death anxiety. Like Kristeva, I pursue Freud's deeper insights regarding gender and religion, especially when that pursuit takes us beyond Freud's Oedipal formulations and into the territory of the "abjection" of the maternal which Kristeva finds at the heart of subjectivity, religion, and the sacred. Like Van Herik, I am interested in constructing a feminist analysis of Freud's understanding of gender, religion, and culture. Just as Van Herik's examination of Freud's writings exposed the play of gender in conceptions of belief and morality, my inquiry into Freud's writing exposes the play of gender in fears and fantasies about mortality and immortality, Jewishness and anti-Semitism, secularism and the absence of God. And like Boyarin, Gilman, and Geller, I believe that Freud's writings on culture are best understood by attending to his cultural context. I explore ways in which, as an assimilated (or assimilating) Jew in an anti-Semitic culture, Freud attempted to theorize the gendered dimensions of his own Jewishness and the anti-Semitism of many of his contemporaries: in addition to a "masculinization" of Judaism, Freud's writings also contain an analysis of the associations of the Jew with the feminine or maternal and with death and the uncanny, both for the Jew and for the anti-Semite.

Although Freud is famous for asking the question, "Was will das

Weib?" (What does a woman want?) (Jones 1955: 468), a better formulation of his question is: "What do men *think* that women want?" This question sometimes takes a related form: "What do men think that *mothers* want?" A careful analyst of male fantasies and fears about the desires of women and mothers, Freud was not unsuccessful at answering these questions. Although he insistently stated that men harbor fantasies of death toward their fathers and sexual desires toward their mothers, he also, almost unwillingly, inadvertently, or unconsciously, explored ways in which men wish their mothers dead and fear that their mothers harbor deadly desires. Freud's theories thus "tell a story about men's fear of women and the social consequences of that fear" (Todd 1986: 528).³

If Freud's speculations on misogyny can be understood as accurate accounts of the fantasies of men, are women exempt from these fears and ideas? I think not. Women within patriarchal societies share, to some degree, unconscious matrophobic ideas, fantasies, and ideologies lying below the surface of dominant patriarchal discourses. Freud's question, as I have revised it, "What do men think that women want?" can be expanded into the more comprehensive, if less elegant question: "What do *we men and women* fear that women (and mothers) want?"

Freud's answer to this question is complex. In Freud's texts, male (and female) fears involving misogyny and matrophobia lie in close proximity to religious fantasies of immortality and the afterlife, anti-Semitic and homophobic ideas about degenerate Jews, and fears of encroaching secularism. These are disturbing notions and fantasies, but they must be confronted and interrogated. Unconscious misogyny and xenophobia and their disastrous social consequences will not be eliminated without a careful analysis of their sources and manifestations. As Harold Bloom has said, "Freud's peculiar strength was to say what could not be said, or at least to attempt to say it, thus refusing to be silent in the face of the unsayable" (Bloom 1995: 113). Freud indeed attempted not only to say the unsayable, but to speak the unspeakable, to say not merely what cannot be said, but what *must* not be said because it is too

disquieting to confront. In what follows, we read Freud carefully enough to hear not only what he said, but also what he attempted to say.

The unsayable and the unspeakable are dangerous and destructive only as long as they remain unthought, unsaid, or unconscious. Neither unconscious misogyny nor other forms of xenophobia, with all their tragic manifestations, will be eliminated without a careful interrogation of their sources and variations. Nor will conflicts over religion or its absence be resolved by turning away from an awareness of the tenacity of the fantasies and fears underlying religious belief and disbelief. As disturbing as they are, we need not turn away from these images, fantasies, and fears. Speaking the unspeakable about the self in the context of the "talking cure" can produce a liberating or therapeutic awareness of thoughts and memories that would otherwise become pathogenic. Similarly, speaking the unspeakable about culture, religion, and gender can be liberating or healing in broader contexts.

THE UNCONSCIOUS IN BODY, PSYCHE, AND CULTURE

Like Peter Homans (1970, 1989, 1995 [1979]), who reads psychoanalysis as fundamentally a theory about "images, symbol, and myth, about interpretations that presuppose levels of meaning, and about culture" (1970: 14), I read Freud as an interpreter of culture whose insights make sense of symbolic and cultural tensions. Although Freud is sometimes seen as a mechanistic reductionist or as scientist manqué (Jones 1996, Sulloway 1979), he is best read as an analyst of culture, ideology, and the unconscious. He was, of course, trained in the medical and biological science of the late nineteenth century, and the effects of that scientific training are evident throughout his work. But the most important and provocative dimensions of his writings are his formulations of the spaces where the body comes into contact with culture and psyche, where the fears and desires of the unconscious, the demands of civilization, and the "pulsions" of the body intersect (Kristeva 1987).

Freud subjected cultural discourse — religion, folklore, literature — to psychoanalytic interpretation, suggesting that, in the words of Robert Paul, “the symbolism of the unconscious encountered in dreams and neurotic symptoms [is] embedded in the language permeating public cultural discourse” (1991: 267). In addition, he maintained an interest in the way culture provides the system of meanings within which individual development occurs. Although he was deeply concerned with understanding and challenging the effects of cultural constraints on individual behavior, a concern that Foucault dismissed as the “repressive hypothesis” (1980 [1978]: 10–49),⁴ he was also attentive to the subtle intersections of cultural, ideological, and unconscious fantasies and desires.⁵

Freud referred often to his project as an investigation of the unconscious in the *Seelenleben* (*SE* 14: 168). Although Strachey translates the term as “mental life” (*SE* 14: 168), a better translation for *Seelenleben* is “psychic life” or “the life of the soul.” Freud portrays a “psychic life” in which psyche, body, and culture are closely intertwined. He describes how ideas are shaped, created, and maintained in the unconscious prior to or alongside their enactment in the social arena. Ideas about divine justice, ideas about destiny, death, and the afterlife, ideas about Jewishness, ideas about the presence and absence of God, in Freud’s writings, are complex cultural and ideological constructions that resonate with the unconscious fears and desires of individuals. Freud’s theory of religion is a theory of how religious ideas are created, experienced, and gendered in the unconscious mind, the *Seelenleben*, and in culture.

I read Freud, then, as an interpreter of personal and cultural fantasies, a reader of psychic realities, an excavator of the unconscious. The fantasies of individuals and the ideologies of cultures, viewed through a psychoanalytic lens, can be seen as obscure revelations of unconscious psychological activities. Reading Freud as a theorist of culture and of the unconscious, I approach his writings on religion as attempts to formulate the workings of the unconscious in religious and cultural ideas

and to expose the psychic realities underlying religious concepts. While Freud's work is not beyond critique, his theories of culture have only begun to be tapped. His counterthesis has lain undeveloped beneath the Oedipal masterplot, its rich implications, both for challenging his dominant arguments and for interpreting culture, unexamined.

Feminists must use caution against facile engagements with master discourses, for indeed, as Tina Chanter asks, "How are we to weigh the strategic gains to be had from positioning oneself in relation to a master discourse, even if one looks on it askance? Are the losses we incur too great, or is this a risk worth taking?" (Chanter 1995: 216).⁶ Such a risk is, in fact, worth taking in relation to Freud's "master discourse." In this book, I set out to demonstrate powerful contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies deeply embedded in Freud's theories. My goal in focusing on them is not to join in the condemnation of Freud's theories so common in the contemporary era, but rather to argue that these contradictions are meaningful. As Freud himself said in another context, "these contradictions stand in need of an explanation" (*SE* 5: 514).

THE TENACITY OF THE OEDIPAL MASTERPLOT

The centrality of the Oedipus complex in psychoanalytic theory is indisputable. It provides not only a paradigm for the structure of the psyche, but also a system for the evaluation of culture. Freud himself called the Oedipus complex "the shibboleth that distinguishes the adherents of psychoanalysis from its opponents" (*SE* 7: 226 n. 1). It has been called Freud's "greatest discovery" (Rudnytsky 1987: x) and "most important paradigm" (Pollock and Ross 1988: xix). It lies "at the heart of Freud's dynamic developmental theory" (Simon and Blass 1991: 161). Freud applied the theory to child development, personality structure, and psychopathology, as well as to the broader phenomena of religious, cultural, and social institutions. In spite of his sometimes dramatic modifications of the Oedipal theory, Freud insisted throughout his life on the accuracy of the Oedipal solution to the riddles he encountered.

Why did Freud turn aside from attempts to speak the unspeakable and fail to confront and develop the non-Oedipal counterthesis that haunts his writings? The answer to this question is complex and overdetermined, but it is possible to isolate some of the intellectual, psychological, and sociohistorical factors. Intellectually, Freud's deep commitment to "uncritical self-observation" came into frequent conflict with his fiercely held sense of the validity of the Oedipal theory (*SE* 4: 103). Psychoanalysis, for Freud, was at the same time method, content, and theory. As an interpretive method, it provides a key to portals otherwise closed to consciousness: it is, as Freud put it, "a procedure for the investigation of mental processes which are almost inaccessible any other way." Second, this method leads to particular contents: it is a description of the contents of the unconscious, a frank and uncensored reportage, a "collection of psychological information" (*SE* 18: 235). Third, it is a theory of the structure or framework — usually Oedipal — within which this collection of psychological information is located and organized.

Freud used psychoanalytic introspection as method fairly carefully, faithfully reporting the results of his excavations of the unconscious in his thinking and writing. While most of the unconscious contents he encountered fell into place as pieces of a coherent theory, some of the pieces simply did not fit the Oedipal puzzle. His attempts to locate these contents within the Oedipal framework were often unsuccessful. His writings are rife with representations that he did not develop into theories, fragments that he was unable to incorporate into his master thesis. In the words of psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu, Freud's work contains images "half glimpsed in the form of thing presentations . . . which he failed to turn into word presentations" (1986: 371).⁷

This tension in the character of psychoanalysis is the context for the counterthesis. Evidence for the counterthesis exists in half-glimpsed images and half-formulated ideas he recorded in numerous texts and documents. Although Freud never fully developed the counterthesis, its traces remain clearly evident in his work in a complex overlapping of

one conceptual grid upon another, like the palimpsestic relations of perception and memory that Freud described in his famous essay "A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad" (*SE* 19: 227). Separating the layers of the "palimpsest" exposes masterplot and counterthesis in tension.⁸ The unlayering of this counterthesis relies, in part, on reading Freud in the original German. Many of the connections I make are not apparent in the English translation in the *Standard Edition*, but stand forth vividly in the original language.

The tenacity of the Oedipal masterplot in Freud's theory itself deserves comment. Numerous theories have been proposed to explain Freud's insistence upon Oedipal solutions to life's riddles. Some have focused on Freud's own personal relationships with his mother and father (Sprenghether, Rizzuto, Robert), others on the social and cultural contexts of European anti-Semitism (Gilman, Geller, Boyarin).⁹ It is clear that Freud's insistence upon the validity of the Oedipal theory was heavily overdetermined.

One aspect of that overdetermination is that Freud's revelatory sense of the significance of the Oedipal pattern cannot be separated from a personal sense of identification with the Sophoclean Oedipus Rex. Freud's biographer, the psychoanalyst Ernest Jones, recounts a story, now almost legendary, of Freud's sense of identity with Oedipus. In 1906, on his fiftieth birthday, Freud's followers presented him with a medallion engraved on one side with his own portrait and on the other with a design of Oedipus answering the riddle of the Sphinx. Inscribed on the medallion were these words, in Greek, from Sophocles' drama *Oedipus Rex*: "Who knew the famous riddles and was a man most mighty." According to Jones, when Freud read the inscription, he "became pale and agitated . . . as if he had encountered a revenant." The reason for Freud's discomfort, Jones later learned, was that "as a young student at the University of Vienna he used to stroll around the great Court inspecting the busts of former famous professors of the institution. He then had the phantasy . . . of seeing his own bust . . . inscribed with the *identical words* he now saw on the medallion" (Jones

1955: 15; cf. Rudnytsky 1987: 4–5). Freud’s fantasized identification with Oedipus was uncannily realized in the gift from his followers.

Freud and Oedipus were both solvers of riddles. The Sphinx had asked Oedipus a riddle requiring an understanding of human change and development: What walks on four, then two, then three legs? Oedipus had answered the Sphinx’s riddle, but Freud pursued the riddle further, explaining the gaps in the solution to the riddle, uncovering the hidden history of the creature who walks on four, two, and then three legs. The riddle, in Freud’s extension, asked how the transitions occur. What enables the creature to move from infancy to adulthood? What causes the creature to limp in old age? Freud’s answer to the riddle Oedipus had only begun to answer was, of course, Oedipus himself: the Oedipus complex, the love of the mother and the hatred of the father, moves the creature from infancy to adulthood. The Oedipus complex wounds and limits the creature. The Oedipus complex leads inevitably to the sufferings and infirmities of old age. Oedipus had begun to answer the Sphinx’s riddle, but Freud felt that he himself had completed the puzzle, solving the riddle once and for all. Freud, like Oedipus, “knew the famous riddles and was a man most mighty.”

Freud encountered many riddles during his career. He argued that most riddles are Oedipal riddles: he suggested, for example, that the first problem encountered by children, “the riddle of where babies come from,” is, in a distorted form, “the same riddle that was propounded by the Theban Sphinx” (*SE* 7: 195). He enjoyed using the rhetoric of the riddle (*das Rätsel*) in his writing. He struggled with “the riddle of the nature of femininity” (*SE* 22: 113), and he expressed bewilderment in the face of the riddle of mourning, proclaiming “to psychologists, mourning is a great riddle” (*SE* 14: 306). In autobiographical remarks incorporated into a postscript to “The Question of Lay Analysis,” he described his lifelong desire to “understand something of the riddles of the world in which we live and perhaps even to contribute something to their solution” (*SE* 20: 253). Similarly, he posed questions about the riddle of faith and belief: “as though the world had not riddles enough, we

are set the new problem of understanding how these other people have been able to acquire their belief in the Divine Being" (*SE* 23: 123).

Although he wished to believe that most riddles are variants of the riddle posed to Oedipus by the Sphinx and that their solutions are Oedipal, as well, even Freud knew that some riddles escape Oedipal solutions. So deeply attached was Freud, both intellectually and psychologically — and politically, as Schorske (1973), McGrath (1986), and others have shown — to the notion that the Oedipal complex must be correct, however, that he was only occasionally able to perceive the rich counterthesis within his own sights. His images and metaphors reveal the tenacity with which he held to the Oedipal theory, the way it functioned as an "unshakable bulwark" against alternate views (Freud, in Jung 1963: 149).

Yet this bulwark was not truly unshakable. Noting occasionally the limitations of the Oedipal paradigm, Freud initiated a trajectory contradictory to his Oedipal analyses of the origins of religion, morality, and monotheism in primal parricides. Characterized by fears and fantasies focused on a dead or deadly mother, the counterthesis constructs a fragmentary theory of death, immortality, and the afterlife, a tentative analysis of the canniness of Jewish identity to the Jew and the uncanniness of the Jew to the anti-Semite, and a hesitant analysis of the loss of religion and the absence of God.