

# A Proper Conversation: Some Reflections on the Role of Psycho- analysis in Literary Study in South Africa

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## **Summary**

This paper asks: what are the epistemological and broader political implications of the employment of psychoanalytic theories in literary studies in South Africa?

In the implicit endorsement of psychoanalytic theories of the subject in much poststructuralist and some postcolonial theory, academics subscribe to a value-laden conception of the self. Psychoanalysis rejects as “primitive” notions of self such as those circulating amongst indigenous South African cultures while it privileges the individualised psychological person who emerges in the early modern period in the West. Thus, however fruitful psychoanalytic theories may be, if they are not made accountable to local thought systems then their complicity with intellectual imperialism may render them at best suspect, at worst incapacitating to South African students. What is needed is a kind of theorising which involves a dialogue with alternative models, models such as traditional Zulu thought and its attendant literary forms. If students are, for example, exposed to Zulu auto/biographical practices, and are encouraged to consider the philosophical underpinnings for such practices, they will be able to question the implications of the adoption of theories like psychoanalysis.

## **Opsomming**

In hierdie artikel vra ek: Wat is die epistemologiese en breër politieke implikasies van die gebruik van psigoanalitiese teorieë in literêre studies in Suid-Afrika?

Deur die implisiete aanvaarding van psigoanalitiese teorieë van die subjek in post-strukturalistiese en sommige postkoloniale teorieë, onderskryf Suid-Afrikaanse akademië die gelaaië begrip van konsep van die self. Psigoanalise verwerp die “primitiewe” begrippe van die self soos dit in inheemse Suid-Afrikaanse kulture voorkom terwyl dit voorkeur verleen aan die geïndividualiseerde psigologiese persoon wat in die vroeë moderne periode in die Weste te voorskyn gekom het. Dus, hoe vrugbaar psigoanalitiese teorieë van die subjek ook al mag wees, indien hulle nie verantwoordbaar is aan die inheemse denksisteme nie, maak hulle medepligtigheid aan intellektuele imperialisme hulle verdag, of erger nog, ontmagtigend vir Suid-Afrikaanse studente. Wat nodig is, is 'n tipe teoretisering wat 'n dialoog met alternatiewe modelle insluit; modelle soos die tradisionele Zulu-denke en die verwante literêre vorms. Indien studente byvoorbeeld blootgestel word aan Zulu outo/biografiese praktyke, en aangemoedig word om aandag te skenk aan die filosofiese grondslag van sulke praktyke, sal hulle in staat wees om die implikasies van die aanname van teorieë soos die psigoanalise te bevraagteken.

There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep man in everlasting ignorance – that principle is contempt prior to investigation.

Herbert Spencer

Everyone claims analytic descent from Freud.

John Forrester

In the 1990s, Literary Theory was central to the teaching in English departments at universities in South Africa. In mid-decade, in response to queries, I found that most undergraduate and all postgraduate syllabi included study of contemporary literary theories. Arguably, poststructuralism dominated in the 1990s; now, in its various incarnations, it is fundamental to gender studies, cultural studies, media studies and postcolonial theory. This means that careful examination of its precepts and assumptions is no less pressing. This is no easy task, for poststructuralism is heterogeneous, even contradictory, and involves interdisciplinary modes of inquiry. One recurrent feature, however, is its acknowledgement and incorporation of psychoanalytic modes of thought (Young 1981: 8).<sup>1</sup> Jameson has argued that the only people still seriously interested in Freudian criticism are the Freudians themselves, but that “at the same time ... the prestige and influence of the Freudian oeuvre and of psychoanalysis as a method and a model has never been so immense at any moment of its history” (Jameson 1981: 65). Focusing on the adoption of (Freudian and Lacanian)<sup>2</sup> psychoanalytic theorisations of subjectivity in post-structuralism and its legates, this essay asks: can psychoanalysis be universally applied? What are the epistemological and political implications of the employment (however latent) of psychoanalytic theories in South Africa? What indigenous cultural practices can be drawn into the debate?

I am arguing for a historicisation of psychoanalysis which examines the historical and social conditions which made possible both its methods and its objects of study, an engagement with key issues in the heated debate which still rages about its validity. Webster (1996) seems to have reinvigorated the fervours of both supporters and detractors, as does Tallis, who claims, in support of Webster and other critics like Fredrick Crews, that “psychoanalysis is utterly without merit” (Tallis 1996: 671). Reservations notwithstanding, this is not a plea to reject such theories from the curriculum. For now, at least, Freud’s assertion that “on account of its hypotheses and the comprehensiveness of its connections, psychoanalysis deserves a place in the interest of every educated person” (Freud 1991b: 437) still holds because psychoanalysis (of a specific sort) informs contemporary literary theories and is central to Western thought – which is generally acknowledged to dominate the nonmetropolitan world. As Appiah has noted,

for us to forget Europe is to suppress the conflicts that have shaped our identities; since it is too late for us to escape each other, we might instead seek to turn to our advantage the mutual interdependencies history has thrust upon us.

(Appiah 1992: 72)

Indeed, but we need to invite scrutiny of Western theory's imperium over the world, to consider whether this is "as clearly of universal *value* as it [is] certainly of universal *significance*" (Appiah 1992: 144).

The suspicion of reason which psychoanalysis and poststructuralism provoke must be retained when we consider our teaching: do South African literary departments rationalise what is taught so as to justify a fear of deviating from the path of certainty and security of Euro-American theory (and its convenient textbooks and journals)? Have we (of whatever racial category) been seduced by the notion of the superiority of Western modes of thinking? Teachers of theory can become blinded to their own investment in this often difficult and obscure body of texts; they can use theory to feed their own sense of intellectual prowess, which would be somewhat unsettled in a teaching practice that is also a learning from those who are taught. In the language of psychoanalysis, we need to be careful of our own needs to fetishise theory.

As long as such theories silence oppositional discourses by claiming "universal" validity and tending to theorise resistance out of the realms of possibility, and also by excluding "folkloric" or "popular" understanding – they too are guilty of intellectual imperialism. In addition to scrutinising motivations, instead of locating epistemic violence elsewhere, we need to confront its inevitability in all explanatory orders and recognise (*pace*: Foucault) that discourses may be resistant in one respect, but collaborative in another. However, as it is important not to collapse indigenous praise poetry into a (false) "black South African" genre, I have focused exclusively on one discourse. As Appiah observes: "in the academy, as in politics, true détente requires more than the regular expression of a desire for rapprochement" (Appiah 1992: 89). Thus the scrutiny of psychoanalysis's use in literary theory might be usefully achieved by way of contrast with local (usually strictly excluded) explanatory models. I offer the Zulu tradition of *izibongo* as an example. I have chosen this because most of my students are Zulus. Other indigenous paradigms might work just as well. Ania Loomba makes a related point:

Whatever the nature of the metropolitan academy, it continues to hold much influence over its counterparts in once-colonized societies, and this obliges us to engage with its debates. I say "us" and "its" because, despite the heterogeneity of and conflicts within academic structures at either end, and despite the obvious

and growing overlaps between work done in “first” and “third” world universities and research institutions, as well as between issues of neocolonialism, racism and minority politics within Western countries, there remain important differences between them. Moreover, “influence” does not suggest unmitigated dependence or mimicry. In any case, the institutionalization of whatever we understand by “influence”, in the shape of publishing networks, funding agencies, ... patronage networks, educational, research and “development” institutions, needs to be underlined. Like all neocolonial scenarios, this one also implicates the internal politics of the “Third World”.

(Loomba 1994: 305-306)

The point is that whatever (specific) local models are drawn into the theoretical conversation, the teaching method I propose would mean an encounter with theory which does not depend on the evacuation of the very subjects who have to grapple with it:

difference is distorted and obscured in totalistic theories, the obvious path for resistance to take is to provide alternative mappings of specific regions of the social field. In other words, theoretical pluralism makes possible the expansion of social ontology, a redefinition and redescription of experience from the perspective of those who are more often simply the objects of theory.

(Sawicki 1988: 188)

Psychoanalysis has permeated Western thought. Even critics like Richard Webster acknowledge that Freud appears to have been the twentieth century’s “leading intellectual force” (Webster 1996: 3). Auden wrote: “To us he is no more a person/ Now but a whole climate of opinion” (Auden quoted by Webster 1996: 10). Given the longstanding global hegemony of Western conceptual patterns, psychoanalytic theory has a significant role in university curricula. Furthermore, it offers unprecedented insights and poses valuable heuristic questions. A critic like Webster, for instance, though both thorough and useful, fails to acknowledge the importance of the insights which psychoanalysis affords and his critique is itself not without flaws: for one thing, in identifying Freud’s insistence on the validity of his theory, Webster fails to acknowledge that Freud frequently admits to incomplete knowledge, and that the tone of his discourse, as the following sentence demonstrates, is often diffident: “It ought to be possible eventually to understand these things; but as yet we cannot” (Webster 1991: 328).

Nor should we allow ourselves to be too gullible regarding Webster’s censure of Freud’s early work, much of which Freud himself recanted. Moreover, while it is true that errors were committed, the theory had to be worked out through analytic practice, and this was necessarily a process entailing reassessment and revision. Even in his lifetime, Freud bemoaned such

unfair treatment:

I may also urge that in the course of my work I have modified my views on a few important points, changed them and replaced them by fresh ones – and in each case, of course, I have made this publicly known. And the outcome of this frankness? Some people have taken no notice whatever of my self-corrections and continue to this day to criticize me for hypotheses which have long ceased to have the same meaning for me. Others reproach me precisely for these changes and regard me as untrustworthy on their account.

(Freud 1991: 283-284)

Gayatri Spivak insists that, “Psychoanalytic formalism of the subject, *with an informed exchange of cultural currency*, can be used to evaluate everyone” (Spivak 1994: 52; my italics) and that as therapy its usefulness is confirmed. Briefly, psychoanalysis challenges humanist accounts of unified, integrated, and autonomous individuals. It elucidates what remains unexplained in humanism – motivations, behaviours and experiences which elude rational justification: “What it aims at and achieves is nothing other than the uncovering of what is unconscious in mental life” (Freud 1991: 437). It questions the neat separations of reason and emotion, and the idea that rational thought is the only or best source of knowledge, or is trustworthy, for we may rationalise profoundly irrational desires or fears. Instead of being dismissed as nonsense, the imaginary or fantasy life receives due attention because it constitutes, for the individual, “a reality of a sort” (p. 415) which impinges on her life and even body.

Furthermore, psychoanalysis has enabled us to reclaim the body from biology in order to see it as a psychosocial product capable of transformations in meaning and functioning (cf Grosz 1992a: 39). The theory complicates notions of how we are socialised and attempts to explain gender relations. It accounts for the ways in which conscious and unconscious parts of the self are informed by culture, by relationships with significant others, and how relations of domination become woven into the fabric of the self. It provides a model from which we may extrapolate to reconceptualise the Manichean opposition of colonised/coloniser, to conceive of a split subjectivity, in which “‘self’ and ‘other’ are intertwined through signification” (Chow 1992: 363). As used in literary theory, it holds that subjective (private) meaning is mediated for both readers and authors by the effects of an (intersubjective) Other – the public language. It demonstrates that no one can escape the influence of the unconscious and provides a coherent account for what many readers may intuit, namely, that neither reader/critic nor author can understand all that moves them because texts evoke and encode repressed material. Lacan’s point that there is no metalanguage reminds us that there is no language in which

interpretation can itself escape the effects of the unconscious. In short, psychoanalysis explains not only differences *between* subjects within a Western culture, but also differences *within* subjects.

But one of the dangers of its adoption by literary studies, and perhaps the main reason why it has remained relatively unchallenged, concerns the high degree of superficiality of the encounter with the work. Such appropriations tend to distort important elements of psychoanalytic theory. For the purposes of literary theory, psychoanalysis (usually Freudian and Lacanian) is blunted and selectively harvested because it makes up just one strand – albeit an important one – of the many which inform poststructuralism and its offspring: postcolonial, gender and media/cultural studies. (The usual disciplinary mix comprises Saussurean linguistics, structuralist anthropology, semiotics, Marxism (customarily Althusserian), Derridean deconstruction and feminism). To achieve a synthesis, one has to downplay or ignore the problems and inconsistencies *within* each, but also the contradictions *between* these models. James Donald argues that instead of a melding of psychoanalytic theory and cultural studies, there should rather be a “dialogue in which, although the two discourses remain distinct ... the questions untranslatably specific to each can provoke new thinking and insights in the other” (Donald 1991: 3). Perhaps, but students can only be expected to become conversant with so much. Moreover, disciplinary cross-hybridisation is inevitable at this juncture, and even if it were not, disciplinary boundaries are, after all, constructs serving specific ends which are not always the most laudable or justifiable. Nevertheless, the “Polyfilla model” (Donald 1991: 4) can be particularly problematic if it entails loss of critical appraisal of what it is that we are borrowing.

This tendency to allow a healthy critical scepticism to lapse on occasion results, in much contemporary theory, in an embroidering on the flaws of the foundational discourses. For instance, Freud and (more justifiably) Lacan have both been criticised for explaining the evolutionary development of the mind without taking into account the body and its sensory apparatus. Freud admitted as much when he identified the theoretical structure of psychoanalysis as a “superstructure, which will one day have to be set upon its organic foundation” (Freud 1991: 436). Much contemporary literary theory replicates this blind spot by theorising the body as nothing more than yet another sign.

Another problem with the absorption of (selected strands of) psychoanalysis into literary theory is the proclivity to treat it as though it were a fixed body of knowledge, not a practice, even though therapeutic analysis is the primary testing ground for all psychoanalytic theory. And in the process of disregarding the crucial relevance of analysis to psychoanalytic theory, literary theory also neglects the inherent circularity in the relationship between psychoanalytic theory and practice. For instance, Freud’s claim that he was in possession of *the only* investigative instrument through which the unconscious could be

explored, meant that he placed himself in a position where he could himself supply evidence to substantiate practically any postulates he chose to formulate (Webster 1996: 252). Moreover, if, in the course of therapy, a symptom did not remit, then Freud could, in terms of his theory of the talking cure, interpret this as the patient's failure to disclose experiences with sufficient honesty. The result, whether intended or not, was to devolve therapeutic responsibility, since the inability to effect a cure need not be interpreted as evidence of the failure of either the therapy or the theory. Lacanian analysis generally circumvents all of this by claiming that it is not seeking a cure at all; anyway, Lacan kept theory and therapeutic practice independent of each other (he did not substantiate theoretical claims with case studies, as did Freud).

Psychoanalysis also avoids the possibility of refutation because almost anything could be construed as the (conscious or unconscious) cause of psychic stress. Furthermore, at crucial points, psychoanalytic theory emerges out of the practice of analysis by design, not by sheer force of chance discovery. By Freud's own admission, "he approached his patients not with an open mind but with a firm preconception as to the kind of memory he was seeking" (Webster 1996: 203). Of course, it might reasonably be argued that a confirmatory bias is a feature of most (but probably all) discursive systems; nevertheless, as scholars and academics it is still our responsibility to examine the forms and functions of the confirmatory bias in discourses which inform our thinking.

Psychoanalysts argue that the unconscious cannot be plumbed in analysis; this is patently as true of Freud's own self-analysis (which was demonstrably informed by his speculative theories)<sup>3</sup> as it is of his intellectual descendants'. But the inevitable "irreducible residue of each analysis" is not simply evidence of the power of the unconscious, for it is, John Forrester argues, "passed on through the genealogy of analysts, manifesting itself in *those symptoms that now masquerade as theory*" (Forrester 1991: 180; my italics). Thus if we are all under the sway of unconscious impulses as psychoanalysis contends, then clearly psychoanalytic theory itself is imbued by the unconscious inducements of its founders and practitioners.

Literary theory tends to obscure the particular social and historical conditions which gave rise to Freud's and Lacan's work. This suppression of history is true of the way that literary theory in general is taught. Ironically, this is even true of Marxist theory, which argues for historicisation; Marxism itself is usually unmoored from the historical circumstances of its genesis and subsequent development.

Freud's theories responded to conditions (social, political, medical, psychiatric and intellectual) in late Victorian and early modern Europe (he was born in 1856 and died in 1939). And Roudinesco gives a detailed account of how Lacan's formulations reacted to intellectual fashions in France from the 1930s

up until his death in 1981; these include Surrealism, Hegelian philosophy, structuralist linguistics and anthropology, and feminism. Moreover, few are aware that both Freud and Lacan cast themselves in the role of messiah.<sup>4</sup> According to Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, Lacan deliberately maintained a silence about his personal history so that he could fabricate a personage, “that of the Analyst with a capital A, always Other, always elsewhere Lacan, whose exhibitionism was immense ... exhibited nothing after all but his own histrionics – that is, his own absence of self” (Borch-Jacobsen 1991: 2-3).

If psychoanalysis was indeed born out of Freud’s and Lacan’s ambition, this does not devalue the resultant body of work. Personal motivations of a theorist are irrelevant to the validity or otherwise of the theory. In a review of Webster’s book, Tim Kendall argues that Webster undermines his own critique of the unconscious and the idea of repression by invoking apparently psychoanalytic concepts of self-deception and projection to declare that Freud was motivated by desires of which he was apparently unaware. Of concern, however, is the likelihood that the suppression of such information in the teaching of theory may lead to the creation of intellectual icons – and how can this be congruent with the aims of a postcolonial education?

The adoption of a tendentious, seemingly complete, unified, dehistoricised version of psychoanalysis means that errors of judgement and reversals are overlooked.<sup>5</sup> Although Freud can hardly be held accountable for the lapses of nineteenth-century medicine (and the jury is still out on whether such errors nullify the entire theory), Freud’s errors were not always inadvertent: apart from the cocaine affair (early in Freud’s career, he published a paper championing cocaine’s curative effects in the fight against morphine addiction even when he knew that the patient had not been cured, but had become addicted to cocaine as well), Freud apparently endorsed Breuer’s account of Anna O’s treatment when he knew Breuer’s claim to have cured Anna O was false. This was probably (as Freud later reported to Jung) because he “had come to the conclusion that Breuer’s particular lie hid a general truth and was therefore excusable” (Webster 1996: 132).<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, some poststructuralist theorists presumably justify the overlooking the inconsistencies and contradictions in psychoanalysis because psychoanalysis is similarly perceived to be generally valid or true.

All too rarely acknowledged, too, is the tension in some versions of post-structuralism between the postmodernist denial of master (the term is used advisedly) narratives and the promotion of a kind of mish-mashed psychoanalytic/Marxist/feminist/Foucauldian/Derridean theory of the subject which is held to be universally relevant. A similar tension between universalism and a distrust of such grand tributes to rationality exists in psychoanalysis itself. Jane Flax points to a paradox in Freud’s work: it culminates and defends major tendencies within Enlightenment thinking (especially its individualism,



empiricism, and rationalism) while simultaneously undermining epistemological and psychological aspects of Enlightenment thought (Flax 1990: 17).

It is this paradox that accounts for much of its appeal for literary theory: on the one hand, poststructuralism uses psychoanalysis to shore up its claim to have seen through rationality's delusions, while on the other, as theory it sets itself up as rationally defensible. However, in our teaching, as in our lives, "the belief that we have freed ourselves from irrational faiths is, historically, one of the most dangerous of all beliefs" (Webster 1996: 447).

The significance of the absorption of psychoanalytic theories of the subject into our thinking, of course, exceeds concerns about literary theory. In the 1990 special edition of *Psychology in Society* devoted to psychoanalysis in South Africa, the contributors and the editor examine a range of important issues, but they do not consider the cultural and historical specificities of psychoanalysis, nor do they question the relevance of such a theory to South Africans.<sup>7</sup> And Saul Dubow, in his Introduction to the 1996 edition of Wulf Sachs's *Black Hamlet* (first published 1937), notes that Sachs has two related objectives in *Black Hamlet*, these are "to show that the structure of the 'native mind' is identical with that of the whites and to demonstrate this in terms of the universal applicability of Freudian analysis" (Dubow 1996: 11).<sup>8</sup> Dubow questions the way in which the method is applied but not whether Freudian analysis bears universal truths.

The notion that psychoanalysis, as a science, somehow transcends its cultural and historical origins is perhaps only revealed in all of its absurdity when it is so baldly stated. In spite of some minor concessions to historical, economic, social and political particularities, psychoanalytic theories claim to explain the psychic development of all humans.

The arrogation of scientific status is not merely misguided, it "confirms the postmodernist claim that universalist concepts conceal acts of domination and that binary oppositions are inseparable from implicit or explicit hierarchies" (Flax 1990: 101). The most obvious and most damaging hierarchies implicit in psychoanalysis relate to gender and ethnicity: male is privileged over female, modern Western culture over others. The usual rebuttal that this is because the culture which it analyses is modern European patriarchy is indeed valid, but it is precisely *because* the theory is rooted in specific circumstances that it should be treated with circumspection. "Despite his own admission that his theories do not include and cannot account for many of the most important aspects of women's experience, Freud nevertheless continues to claim authorship of a radically new understanding of human rather than male psychology" (Flax 1990: 70). And this is customarily how it is treated as it is absorbed into poststructuralist theory and its heirs.

Many critics, as well as some supporters of psychoanalysis, have pointed to weaknesses in the theoretical edifice, its focus on the father and marginalisa-

tion of the role of the mother, and its antipathy to women's sexuality. There are many aspects of both Freudian and Lacanian accounts which suggest that the theorists' own fears of feminine autonomy and their desires for masculine supremacy are transmuted into theory.

Suppression of the preoedipal occurs in the work of Freud and Lacan.<sup>10</sup> Freud's ostensibly candid examination of sexuality is no less biased. His insistence that women can achieve full "genitality" only with the rejection of the supposedly "masculine" phase of clitoral sexuality does not, as numerous critics have shown, correspond to any real developmental process and is thus sustainable only because of psychoanalysis's strongly anti-empirical style. Flax (1990: 82) and other feminists have criticised Freud's theorisation of girls' inability to completely resolve their oedipal complex and of women's greater subjection to the body and its drives. Women are associated with unreason, feeling, and primary process. Dylan Evans concedes that for Freud, the castration complex was a universal phenomenon "which is rooted in a basic 'rejection of femininity'" (Evans 1996: 21).

The claim by supporters of psychoanalysis that the employment of the term "phallus" confutes charges of sexism has yet to be convincingly argued.<sup>11</sup> In the following passage Lacan's use of the metaphor of the phallus manifestly relies on the anatomical penis:

The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire.

It can be said that this signifier is chosen because it is the most tangible element in the real of sexual copulation, and also the most symbolic in the literal (typographical) sense of the term, since it is equivalent there to the (logical) copula. It might also be said that, by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation.

(Lacan 1977: 287-288)

As Flax observes, Lacan's notion of the power of the phallus as universal signifier depends for its explanatory power on the gender system as we know it, and on "the ineluctable equivalence of phallus and penis in ordinary language (Flax 1990: 104). Spivak hits the nail on the head: "no amount of penis-phallus finessing will allow us to escape the narrative" (Spivak 1994: 61).

For Lacan, the mother lacks the phallus because it is the "Name-of-the-Father" (i.e. culture, here specifically the incest taboo) which rends the mother-child dyad, and the mother is powerless against this. Lacan treats culture/-language/Law of the Father as universal structures and equivalents within which the phallus is the universal signifier, thus we cannot question what it is that determines the phallus's primacy. Anthropology and history teach us,

however, that such generalisations are dangerous.

Moreover, the association of women with the presymbolic in effect means that women are relegated to the omnipresent repressed which haunts both symbolic systems and the subject, but which is unspeakable and unknowable. Freud's question, what does woman want?, is addressed to men, not women, and has thus become "emblematic of woman's inability to determine her own meaning within patriarchal signification" (Bergner 1995: 78). Women – as physically differentiated from men and excluded from power structures – are thus necessarily the dark, silent, unknowable Other, not only for men. For Lacan, the "mysterious 'other sex' is always the woman, *for both men and women*" (Evans 1996: 179; my italics).

Moreover, "while psychoanalysis may have enabled women to understand how they internalise 'femininity' in a patriarchal society, it has not given them any clues as to how to liberate themselves from its oppressiveness, in that it does not suggest any forms of political struggle" (Wright 1991: xviii). Juliet Mitchell's oft-quoted counterclaim that psychoanalysis is not "a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society but an analysis *of* one" (Mitchell quoted in Young 1990: 150) begs the question: how, from within a psychoanalytical theoretical paradigm (especially a Lacanian one) is a woman to escape her presymbolic position and challenge masculine domination, if even the most inaccessible recesses of her psyche are informed by such systematic inequality?

Barbara Christian points out, also, that such a theory simply ignores cultures whose language was invented and controlled primarily by women. She cites the example of some Native American languages which use female pronouns when referring to non-gender-specific activity (Christian 1996: 154-155).

Psychoanalysis's account of gender is not adequate for every social formation and its focus on "the sexual and its thematics" (Jameson 1981: 64) reflects the priorities of late Victorian and early-modern Europe.<sup>12</sup> According to Fredric Jameson, in psychoanalysis "the preliminary isolation of sexual experience, which enables its constitutive features to carry a wide symbolic meaning" is possible only as a result of a process of "isolation, autonomization, specialization". The notion of desire as the essential dynamic of being of (transhistorical, transcultural) individual subjects depends, Jameson argues, "on the increasing abstraction of experience in modern society" (p. 65). In those cultures in which "sexuality remains as integrated into social life in general as, say, eating, its possibilities of symbolic extension are to that degree limited, and the sexual retains its status as a banal inner-worldly event and bodily function" (p. 64). Yet another position can be discerned in traditional Zulu culture, for example; here sexual desire may not emanate from the innermost core of the individual, but is probably caused by the shades or ancestors, who may be localised in the sexual organs and take a very active role in the sexual act (Berglund ([1979]1989: 115-116).

The culture which spawned psychoanalysis is profoundly sexist, and this is both explained and manifested in psychoanalytic theory. For Freud, women do not have the powerful superegos which men acquire, and they are “little capable” of the “instinctual sublimations” required by culture. Women, he declares, are the enemies of civilisation (Freud 1991: 293). But sexism and ethnocentrism are rarely separate issues; Freud’s use of the trope of woman as the “dark continent” (Doane quoted in Bergner 1995: 86) reminds us that imperialism and colonisation were at their zenith in the nineteenth century.

The inherence of gender and race becomes theorisable in terms of psychoanalytic theory, but the intersections of these as the negative side of the binary oppositions are also found *in* psychoanalysis. Students might be encouraged to read Paulin Hountondji’s “African Philosophy, Myth and Reality” (1983) and Kwasi Wiredu’s “How Not to Compare African Thought with Western Thought” (1998). In psychoanalytic discourses, as Gwen Bergner argues, racial difference and sexual difference emanate from a common construction of otherness and they intersect and interact in contextually variable ways that preclude separate or determinist description (p. 77). Sander Gilman “shows that anti-Semitism, like other racisms, locates racial difference in sexuality, in the body, in language” (Bergner 1995: 86). In Western culture the masculine acquires the values of mastery, rationality, power; it is aligned with culture and the control of nature, law-making, history- and knowledge-creation. These same “masculine” values are assigned to the colonisers’ culture; their binary opposites – the feminine and the colonised – are objects of both fear and desire.

Psychoanalysis has often been accused of being anthropologically naive. It relies, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, on a limited notion of the (nuclear) family which elides the specificities of the historical, economic, political and social context that informs any given domestic or kinship arrangement (cf Deleuze & Guattari 1984: 179-180 for their discussion on the relationship between ethnology and psychoanalysis; cf also Freccero 1992: 247-248). Henrietta L. Moore stresses that

concepts of the person and the acting, knowing subject vary enormously cross-culturally. For example, in many African societies, persons are not thought of as being radically distinct or separate from other persons, and in some cases they are believed to contain within them parts of other persons and of the natural world. Even so, this lack of separation does not affect the ability of such persons to achieve emotional maturity or to act as autonomous individuals. It is evidence of this kind that could be used to produce a radical critique of certain psychoanalytic theories ....

(Moore 1992: 7)

As Ruben Mowszowski observes, “Westerners like Karl Marx and Freud have had a funny way of claiming truths for all of humanity when they have never been outside Europe or stepped outside their own Western paradigm” (Mowszowski 1998: 20). However well-intentioned teachers of theories may be, the reliance on Eurocentric theories – to the exclusion of any other conceptual models – “reinforces the assumption that people in the third world just have not evolved to the extent that the west has” (Mohanty 1994: 214). Benita Parry accuses contemporary theories of either erasing the voice of the native or limiting native resistance “to the devices circumventing and interrogating colonial authority”. Moreover, “the notion of epistemic violence and the occluding of reverse discourses have obliterated the role of the native as historical subject and combatant, possessor of another knowledge and producer of alternative traditions” (Parry quoted in Loomba 1994: 307). The dialogue with psychoanalytic theory that I am advocating hopes to put our students and ourselves in a position from whence we can “recognise its irreversible influence, whilst resisting its imperialising eye” (Hall 1994: 400).

Webster contends that the legacy of Puritan rationalism in modern Western capitalist societies is “a profound ideological hostility towards all those who proclaim the value of community, of co-operation or of intimate human relationships as opposed to economic individualism” (Webster 1996: 449). Something of Freud’s bias against those who feel a “primitive” bond with the world, as opposed to the more “mature” detached ego can, for instance, be detected in “Civilization and its Discontents” (Freud 1991a).<sup>13</sup>

In her Introduction to the recently republished *Black Hamlet* (Sachs’s account of his analysis of a Zimbabwean traditional healer and herbalist named John Chavafambira), Jacqueline Rose addresses some of the paradoxes of the importation of psychoanalysis into Africa. In Africa one finds “more collective, publicly shared forms of identity” (Rose in Sachs 1996: 41) than are found in the West; “a form of personhood bereft once outside its collectively or ancestrally sanctioned domain” (p. 41). African social structures differ markedly from those informing psychoanalysis. But despite acknowledgements of numerous limitations in the theory and practice, Rose insists on psychoanalysis’s translatability.<sup>14</sup> For instance, she points out that

the exchange between Sachs and Chavafambira takes place in the language of the colonizers ... if there is to be a rebirth of psychoanalysis in South Africa today, it will have to be in a form that, given the political legacy, can address the structural difficulties of language as much as the varieties of spoken tongue.

(Rose 1996: 45)

It seems that she is not referring to psychoanalysis *as a foreign discourse* with its own terminology and biases, its value-laden epistemological and ontological

leanings – all of which are embedded in a foreign idiom which devalues indigenous African cultures. The belief that Africans are psychically immature can, Rose contends, be traced back to Freud's essay "On Narcissism" in which he equates the mental life of primitives with the infantile unconscious. However, "[p]sychoanalysis itself can", she claims, "help us undo the ethnocentric components of its argument" (Rose 1996: 51).<sup>15</sup>

Thus although Rose is critical of Sachs's use of psychoanalysis and of the assertion of universal kinship, which "starts to look like a facet of colonialism, not *despite*, but *because of* itself" (Rose 1996: 62), she repeatedly, but surreptitiously, reasserts a primacy for psychoanalysis.<sup>16</sup> Her conclusion that it is three women – the wife and mother of John Chavafambira and a woman *ngoma* – who are "beyond the analytic pale ... [who] run rings around psychoanalysis, setting the limits of what it can do in Africa, making it impossible for psychoanalysis to have the last word" (pp. 63-64) is not substantiated. Furthermore, in the very next sentence (the concluding sentence) she cleverly grants psychoanalysis (figuratively and literally) the last word, while simultaneously denying that anything can ever have the last word: "That there can be no last word – not psychically, not politically – is, however, also the fundamental principle of psychoanalysis" (p. 17).

Rose's desire to see psychoanalysis transcend the cultural and historical (and thus psychic) disparities between Freudian Europe and indigenous southern Africa enables her to obscure the *role* of psychoanalysis in Africa. As Rosemary Hennesy and Rajeswari Mohan and others have acknowledged, the focus on interiority in psychoanalysis means that political and other exploitative systems remain unchallenged – a flaw even Sachs came to acknowledge in his work with Chavafambira.<sup>17</sup>

In recognising that psychoanalysis has subversive potential, we must concede that it feeds into and reinforces Western individualism and capitalist modes of wealth accumulation, and participates in imperialist knowledge-making structures.<sup>18</sup> Contemporary literary theory's reliance on psychoanalysis's theory of the subject thus implicitly subscribes to a value-laden notion of the history of the self (as outlined by Marcel Mauss) which generalises from the West to the rest of humankind: "the 'person' emerges gradually from primitive ideas of ancestral community, through legal definitions, through ethical and Christian notions, to the psychological person of the early modern period", whose being involves, for the first time in our history, a notion of interiority (quoted in Selden 1990: 59).

Anne McClintock argues that "[h]istorically voided categories such as 'the other', 'the signifier', 'the signified', 'the subject', 'the phallus', 'the post-colonial', while having academic clout and professional marketability, run the risk of telescoping crucial geo-political distinctions into invisibility" (McClintock 1994: 293). Although one must at all times insist on the mutability of all

cultures, on the porosity and obscurity of their contours, and must thus avoid making pronouncements about absolute differences, nevertheless one can – and must – acknowledge particularities. Thandabantu Nhlapo and Mary Maboreke (in Bazilli 1991) have written about the constitution of gender in black South African cultures, and although their analyses lack attention to differences between such cultures, they do open the issue of cultural specificity in familial and gender relations, and thus in the constitution of the subject.

A syllabus which contrasts models of truth<sup>19</sup> might involve the reading of key primary theory texts as well as a range of indigenous texts, in my case (with a majority of Zulu students) Zulu praise poetry. The auto/biographical texts would be a valuable extension of the theory reading since they explicitly seek to represent subjectivity, and thus enact the underlying theoretical paradigms. As Flax argues,

[t]o escape the homogeneity of the dominant discourse, we must juxtapose to it alternative modes that repudiate the truth claims and pretence of omniscience of the discourses that now watch over us. These alternative deconstructive discourses must necessarily pay attention to varieties of experience and value whatever they can find of the local and particular.

They cannot offer a viewpoint, a universal subject, a way to liberation, development, or happiness, or a truth that will set us free ....

(Flax 1990: 41-42)

Indigenous discourses are important not only because they are constitutive for many students, but also because they are implicated in colonial discourses which “mutilate, transform, appropriate [them] in their production of their hegemony” (Loomba 1994: 310). Elsewhere, I argue that the South African social formation comprises several relatively heterogeneous symbolic systems which serve as frames which lend shape to experience and to experiencing subjects (Coullie 1996: 131). Giving students the opportunity to examine contestatory but also mutually influential discursive formations, allows them to see how subject positions emerge not only within the frames but also between the frames.

This syllabus is presented as an illustration, not a prescription. Of course, it might involve some crucial learning for teachers of contemporary theory too since they may well be ignorant of local models. This form of teaching which no longer clings to the position of teacher as expert, a programme of negotiated learning which crosses the divide between the rows of seats and the space behind the podium, is not only pedagogically sound, but politically and ethically defensible too.

But what is praise poetry and how could it be used to question other models of self? The tradition of praise poetry (*izibongo*) spans many indigenous

languages and ethnic groups in South Africa. These poems vary greatly in form and function, from the serious, long and complex poems of chiefs and people of prominence to the short *izihasho* of ordinary men and women which may be reproachful and contain scatological and sexually explicit references; a range of these, in print and as performance texts (say, on video), should be considered.<sup>20</sup>

Exploring a variety of *izibongo* which span many decades and traverse social rank means the preclusion of the sentimental notion of a timeless and fetishised indigenous tradition. And the notion of tradition should itself be subjected to critical scrutiny. Jeanne de Koker's analysis of what is known as African customary law shows this "tradition" to be, in fact, a creation of colonialism. The flexible system of customary law as a set of traditional practices is frozen and distorted when it is codified. De Koker argues persuasively that it is our interpretative methods and objectives which create the possibilities for the detection of "traditions". For one thing, traditions are rarely the untainted products of specific cultures: Vilakazi comments upon the complex intersections of what he refers to as pagan Zulu practices and beliefs and those of Christianised, Westernised Zulus even in the 1950s and 1960s. Looking even further back in time, Appadurai notes that "the complex and overlapping set of Euro-colonial worlds [throughout the non-European world, accelerating in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries] set the basis for a permanent traffic in ideas of peoplehood and selfhood, which created the imagined communities of recent nationalisms throughout the world" (Appadurai 1994: 325). Hybridisation featured in even precolonial African societies (usually conceived of as timeless, unified and stable). Appiah agrees with Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch that "the complexities of war and trade, dominance and clientage, migration and diplomacy" meant that such indigenous societies rarely enjoyed either stability or equilibrium (Appiah 1992: 125-126).

Analysis would show that in Zulu praise poetry the subject's identity is generally defined by significant others just as much as by the enunciating self. This is evidenced in a multi-faceted blurring of distinction between the biographical and the autobiographical. Thus although praises of important people composed by professional praisers (*izimbongi*) are usually biographical, they may include lines that the subject of the poem has composed about her or himself, as well as those which members of the community associate with the person. Praises of ordinary people may also be auto/biographical in that lines composed by the subject may be indistinguishable from those composed by others about her or him and bits of other people's poems may be incorporated. Moreover, pronoun shifts (first, second and third person are not uncommon within one poem) smudge authorship since neither narration nor focalisation are clearly located in a specific individual's perceptions. All of these features suggest that self-knowledge is not privileged and points to a



theorisation of self as exceeding the bounds of the individuals' psyche or history.

Dialogism is an important feature of *izibongo*: "They can themselves be the site of dialogue and conflict, as they contain multiple voices and multiple memories. If a single unifying voice is imposed, it tends to sit uneasily with these other contending presences" (Gunner 1984: 26). Without a specified point of view, the praise poem often explores a nonindividualised perceptual process, a nonsubjectivised, nonpsychologised world which nevertheless emphasises the particularity of the subject. Ordinarily, *izibongo* do not explore the subject's (or performer's) private perspective; we are not party to the subject of the poem's psychical processes or motivations. In psychoanalysis, on the other hand, the narratives which the analysand communicates serve as sole source of truth about the individual's psyche. So that although psychoanalysis *theorises* the self as exceeding the individual and implicating cultural taboos and the collective unconscious, in *therapy* it is nevertheless the enunciating analysand who is the source of his/her own truth (which the analyst may help to decipher).

In praise poetry the use of others' praises in another person's poem serves to reinforce a nonlinear sense of history in which the past (even the distant past, before the subject was born) may be regenerated through ritual. Thus, an individual's praises may also include references to the ancestors, composed by the autobiographical subject or borrowed from elsewhere, which serve to situate the subject within kinship lineages (cf Gunner 1994: 62-63; Turner 1995: 5; Opland 1983: 127-131; Vilakazi 1965: ix; Berglund 1989: 291-292). For non-Westernised Zulus, *izibongo* are both sacred and profane, the naming of a person identifying his or her quintessential being as well as signifying the subjects' inseparability from the community (both living and dead but not gone). The subject of the praise poem is constituted in much more fractured and looser ways, but in ways which implicate spiritual presences, whereas psychoanalysis, as we have seen, rejects any spiritual aspect to the subject.

And what could students learn from this comparison about theories of self? In psychoanalysis, the narrativised self is usually the effect to be explained by the cumulative causes of the story, and story events are related in terms of comparability or causality. This emphasis on causality and on secular time is not a feature of praise poetry. The subject of the poem is situated in an almost unpunctuated stream of time, from the past of the ancestors (who are still very much a part of the community), to the future generations who may invoke the subject through the performance of the praises.

Because the text is not commodified but is performed (by the subject of the poem or someone else), the praises may vary slightly in response to specific performance contexts (cf Vail & White 1991: 58; Turner 1995: 72-73). Moreover, the fact that the poems are performed for an audience – not printed for

private consumption – means that they serve to cement community ties, for there is often audience participation in the performance. (Contrast this with the intensely private therapeutic situation in psychoanalysis.)

One might invite students to consider, too, the role of confession: the “talking cure” depends on confession of the very most intimate and emotionally charged aspects of self. “Just as the ideal of Christianity is one of interminable confession, so the ideal of psychoanalysis is, to use Freud’s own words, one of ‘interminable analysis’” (Webster 1996: 352). On the other hand, although what might be considered to be intimate details of the subject may be recounted in a praise poem, this information serves to identify, to recognise the distinctiveness of, the individual, not to effect some sort of emotional cleansing. Instead of an economy of personal revelation, oral forms rely on communalism, on shared knowledge and ritual, on conformity and concord. Instead of a developmental depiction of character, of a self split between the private interiorised “real” and the public persona (the conscious self governed by ego and superego), the self in oral poetry is addressed as a stable, knowable member of a community.

The differences may be further clarified if one broadens the inquiry to include consideration of the role of confession in traditional Zulu societies. Here, although confession is also important, especially in conjunction with the help of the diviner (or traditional healer), in such situations the diviner – who is seeking the origin and cause of a specific misfortune, such as drought, quarrels, unexplained illness, untimely deaths – is active, and the confessing person merely confirms the diviner’s revelations. Moreover, as Berglund shows, often the person confessing has to be persuaded (sometimes violently) of her or his guilt, and it is the diviner who has the final word (Berglund 1989: 312-320). There are two relevant issues here: the nature of the trouble which necessitates confession is not confined to what in the West would generally be considered the human realm, and envy and grudges can be just as harmful to another person or even the entire community as actual deeds. The individual is thus not a unit sealed off from the natural or spiritual world. And second, the aim is to root out evil for, “[i]f there is trouble there must be a cause” (Berglund 1989: 318). The goal is thus usually less to help the person confessing than to solve a problem affecting the community.

Moreover, confession in psychoanalytic therapy (indeed, the meaning of selfhood in general in psychoanalytic theory) relates primarily to the sexual which is associated with secrecy, guilt, trauma, and the intensely private; in Zulu praise poetry we find that sexuality is not invested with the same primacy.

The various praise poems which will form part of the course material thus exhibit degrees of affinity to an abstracted generic tradition, but also a range of responses to that tradition. In some recent praise poems, for instance, there

is evidence of a shift towards Western individualism manifested in the printing of poems, in greater clarity of narrator's/focaliser's position (both of which contribute to a Western-type definition of the author's role) and in less dense imagery, allowing for ease of interpretation by an anonymous readership. Students may discover that ours is a world of porous boundaries:

and thus the search for steady points of reference ... can be very difficult [if not impossible]. It is in this atmosphere that the invention of tradition (and of ethnicity, kinship and other identity markers) can become slippery as group pasts become increasingly parts of museums, exhibits and collections, both in national and transnational spectacles, culture becomes less what Bourdieu would have called a habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena for conscious choice, justification and representation.

(Appadurai 1994: 335)

The examination of praise poetry's transformations over time refuses to homogenise or simplify what is obviously both varied and complex and will conduce investigation into the differences in the constitution of the subject which inform diverse texts. Students (of whatever ethnic or linguistic background) may be encouraged to ask what theories inform such practices, and how these compare with humanist, psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theories of the subject.

The apposition of contrasting self-representational and theoretical texts may highlight significant differences. Novel negotiations between these divergent paradigms have occurred (cf Kuzwayo). For a fuller discussion of the distinctions between narrative autobiography and praise poetry, and of the political and economic implications of the recent shifts in *izibongo*, see Coullie (1999). The alienation of the individual in capitalist societies (with the attendant consumerism, privatism, selfishness, personal ambition, psychological isolation, restlessness) is both the motivation for and the subject of psychoanalysis. Vilakazi argues that Westernised value systems are "diametrically opposed to those of the traditional Zulu world" (1965: 123) which require a "high degree of face-to-face relationships", hospitality, and continuity from generation to generation (this includes the living and the dead) (Vilakazi 1965: 136). The West is convinced that the modern, technologically advanced world, governed by strict measurement of chronological time, is superior to one in which the rhythms of the earth are significant, and where time is cyclical and past, present and future blend into one another symbiotically. It is assured that rationality can compartmentalise experience. Thus psychoanalysis is conducted in specially designated places by specialists (as is characteristic of Western cultures) who charge fees which are beyond the means of most for each session. Moreover, if they are Freudians and Lacanians, they strictly regulate

the time devoted to therapeutic sessions (though, because the process is likely to be prolonged, it excludes those who have minimal free time). In Zulu culture, and this is manifested in *izibongo* and in other practices, the community is intimately involved at many levels. One would not perform one's praises alone, or in a room with only one other person. And the performance of the praises is addressed to the community which includes the living and the shades (who are interdependent in a very real sense). Conversely, psychoanalysis involves one person (what James Hillman, a Jungian psychoanalyst, calls a "Christianized personalized skin-bounded soul", 1994: 39) communicating with one auditor. He argues further that analysis's omission of the political indicates a repression, a defence mechanism, as does the insulation of the analysand behind thick barriers which exclude the patients' lovers, spouses, children, colleagues, friends and which prevent analysts from engaging in patients' lives in any way. Only the patient's psyche is probed "within the confines of [therapy's] territory as prurient mystics of the interior" (Hillman 1994: 30). Theory and practice attest, Hillman argues, to the importance given to the conception of the person which is a reflection of the particular psychological – and, I might add, economic and political – climate of nineteenth-century Europe, which also saw the rise of colonialism, industrialism, capitalism, consumerism and materialism. At this point one might ask why psychoanalytic theories have gained such authority. Webster contends that secular theories of human nature (such as psychoanalysis, Marxism, structural anthropology, existentialism and functionalism) were necessary because of the gap left by religion in the nineteenth century in the West (Webster 1996: 6). Freud refers to religion as "a delusional remoulding of reality" (1991a: 269); he and Lacan conceive of religion as emerging out of human needs for explanations which are independent of demonstrable proof and as barriers to cultural progress. (Here Jungians diverge in that they see the rejection of religion not simply as superstition but as neurosis as symptomatic of the pride of materialism (Webster 1996: 383).) However, much of psychoanalysis's success is due to its use of reasons as one finds in religions – in a profoundly speculative manner (however plausible this may seem). Freud's and Lacan's theories are both beyond logical explanation: Freud complained that his contemporaries disputed "the truths of psychoanalysis with logical and factual arguments" which "arise from emotional sources" and, as Borch-Jacobsen points out,

Lacan was the last to believe in his fictions.....Outlined behind the "little letters" that Lacan was tracing on the blackboard was nothing less than a new "scientific

myth”, more “up-to-date” than Freud’s, and a sort of modern religion of the Symbolic, intended to make up for religion’s bankruptcy in our desacralized societies.

(Borch-Jacobson 1991: 163)

And therapy is strictly secular: the spiritual is regarded as symptomatic of delusion.

Importantly, the subject’s discourse in psychoanalysis and in printed narrative autobiography marks – in different ways – the insertion of private life into the money economy. This is symptomatic of modernity which has, Appiah argues, “turned every element of the real into a sign, and the sign reads ‘for sale’” (Appiah 1992: 145).

Distinctions between subjugated indigenous discourses and dominant discourses are considerable; there are, however, some startling similarities. Consider, for instance, the questions of faith and myth. Whereas contemporary literary theories dismiss various theories of self which are deemed to be mystical, primitive, and/or religious, psychoanalysis (which is validated) also, as I have argued, relies on a degree of faith and myth. Furthermore, in both psychoanalytic theory (especially Lacanian) and traditional Zulu thought, empiricism and positivism are regarded with some scepticism, as is consciousness as sole arbiter in experience and in the determination of the real.

Dreams are meaningful in both interpretational systems. Where Freud asserts that “dreams in general have a sense – and that everything that occurs to the mind is determined” (Freud 1991: 176), Berglund observes that “[t]he important role played by dreams in Zulu thought-patterns cannot be overstressed” ([1979]1989: 97). Just as psychoanalysis allows for the voice of the Other in the speech and dreams of the subject, so, in Zulu culture, “[d]reams are a channel of communication between survivors and the shades” (Berglund [1979]1989: 97-98). Also remarkable is the fact that the Zulu novice traditional healer must confess all dreams to her tutor, and that (as in psychoanalysis) failure to regain full health might be construed as a sign that she had withheld information (pp. 152-153). (I need to point out, however, that there is a crucial distinction: psychoanalysis conceives of dreams as primarily revelatory of the analysand and of the cultural milieu – they are “not vehicle[s] for communication” (Freud 1991b: 270); Zulu thought, however, sees dreams as usually revelatory of *truths which are external to the dreamer*: “In dreams”, Berglund records, “the shades become very real, intimate and concrete” ([1979]1989: 98). Furthermore, as Deleuze and Guattari point out so succinctly, “[p]sychoanalysis does treat myth and tragedy, but it treats them *as* the dreams and the fantasies of private man, *Homo familia* – and in fact dream and fantasy are to myth and tragedy as private property is to public property” (Deleuze & Guattari 1984: 304). Another similarity may be located in the fact that

according to them little occurs by chance. (However, they differ in their determinism.)<sup>21</sup> Also, both Zulu traditional thought and psychoanalysis are characterised by a suspicion of the feminine. Although the Zulu claim that women are not necessarily regarded as inferior to men, the fact that the left side (of the body, of the hut) is associated with the feminine, darkness, evil and the shades, while the right side is associated with the masculine, with light, goodness and strength suggests otherwise (Berglund [1979]1989: 363-378). Also, most shades are male, while most witches are female (p. 277).

Is this a comparison of apples and pears? Students would themselves have to consider this, since orality and literacy make different demands and enable different practices. Students might be encouraged to read Paulin Hountondji's "African Philosophy, Myth and Reality" (1983) and Kwasi Wiredu's "How Not to Compare African Thought with Western Thought" (1998). Inasmuch as literacy requires consistency and written claims are vulnerable to refutation, orality is much more accommodating, and more iterative, because it "makes it hard to discover discrepancies" (Appiah 1992: 130). So although literacy allows greater independence of thought, in literate cultures "the demands imposed by the distant, unknown reader require more universality, more abstraction" (p. 132) than is necessary in much more figurative oral knowledges. Indeed, psychoanalytic theory exemplifies these tendencies to abstraction and universalising. The teaching programme submitted here would invite interrogation of the Western preference for abstraction, for the sequestration (and institutionalisation and hierarchisation) of interpretative approaches – philosophical/intellectual from practical/creative and spiritual/mythical.<sup>22</sup> But perhaps we would also need to ask whether praise poems are simply acts of theorising which are "in narrative forms", in the play of language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our [i.e. people of colour] liking" (Christian 1996: 149).

Although statistics are not available, communalism apparently still has some currency even in the urban areas in South Africa. According to a newspaper report, most black South Africans still believe in the reality of the ancestral world (cf Mowszowski 1998: 20; Ashforth 2000; Arden 1996; Holland 2001). Whether this applies to a diverse population of black South African university students or not is immaterial: regardless of their racial or ethnic affiliations, or their cultural biases, students will be able to explore the implications of these diverse conceptions of self. The syllabus involves the dissolution of the imperialist "division between studying subject and (archeological) object" (Jolly 1996: 374) and of Africa and the West. Furthermore – and this is very important – those who do identify with African traditions, or whose parents, relatives and friends do, will find validation in the fact that such thought-systems are held to be worthy of inclusion in university syllabi as potentially radical sources of theoretical insight.

As we have seen, one of the compelling criticisms commonly levelled against psychoanalysis is its perceived failure to address the political; part of what I am arguing, though, is that in spite of the avoidance of direct engagement with political issues, the psychoanalytical project is shot through with politics. I am referring, here, to politics in the broader sense – as contention between competing interest groups in social systems; but it is worth adding that psychoanalytic movements, international and national, have been – and continue to be – fraught with factious internal politics. Bitter dissension and ruptures have characterised the psychoanalytic movement from the outset (there were divisions between Freud and Breuer, Rank, Jung and Adler). The International Psychoanalytic Association's relations with member and nonmember organisations have often been discordant, as have developments in Russia, in France (see Roudinesco (1990)), and in America.<sup>23</sup> But to return to the broader political implications of psychoanalytic theory in post-structuralist theory, we might heed McClintock's call for "a *proliferation* of historically nuanced theories and strategies ... which may enable us to engage more effectively in the politics of affiliation, and the currently calamitous dispensations of power (McClintock 1994: 303).

Many students may feel that the literary theory is couched "in a language which no man or woman speaks ... whose secret purpose is not to communicate, but to intimidate and impress" (Webster 1996: 493),<sup>24</sup> and whose occlusion of African philosophies bespeaks both arrogance and insensitivity. As teachers of theory, we need to be aware that while it is easy to enmesh ourselves in "cleverness" it is nevertheless our responsibility to avoid making what Adorno and Horkheimer refer to as "the game" into "a serious and responsible institution which requires the application of all available strength to ensure that there is no proper conversation and at the same time no silence" (Adorno & Horkheimer 1979: 210).

## Notes

1. It is important to add, however, that not all so-called poststructuralist theorists have followed this trend: Foucault and Derrida are the most prominent of the poststructuralist theorists who argue (from divergent positions) that psychoanalysis is embedded in its own historical and cultural circumstances and that its truth-claims are no more or less valid than similar claims made by other discourses. Nevertheless, the employment of psychoanalytic concepts can be detected – in varying measure – in most contemporary theory, even that which might be expected to be hostile to psychoanalysis, such as feminist, Marxist, and postcolonial theories.
2. There is an unavoidable truncation of the theories from which poststructuralism

and its later formulations borrow. For instance, whereas Freud and Lacan tend to be treated as though their theories were without internal inconsistencies and contradictions, other psychoanalytic sects or schools, such as those initiated by Jung and Winnicott, are simply not mentioned, perhaps largely because these fissures within the psychoanalytic edifice are simply too untidy and too complex for poststructuralism.

3. Charles Brenner counters this with the argument that self-observation was only significant in the development of the theory at the start of Freud's career in psychoanalysis, and insists that its principal role then was to convince him of the similarity between many aspects of the mental functioning of neurotics and healthy individuals.
4. Webster (1996: 9) argues that many followers accepted this self-characterisation because unconditional acceptance of psychoanalysis required them to relinquish some of "the most sacred principles of rationalism" (1996: 9-10), and in order to do this, they needed "nothing less than the authority of a messiah" (p. 10).  
Freud's suppression of the cocaine affair early in his career might be taken as emblematic of the lengths he was prepared to go to in order to secure prestige for himself. Webster gives a fascinating account of this episode.
5. For instance, Freud took ideas from Charcot, Breuer and Fliess which are now known to have been mistaken: few would dispute that the diminution in cases of hysteria in our time is due to the fact that more sophisticated diagnostic technologies have proven that "hysteria" was, in Freud's time, an inaccurate catch-all "illness" (Webster 1996: 72). Freud himself learnt that a patient whom he had diagnosed as hysteric had actually suffered from sarcoma as the patient subsequently died (Webster 1996: 142-3). For a current definition of hysteria, see Webster 1996: 139. Moreover, many of Freud's doctrines about the nature of the mind were drawn from contemporary neurology, and have been contradicted by the findings of modern neurology: the term "neurasthenia" was used as catch-all diagnosis for a range of ailments for which adequate diagnostic tests had not been developed, such as glandular fever, TB, lead poisoning, some cardiac conditions, tinnitus, Addison's disease, and various endocrinal disorders. Furthermore, Freud's theory of infantile sexual development relied on what is now discredited biogenetic theory (Webster 1996: 236).  
Apropos his ability to extrapolate an entire theory from supposition, it would seem that Freud did not actually recall seeing his mother naked nor his being sexually aroused. "He had remembered only a long train journey from whose duration he *deduced* that he might have seen his mother undressing" (Webster 1996: 254) and that this *might* have provoked sexual arousal.
6. Anna O was the first to establish the "talking cure" and was thus the progenitor for psychoanalysis. Not only had her symptoms not entirely disappeared, as both Freud and Breuer were well aware, but she was severely addicted to morphine



which Breuer had prescribed (Webster 1996: 112).

Freud also failed with Elizabeth von R (Webster 1996: 159-167) and Frau Emmy. The fact that he openly communicated the latter failure while continuing to claim that the general method was successful suggests, Webster argues, “that ... his faith in the correctness of his therapeutic theory was so huge, and so necessary to the sense he had of his own identity, that he was unable to weigh the evidence for and against his theory with any objectivity” (p. 149).

7. 1990 was a time of profound political uncertainty for South Africa. The editor attributes the poor number of responses to the call for papers to this.
8. Breuer – in response to Freud’s early seduction theory which explained all cases of “hysteria” in terms of sexual causes – argued that Freud’s “psychical need” to construct “absolute and exclusive formulations” led to “excessive generalisation” (Webster 1996: 196). Although the seduction theory was later rejected, the tendency to universalise and generalise is manifest throughout Freud’s work, and indeed, throughout psychoanalytic theory.
9. Although Freud argues that a science comprises a large proportion of assertions reliant upon probability, along with “few apodeictic propositions in its catechism” (Freud 1991: 78), the notion of psychoanalysis as a science is nevertheless problematic since it is not rigorously qualified by admissions that its construction emerges not out of “objective” or rational observation, but is itself under the sway of the unconscious and the discursive/symbolic systems within which such comprehension is embedded. Lacan concedes in *Seminar 1* that Freud’s science is not marked by the style of other sciences: “his domain is the truth of the subject ... a dimension specific to psychoanalysis and whose originality has to be detached from the very notion of reality” (Lacan quoted in Felman 1987: 58), but he nevertheless conceptualises psychoanalysis as the science of the unconscious, from which he deduces a topology intended to account for the constitution of the generic subject.

Whereas some literary theorists and others defend psychoanalysis by claiming that it is not a science but rather a kind of metaphorical model, such claims can only be made by reinventing psychoanalysis, for both Freud and Lacan insisted that it was a science. Charles Brenner reasons that psychoanalysis was not devised in order to prove anything and that the denial of scientific status to psychoanalysis usually hinges upon a narrow view of science as experimental rather than observational.

10. Flax explains:

Freud’s reversal of the actual power relation between the mother and small child serves as a defence against the acknowledgement of male powerlessness vis-à-vis the mother.

Conceptualizing the woman/mother as “castrated” and in need of a son in order to acquire the longed-for penis renders the mother dependent on her

*son* for psychological fulfilment In the oedipal struggle father and son become allies. The son's identification with the father becomes part of his fortification against the return of the repressed mother world. By privileging the oedipal phase and denying the power of the first object relation, Freud participates in and rationalizes an act of repression both typical of and necessary to the replication of patriarchal culture.

(Flax 1990: 79-81)

11. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan (1998: 351) and Borch-Jacobsen (1991: 212) warn against simplistic accusations of sexism in Lacanian theory but the arguments are not persuasive. Borch-Jacobsen refers to the predominance of the visual functions in human sexuality and in symbolisation; as only the phallus is capable of being "publicly exhibited and therefore communicated and symbolized ... it is the only *theorizable* sexual organ" (p. 217). Clearly, though, the relation between the phallus and the penis is not simply metaphorical but is socially and politically motivated.

Elizabeth Grosz continues:

The phallus cannot be regarded simply as a neutral term which positions both sexes within the extra-familial social field, for the effects of such positioning are very different, and the narcissistic "wound" to the woman's body depicted by the castration fantasy is the unspoken cost of men's positions of social and sexual primacy.

(Grosz 1992: 322)

12. Bernard X. Bovasso, in a defence of Freud, (almost) admits that Freud's assignment of psychic energy to the sexual was too narrow, and that this may be attributed either to the sexual dislocations of his time or in himself.
13. For Lacan, the Freudian discovery of the Oedipus complex is linked to the "social decline" of "traditional patriarchy" and to the "desacralization" of modern societies (Borch-Jacobsen 1991: 40). "Whatever its future may be, this decline constitutes a psychological crisis. Perhaps the advent of psychoanalysis itself should be attributed to this crisis?" (Lacan quoted by Borch-Jacobsen 1991: 40). Precisely: psychoanalysis (like other knowledge systems) emerges in response to particular historic and cultural needs.
14. For instance, Freud's theorisation of the oedipus is based on a foreign social structure. Nevertheless, she finds it valid because in some African societies, "the main, public and permanent issue of life is explicitly defined in terms of the great oedipal themes: fecundity, ancestors, phallic omnipotence and the death of the father as progenitor of the law" (Ortigues quoted in Rose 1996: 41). Also, although she concedes that "there is no analytic intervention without history and desire", and that while the differences between African societies and Freud's turn-of-the-century Europe impose limitations on "the possibility of therapeutic intervention", she still concludes that psychoanalysis can help "the patient toward

a benign reintegration of her or his symbolic legacy” (p. 41). Throughout, she finds in favour of psychoanalysis.

15. Projection of “unwanted parts of ourselves in others” (p. 52) is what is behind psychoanalysis’s, and specifically Freud’s, repression of “the oceanic feeling of oneness with the world” (p. 53), telepathy, and of projective identification itself – all of which are deemed in psychoanalytic theory as characteristic of the primitive. Freud’s prejudice against belief systems such as those which characterise traditional African lifestyles is evident in that he “regarded monotheistic forms of religion as the sign of a highly developed state of civilisation” (Evans 1996: 163).

Like woman, non-Western man becomes the excluded component of the theory that is trying to account for him. He is there to mark the limit of psychoanalytic insight (his exclusion is what allows psychoanalysis to keep its own boundaries in place) .... How can the Western observer recognize the presence of projection unless it is still familiar to him, something he still *knows*? (It is a basic premise of psychoanalysis that nothing is ever completely left behind.) In which case the theory immediately loses its founding distinction between primitive and civilized man (pp. 52-53).

The argument is persuasive; but in concluding that the differences that the theory accounts for are those that the theorists themselves desire to find, is Rose not perhaps erasing difference because what *she* desires is to rehabilitate psychoanalysis precisely by demonstrating that it can account for its own flaws? And does this not serve to obscure more fundamental questions regarding its status as “truth” rather than theory?

16. Although charges of universalism should indeed be tempered by the recognition that “all sciences strive for laws of generality” (Hayes 1990: 39), such an admission does not solve the problem.

Rose concedes:

Universalism is always historical – always this or that universalism, never universal in itself. This is no less true of psychoanalysis, whose claims to universality were aimed first at the delusion of normality (we are all perverts at heart); at the racist boundaries of science (psychoanalysis makes no racial distinctions); and at a world that was reluctant to let it through the doors.

(Rose 1996: 61)

But the tenor of her argument undermines this kind of acknowledgement, since at no point is psychoanalysis’s profession to universalism ever seriously questioned or recognised as being implicit in imperialist epistemologies. In her oft discernible desire to retain for psychoanalysis its status as universally relevant, Rose chooses to ignore this. For example, of Sachs’s ability to gain Chavafambira’s trust by inviting his hostility, Rose comments:

The difficulty, then, is not so much that the colonial situation makes analysis impossible; if anything, the problem works the other way around. *Black*

*Hamlet* demonstrates the ruse of psychoanalysis. Analysis will *not* be thwarted ....

(Rose 1996: 47-48)

17. Biodun Iginla contends that psychoanalysis's "logic of necessity" in which "everything passes through patricide, oedipus and castration" and "logic of contingency that cannot theorise historical, political or social specificity" contributes to the preclusion of political intervention. This is compounded in Lacan by his theorisation of the supposedly universal structure of language in which all signifying practices are confined "to a monolithic quasi-divine Symbolic order" (Iginla 1992: 32-33) which, Flax agrees, renders the identification of "historically variable and changeable aspects of relations of domination" almost impossible (Flax 1990: 91). Hennesy and Mohan argue that recent theories of alterity deriving from Lacan's theoretical elaborations of subject constitution

have been unable to locate alterity in relation to exploitative relations of production [They have] consistently elaborated subjectivity in ahistorical terms because of their propensity to generalize and universalize accounts of subject formation from a configuration of psychosexual relations unique to Western bourgeois family arrangements. Furthermore, in spite of their gestures towards radical political practice, these theories are unable to escape a dualism that separates the oppressive effects of sexual difference from exploitative economic practices enabling and enabled by it. As differences get conjugated in terms of sexuality in Lacanian derivatives, attempts to take into account other modalities of alterity – such as differences brought about by class and race divisions – inevitably lead to a rearticulation of those differences in sexual terms.

(Hennesy & Mohan 1994: 467)

18. Fanon (particularly in *Black Skin* (1967)) goes some way to exploring the implications of race on the subject's psyche: the relation between colonised and coloniser is conceived of in oedipal terms, "portraying the native as an angry son who wishes to kill the father (the white man) and put himself in the father's place" (Chow 1992: 361) and, I might add, enjoy the father's women. Nevertheless, Fanon's work is couched in a blindness to his own and the colonising culture's misogyny. I cannot agree with Bergner's claim that Fanon's application of psychoanalysis to the colonial sphere entirely releases the theory from its European origins (Bergner 1995: 76).
19. For such "truths", like any truths delivered by language, are embodied in language, and what is the truth of language, Nietzsche once said, but "a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this

is what they are” (Nietzsche quoted by Said 1978: 203).

20. See Turner (1995) and Opland, *Words* (1992). There are also praises of cattle, divining bones, and of more recent advent, of trade unions, football teams, and religious movements. The term “praise poetry” is a misnomer, for such poems do not confine themselves to praising of the subject. I have nevertheless used this term since it is the one that enjoys currency, and will thus be best understood.
21. See Berglund [1979]1989: 269-270. Thus, for example, the inherent (although differently configured) determinism in both Freud and Lacan is suppressed. James Strachey avers that “[b]ehind all of Freud’s work ... we should posit his belief in the universal validity of the law of determinism” (Strachey 1991: 7).  
Moreover, in Zulu culture there is no clear division between knowledge and belief (Berglund [1979]1989: 78), while psychoanalysis itself theorises most cogently the simultaneity of knowledge and belief but also *demonstrates* this coupling since – however persuasive psychoanalytic theories may be – they generally rely on plausibility, not empirical proof. Appiah argues cogently that witchcraft and traditional religious belief resemble modern natural science for both are “underdetermined” by observation, i.e. “the application of theory to particular cases relies on a whole host of other beliefs, not all of which can be checked out at once” (Appiah 1992: 119). It is not hard to see that this is relevant to psychoanalysis too. Of course, this does not invalidate psychoanalysis, but it should make us sceptical of its rejection of religions, traditional or otherwise, and of theory’s pretensions to a superior rationality.
22. Paul Williams argues that the strictly rationalist critiques of “Freud-baiters” fail to account for the surreal, elusive phenomena of the unconscious (Williams 1998: 3). Perhaps this lends support to the not exclusively abstract or rationalist exploration which is proposed here. Rationality is both an important and an impossible goal; “[w]e cannot change the world simply by evidence and reasoning, but we surely cannot change it without them either” (Appiah 1992: 179).
23. That dissension and power struggles continue to characterise psychoanalysis in Russia was evident in the lecture delivered by the Director of the National Psychoanalytical Federation, Professor Mikhail Reshetnikov, at a conference in St Petersburg in July 1998. (I wish to express my gratitude to the HSRC for awarding me funds to help cover expenses for attendance at this conference.) For an account of the current situation in America, see Douglas Kirsner (2000).
24. De Reuck argues that “Literary Theory” encourages critical thinking: can one be sure that students for whom English is not the mother tongue are not *disempowered* by the often highly specialised and obscure use of language found in many theoretical texts? Still, I disagree with Cecily Lockett that contemporary

theory is in some respects inappropriate to the reading of South African cultural production since its difficulty makes it inaccessible to the vast majority of the population, and also because it invariably reads the cultural text in ways which are contrary to popular readings (Lockett 1990: 3-4, 8). Not that these charges may not be valid, but the university should not be limited by popular conceptions, nor should difficulty be reason for exclusion of material. Our students are, after all, the intellectuals of our nation, and should be treated as such. Nevertheless, it is true that while guides to poststructuralism are opaque enough, original material is often impenetrable. For instance, even Lacan's supporters note that he uses certain expressions to mean different things in different contexts (without explanation) (Lemaire 1977: 157), and that it often seems as though we were not meant to understand Lacan's work (Davis 1983: 855-856). It is in the light of this, that I argue for a greater degree of circumspection and a much fuller engagement of students in their encounter with theory and the act of theorising.

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