The Hiltebhārata:

Rethinking Alf Hiltebeitel's Epic Scholarship Through His Late Engagement with Freud

Including an *Upākhyāna* from Interwar Vienna[*]

[*] Thanks to Perundevi Srinivasan and Marshall Alcorn for reading earlier drafts of this paper.

What should impel us to read the *whole* of an author's work is the perception that only *we* can find what is important to *us*. No work of reference can possibly produce by means of excerpts that chemical reaction between a piece of information we have discovered for ourselves, and our own dim foreknowledge of it that makes it our own intellectual property.

-Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, p. 10., as underlined by Freud in his personal copy as he was writing *The Interpretation of Dreams*, as quoted in Hiltebeitel 2018a: 75.

Introduction

For the past forty-five years, Alf Hiltebeitel has been producing groundbreaking scholarship on Sanskrit epic and South Indian popular religion. In the process, he has given us an epic of his own, something between Freud's collected works and the *Mahābhārata* (although it would make more sense organized into concentric Vedic *maṇḍala*s than sequential epic *parvan*s or *kāṇḍa*s).[1] We could begin with first book, *The Ritual of Battle* (Cornell 1976), and his two most recent (unpaired) books, *Nonviolence in the Mahābhārata* (Routledge 2016) and *World of Wonders* (Oxford forthcoming) which add up to about 800 pages combined. The two volumes of *The Cult of Draupadi*, Vol. 1, *Mythologies: From Gingee to Kurukṣetra* (Chicago 1988) and Vol. 2, *On Hindu Ritual and the Goddess* (Chicago 1991), give us another 1000 pages or so. The two "rethinking" books, *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadī among Rajputs, Muslims, and Dalits* (Chicago 1999) and *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago 2001), are about another 900 pages.

Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the Mahābhārata—Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel, Volume 1 and *When the Goddess Was a Woman*: *Mahābhārata Ethnographies—Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel, Volume 2* (Brill 2011), are about 1200 pages altogether. *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative* (Oxford 2011) is about 700 pages. The two Freud books, *Freud's India* and *Freud's Mahābhārata* (Oxford 2018), are a manageable 600 combined pages. Stopping this partial bibliography here brings us to an estimated total of 5,200 pages, roughly the same size as the *Mahābhārata* (or at least of Bibek Debroy's ten-volume English translation of it). And it is said by the wise that all those who read this "Hiltebhārata" (for what else could we call it?) will be washed clean of all their sins.

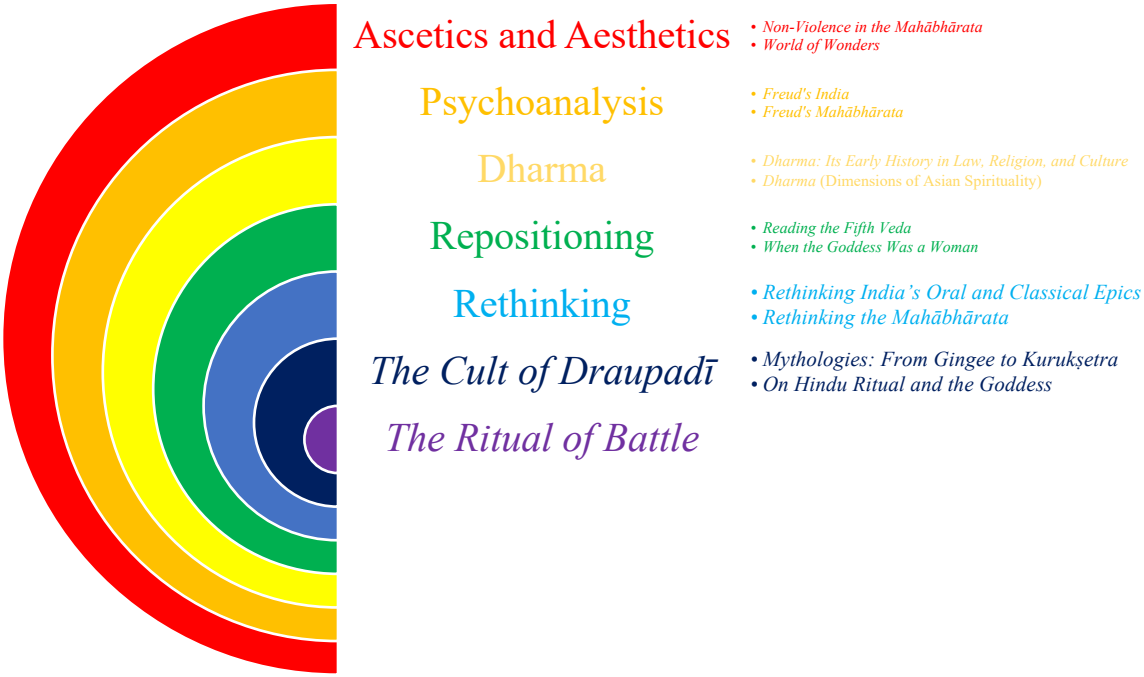

Figure 1. The Hiltebhārata arranged into seven Vedic maṇḍalas

In their introduction to *Reading the Fifth Veda* Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee provide a very good account of his work up through about 2010, observing that "[while] Hiltebeitel's interests are unusually broad, one can identify two broad areas of inquiry: the classical Sanskrit epics (principally the *Mahābhārata* and, to a lesser degree, the *Rāmāyaṇa*), and the goddess, as his fieldwork finds her in the south Indian cult of Draupadī and the related cult of Kūttāṇṭavar/Aravāṉ" (xi). This is true, but only in the same way as it is true that the *Mahābhārata* is the story of a war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas.

I will try to do justice to the richness and complexity of Hiltebeitel's scholarly work here, and I will fail. But I do hope to succeed in demonstrating that the work Hiltebeitel has produced in the decade since the publication of the essays collected by Adluri and Bagchee casts a new light on his whole enterprise. It does so by revealing the centrality of a previously underappreciated theme that has been developing in his scholarship since 1980, around the time Hiltebeitel began engaging the work of Madeline Biardeau, and has arrived at a final (?) form in

the last five years following his direct engagement with psychoanalysis in general and Freud in particular.

Three years after their publication, the two Freud books have not received a great deal of attention.[2] And now that Oxford is publishing *World of Wonders*[†] to take the top spot as Hiltebeitel's latest intervention in *Mahābhārata* studies, I fear that they never will. Both for that reason and because I think they are highly significant in their own right, the Freud books will take center stage in this paper. But in order to appreciate their arguments, we will need to go even further into the idiosyncrasies and historical accidents of psychoanalytic canon formation than Hiltebeitel does in *Freud's India*. Accordingly, the first part of this paper begins with an *upākhyāna*, a term Hiltebeitel has translated as "subtale" and more recently, "side-tale," that will take us far away from the *Mahābārata* and Classical Hinduism. But this will be, I hope, a purposeful detour.

In *Freud's India*, Hiltebeitel reconstructs the interconnected intellectual projects of Freud and the Bengali psychoanalyst Girindrasekhar Bose. He describes his purpose for doing so like this:

> My inclination is to see a basis for sympathies between Bose and Freud. Pre-World War II Europe and late colonial India between 1922 and 1937 offer a period when both men knew that varied voices sought to link their own familiar enough Judaisms and Hinduisms not only with the origins of religion but also with attacks for their alleged backwardness, and with emerging nationalisms and essentialisms that neither signed on to. Both also felt the impact of hegemonic Christianities and insidious understandings of the Aryan. (2018a: 3)

In the first half of this essay I want to do something similar, but rather than draw connections or distinctions between Freud's thought and Indian culture, I will look at Freud's relationship with the variety of methods and theories emerging in the history of religions and

[†] As of this writing, *World of Wonders* is not yet published, but I have been in contact with Cynthia Read about it and I think we can expect to see it in print before too much longer.

philology during the 1930s. The reason for doing this here and now is that, as many times as Freud's ideas have been assessed and reassessed in terms of their utility for reading religious texts in general and Indian texts in particular, they have always been treated as abstract, rounded off, and more or less dead, rather than as sharp, dynamic, and deeply embedded in the unique intellectual and cultural milieu of Freud's Vienna, as I prefer to see them. In the case of evaluating Freud's notion of repression as a concept that is useful for reading the *Mahābhārata*, this kind of treatment shears off some very important contextual elements that may bear directly on what Freud was really trying to formulate.

I hope to rectify what I see as an understudied aspect of Freud's thought during the writing of *Moses and Monotheism*, the text that is important to us because it directly inspired Hiltebeitel's new theory of the epic. If the reader will indulge me, I will attempt to make a connection that has, as far as I know, never been made by any Freud scholar, tying together four texts published between 1929 and 1939: 1) Freud's last book, *Moses and Monotheism*; 2) his last two clinical essays, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" and 3) "Constructions in Analysis"; and 4) a mostly forgotten German book by the eccentric Viennese polymath Robert Eisler with the cumbersome Greek title of *ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΑΣ* [*Jesus, the King Who Did Not Reign*]. I include this *upākhyāna* focused on four texts completely unrelated to the *Mahābhārata*[3] in hopes of providing something that will add useful background and context to the argument Hiltebeitel is making in the two Freud books. But I also want to demonstrate the interpenetration of psychoanalysis, textual criticism, and the history of religions at a pivotal point in their development, and to do so in a way that illuminates the significance of Hiltebeitel's recent use of psychoanalysis to read the epic.

In the second part of this paper, I will show how Hiltebeitel has developed a topography of the epic that is structurally analogous to Freud's classical topography of the mind from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, with its unconscious, preconscious, and conscious systems. In its earliest formation, expressed in the 1980 essay "Śiva, the Goddess, and the Disguises of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī," Hiltebeitel's topography is an implicit way of conceptualizing the manner in which symbols in the epic serve as "quilting points" (to adapt a term from Lacanian psychoanalysis) connecting a fluid Mahābhārata tradition to a frozen *Mahābhārata* text.

The topography begins to emerge in explicit form in the 2000 essay "The Primary Process of the Hindu Epics," where Hiltebeitel makes a psychoanalytic term ("primary process") central to his argument but deploys it in a way that owes less to Freud than it does to secondary literature by Gananath Obeyesekere and Paul Ricoeur. But in his more recent work from 2018, Hiltebeitel finally engages the work of Freud directly and fully articulates an explicit topography in which the cultural and political landscape of the second urbanization of South Asia serves as the unconscious system, the Veda serves as the preconscious, and the baseline Northern recension of the *Mahābhārata* serves as the conscious. He then uses this topography to triangulate the three domains of trauma, tradition, and text in the final chapter of 2018's *Freud's Mahābhārata.*

I. Psychoanalysis and Philology: An Upākhyāna from Interwar Vienna

In the final chapter of *Freud's Mahābhārata,* titled "Moses and Monotheism and the *Mahābhārata*: Trauma, Loss of Memory and the Return of the Repressed," Hiltebeitel introduces his new reading of the epic, which came to him "like a bolt from the blue" (2018b: 265). It also brings together three recent strands of his work: his collaboration with Perundevi Srinivasan,

leading toward a soon-to-be completed co-written volume; his thoughts on the role of *adbhuta rasa* in the epic, leading to *World of Wonders*; and his thoughts on "gleaners," already explored in 2016's *Nonviolence in the Mahābhārata*.

Drawing inspiration from Freud's famous argument in *Moses and Monotheism* that Moses had been a monotheistic Egyptian priest whom the Israelites had murdered before suppressing the memory of their crime, Hiltebeitel opens the chapter with this paragraph:

> This chapter will answer what is meant by the lead title of this book. *Freud's Mahābhārata*… will turn out to be more than a readers' lure, and something else beyond a medley of varied Freudian readings of *Mahābhārata* themes, scenes, and episodes... Drawing on all the preceding chapters, what will emerge is a new theory of the Mahābhārata that can be called "Freud's *Mahābhārata*" because he inspired it. To say that, however, is to say that theory has worked in oblique ways. The work of Freud's that inspires this chapter is *Moses and Monotheism,* which, somewhat like this chapter, waited a long time before it was brought together, and in many ways marked a departure from all that Freud had previously written. It is Freud's last completed full-length study, and until recently is probably his least understood and least appreciated work. It is probably fitting that his last work should have provided the inspiration for this last chapter (2018b: 203).

To fully appreciate his late turn to Freud as Hiltebeitel describes it above, we first need to understand the significance of Freud's own late turn during the writing of *Moses and Monotheism* to the work of another scholar, namely Robert Eisler.

In *Freud's India,* Hiltebeitel provides some illuminating intellectual history through his examinations of Freud's correspondence between 1920 and 1937 with Romain Rolland and India's first psychoanalyst, Girindrasekhar Bose. Following his lead, I will now do some intellectual history of my own, focused first on Robert Eisler's highly controversial 1929-1930 intervention in the study of the historical Jesus, *ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΑΣ*, and the important role it played in Freud's 1937 essay "Analysis Terminable and Interminable." Next, although Eisler's work is not mentioned in either text, I will argue that it also shaped Freud's

thinking in two closely related works from the same period, "Constructions in Analysis" (1937), and *Moses and Monotheism* (1937-1939).

Together, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," "Constructions in Analysis," and *Moses and Monotheism* constitute Freud's last published works, and a number of important Freud scholars have made different arguments explaining how they relate to each other. Yosef Yerushalmi makes the connection between *Moses and Monotheism* and "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" explicit with the full title of his 1991 book, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable*, while Harald Leupold-Löwenthal explains the possible connections between all three works this way:

> Freud had written to Max Eitingon… on 5 February 1937 "Having recovered from the most recent damage and able once more to smoke to a certain extent, I have even started writing again. Just minor things: A fragment that could be detached from the work on Moses (known to you and Arnold Zweig) has been completed. The more important things connected with it must of course remain unsaid. A brief technical essay which is slowly taking shape has the function of helping me fill the many free hours with which my dwindling analytical practice has presented me." Ernest Jones (1962) believes that this essay must have been "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," while Ernst Freud (1961) suggests it was "Constructions in Analysis." Freud's mention of the Almanac and *Imago* suggests that Jones was right, as the *Almanach der Psychoanalyse* 1938 includes a brief extract from "Analysis Terminable and Interminable." (2013: 58)[4]

André Green proposes a different constellation of final texts that comprises *Moses and Monotheism*, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," and the unfinished *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*:

> "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" may be regarded as one panel of a triptych which, taken as a whole, forms Freud's testament. Whereas *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (1940; unfinished) brings together the essential points of psychoanalytic theory, *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) illustrates a nontherapeutic application of psychoanalysis. Freud here connects the cultural development of our Judeo-Christian civilization with the consequences of carrying out the murder of the father. This was a particularly significant factor for him, as the Oedipus complex, described as the nuclear complex of the neuroses, is also called the father complex. To give coherence to this group of works, the following subtitle

> for "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" could be imagined thus: "Why the Oedipus Complex Cannot Be Disposed Of." (Green 2013: 125)

However we conceive of their precise relationship, we will proceed with the understanding that all three works are part of a profound reassessment of the psychoanalytic project, undertaken at a point of personal and professional crisis for Freud.

Religion, the Reich, and Repression Reconsidered

In 1937 Freud wrote to his Welsh colleague and biographer Ernest Jones that the Austrian people were "thoroughly at one with their brothers in the Reich in the worship of anti-Semitism" (Gay 1988: 617). Freud, then eighty-one, was considering ends: the end of the psychoanalytic movement in Austria, the end of his life in Vienna, and the possibility for the successful end of a course of psychoanalytic treatment. The first two were fast approaching, but the last one was beginning to seem remote. He expressed his thoughts about this in the essay, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," which, along with "Constructions in Analysis," published the same year, represents the last of his technical psychoanalytic writing and the first that he had done in almost twenty years.

One of the most important acts of "rethinking" (to use a term that is dear to Hiltebeitel) in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" occurs in Freud's discussion of repression. In an attempt to account for the unforeseen problems that continually arose over the course of analysis and seemed to prolong it almost indefinitely, Freud revisited the concept of repression, the role of the repressed, and the relationship between them.

Twenty-two years before, he had written:

> We may suppose that the repressed exercises a continuous pressure in the direction of the conscious, so that this pressure must be balanced by an unceasing counter-pressure. Thus the maintenance of a repression involves an uninterrupted

> expenditure of force, while its removal results in a saving from an economic point of view. (SE XIV: 151)[5]

Now, Freud was moving away from an emphasis on the economy of "counter-pressure" as he attempted to explain the frequent therapeutic setbacks that made it extremely difficult for analysts to define success in their work. To account for this, Freud was forced to partially reject his topographical model of consciousness (consisting of the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious systems), which had been dealt a serious blow by the inability of analysts overcome their patients' repression.

This situation was made more destabilizing by the fact that it was from the discovery of repression, as Freud notes, "that the study of neurotic processes took its whole start" (SE XXII: 236). The signal insight that came from his and Josef Breuer's work with "Anna O" and marked his split with the French psychological school of Jean-Martin Charcot and Pierre Janet was that the repression of memories and feelings was not the sign of a malfunctioning mind but was inherent in the makeup of the mind itself. Now, the apparently insurmountable nature of repression pointed to the idea that it and the other defenses were actually distorting the ego, changing its constitution to the degree that its defenses were treating therapeutic progress as a threat to be repelled. The ego defenses seemed to be acting like the overzealous white blood cells of someone with an autoimmune disorder, attacking healthy tissue instead of harmful pathogens.

Aside from its role as "the corner-stone on which the whole structure of psycho-analysis rests" (SE XIV: 16), repression was also on Freud's mind in 1937 because of the implications of another specific development in analytic practice. When they were unable to bring forth any element of a repressed memory by interpreting slips of the tongue, dreams, or symptoms, analysts had been having therapeutic success by introducing imagined and hypothetical "constructions" of their patients' repressed memories. They found by interpreting these

constructions, they could sometimes call forth some actual repressed content from patients themselves.[6]

While the original intent of using constructions was the same as that of interpretations (i.e., bringing repressed material into consciousness) it turned out that these invented memories introduced by the analyst were helping the analysis to progress even when the repressed material remained unconscious. When analysts presented these constructions to them in an effort to bring forth a repressed memory, some patients had "lively recollections called up in them—which they themselves have described as 'ultra-clear'—but what they have recollected [had] not been the event that was the subject of the construction but details relating to that subject." Freud concluded from this that the

> "upward drive" of the repressed, stirred into activity by the putting forward of the construction, has striven to carry the important memory-traces into consciousness; but a resistance has succeeded, not, it is true, in stopping that movement, but in displacing it on to adjacent objects of minor significance. (SE XXIII: 266).

In other words, when repression and the resultant ego distortion were too strong to overcome, it became "necessary to conjecture, or to 'reconstruct' missing links in the personal history" (Arlow 2013: 44). And if it were apt, an analyst's hypothetical construction could draw the repressed close enough to consciousness to create signs of "indirect confirmation." Constructions were useful fictions that helped patients to integrate their traumas without ever having to remember them.

Mikael Sundén has argued that, although it is generally classified as a paper on analytic technique, "Constructions" is "about constructions in the grand psychoanalytic theories of culture and religion," and therefore closer in its aim to Hiltebeitel's inspiration, *Moses and Monotheism*, than it is to "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (Sundén 2011: 25). But I would also maintain that Hiltebeitel was as influenced by the ideas expressed in the two 1937

essays as he was by Freud's work on Moses, since I subscribe to the view that all three works are facets of the same project.

As Jacques Press puts it, "the works of 1935 to 1939, as Freud struggled with successive drafts of *Moses and Monotheism*… represented a final turning-point in his oeuvre, leading the founder of psychoanalysis to reappraise core elements of his theory, particularly as regards trauma and its effects" (Press 2011: 31). Edward Said refers to the work of this period as Freud's "*spätstil*," marked by "more complexity and a willingness to let irreconcilable elements of the work remain as they are: episodic, fragmentary, unfinished" (Said 2004: 28).

To the observations above, I would also add that one of the defining features of Freud's late work is the loss of distinction between analytic-therapeutic and historical-cultural theory.[7] "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," "Constructions in Analysis," and *Moses and Monotheism* therefore represent three glimpses into Freud's revised thinking about the relationship between religion, delusion, trauma, history, and memory. And at the core of this revised thinking are the concepts of repression and the other ego defenses, which is why I argue that this passage from "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" deserves more attention than it has so far received from Freud scholars:

> [Repression] is something quite peculiar and is more sharply differentiated from the other [ego defense] mechanisms than they are from one another. I should like to make this relation to the other mechanisms clear by an analogy, though I know that in these matters analogies never carry us very far. Let us imagine what might have happened to a book, at a time when books were not printed in editions but were written out individually. We will suppose that a book of this kind contained statements which in later times were regarded as undesirable—as, for instance, according to Robert Eisler (1929), the writings of Flavius Josephus must have contained passages about Jesus Christ which were offensive to later Christendom. At the present day, the only defensive mechanism to which the official censorship could resort would be to confiscate and destroy every copy of the whole edition.[8] At that time, however, various methods were used for making the book innocuous. One way would be for the offending passages to be thickly crossed through so that they were illegible.[9] In that case they could not be transcribed,

> and the next copyist of the book would produce a text which was unexceptionable but which had gaps in certain passages, and so might be unintelligible in them. Another way, however, if the authorities were not satisfied with this, but wanted also to conceal any indication that the text had been mutilated, would be for them to proceed to distort the text. Single words would be left out or replaced by others, and new sentences interpolated.[10] Best of all, the whole passage would be erased and a new one which said exactly the opposite put in its place. The next transcriber could then produce a text that aroused no suspicion but which was falsified. It no longer contained what the author wanted to say; and it is highly probable that the corrections had not been made in the direction of truth. If the analogy is not pursued too strictly, we may say that repression has the same relation to the other methods of defence as omission has to distortion of the text, and we may discover in the different forms of this falsification parallels to the variety of ways in which the ego is altered. (SE XXII: 236-237)

The work to which Freud is referring is Eisler's two-volume behemoth with the appropriately protracted title of *ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΑΣ: Messianische Unabhängigkeitsbewegung vom Auftreten Johannes des Täufers bis zum Untergang Jakobs des Gerechtenn ach der neuerschlossenen Eroberung von Jerusalem des Flavius Josephus und den christlichen Quellen* [*Jesus, the King Who Did Not Reign: The Messianic Independence Movement from the Appearance of John the Baptist to the Downfall of Jacob the Righteous after the Newly Discovered "Conquest of Jerusalem" by Flavius Josephus and the Christian Sources*].

It strikes me as bizarre that not one contributor to Joseph Sandler's otherwise very useful 1991 volume of collected essays, *On Freud's "Analysis Terminable and Interminable*,*"* mentions Eisler's book even once, given the role it seems to have played in Freud's thinking during this critical period. As far as I know, no Freudian scholar has ever followed up on the reference or explored its significance, which, as I will argue here, must also be understood in the context of "Constructions in Analysis" and *Moses and Monotheism*. More to the point of this essay, I will also argue that Eisler's book is significant for thinking through the relationship between psychoanalysis and the 19th century "higher" text-criticism that Hiltebeitel (followed by Adluri and Bagchee) has taken issue with, at least to the extent that it has influenced Indology.[11]

So please bear with me as I continue to digress. Because if Hiltebeitel's study of the epic has taught us anything, it is that we must never ignore the side-tales.

Eisler's Scandalous Construction of Jesus in the "Slavonic Josephus"

Robert Eisler (1882-1949) was an eccentric but brilliant Austrian Jewish polymath who published work on religion, philology, economics, art history, philosophy, diplomacy, and psychoanalysis (both Freudian and Jungian).[12] I will give a bit more relevant information about Eisler's life and work below, but let us now take a closer look at the specific work Freud quotes and explore how it relates to Freud's thinking on religion, repression, constructions, historical truth, and trauma.

In the introduction to *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist: According to Flavius Josephus' Recently Rediscovered 'Capture of Jerusalem' and the Other Jewish and Christian Sources*, the one-volume 1931 English translation of the text cited by Freud, Eisler wrote:

> The present work is fundamentally different in method, scope, and outlook from any "Life of Christ" or any other book dealing with Christian origins, or any 'History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus,' that I know of. For it claims to show:
>
> First. That there once existed a rich fund of historical tradition about the Messiah Jesus both among the Jews and the non-Christian Greeks and Romans.
>
> Second. That this precious material was deliberately destroyed, or falsified, by a system of rigid censorship officially authorized ever since the time of Constantine I and reinstituted in the reigns of Theodosius II and Valentinian III (477 A.D.).
>
> Third. That, in spite of the tireless efforts of ecclesiastical revisers, enough has been preserved in certain out-of-the-way corners of the world, among Jews and heretics as well as in quotations occurring in Christian polemic and apologetic literature, to allow us to reconstruct with sufficient clarity and plausibility, and even with a certain amount of picturesque detail, the fundamental features of Jesus' personality and his mission, particularly as they

> appeared to his enemies.
>
> Fourth. That through a careful comparison of this mercilessly cold, detached, and unsympathetic pen-portrait of the man Jesus with the naively idealizing presentation of the Kyrios Christos by the writers of the early and later Christian Church, it is possible to come quite close to the historical truth about the Naṣōraean prophet-king and about his elder relative, the schismatic high priest of the Jews, Johanan "the Hidden One," better known as the Baptist. (Eisler 1931: vii)

As the book's subtitle indicates, the primary source for Eisler's entirely new vision of the person of Jesus was the first century Roman Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.[13] Josephus produced a number of histories for Roman audiences, one of which, published about 75 CE, was his first-hand account of the Great Jewish Revolt of 66-73 CE, titled *The Jewish War*. He wrote it in Greek with the help of some scribes who were more proficient than he was in that language, which he had only learned late in life. But in that Greek text he refers to a version he had written earlier that was intended for Jews in the Diaspora.[14] This earlier version would presumably have been in Aramaic, the old lingua franca of the Achaemenian Empire, and has never been discovered.

Josephus's writings had not been overly popular among the Romans during his lifetime, but beginning in the second century early Christians found them useful for explaining the growing division between Jewish and Christian communities. From about the fourth century, a Latin paraphrase of *The Jewish War* was circulating among Christian readers. Eisler refers to this text as *Hegesippus* or *Egessipus,* which is the pseudonym of the author to whom the text is attributed, and also probably a corruption of the name "Josephus." Clearly aimed at Christian audiences, the *Hegesippus* inserted a large amount of new material explaining how God used the Roman army to destroy the Temple and punish the Jews because they had rejected Christ (Goodman 2019: 24-25).

PLATE VI

יורה דעה

HOW JEWISH WRITINGS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY WERE EXPURGATED BY THE CENSOR

A CENSORED PAGE FROM JACOB BEN ASHER'S 'Arba' Turim, PRINTED BY THE FAMOUS SONCINO PRESS, 1516. AFTER THE COPY IN THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, NEW YORK

(SEE P. 58, LINES 3 F.)

PLATE VII

מאמר שמיני לה

PAGE 55 (=33) OF GERSHOM BEN SHELOMOH'S SEPHER SHA'AR HASH-SHAMAÎM ("DOOR OF HEAVEN") PRINTED IN VENICE 1547 (COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY)

SHOWING THE OBLITERATION OF LARGE PARTS OF THE TEXT BY THE CENSOR BY RECKLESS SPREADING OF INK OVER THE PRINTED PAGE

(SEE P. 56, LINE 32)

Figure 2. Examples of Censored Jewish Writing from Eisler's Book, Plates VI and VII

THE 'TESTIMONIUM' OUT OF 'ANTIQUITIES' INSERTED INTO THE 'WAR'
AND FURTHER FALSIFIED BY AN ADDITION FROM A BOOK BY BISHOP HIPPOLYTOS OF ROME
CODEX VOSSIANUS GRAEC. 72 OLIM PETAVIANUS OF THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY, LEYDEN
(SEE P. 59, NOTE 5; P. 68, LINES 37 FF; P 72, NOTE 1)

Figure 3. An Example of Interpolation in a Josephus Manuscript, from Eisler's Book, Plate VIII

FLAVII JOSEPHI 'ANTIQUITATES JUDICAE,' XVIII., 3. 3.

TEXTUS RESTITUTUS

ΓΙΝΕΤΑΙ[1] ΔΕ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΥΤΟΝ ΤΟΝ ΧΡΟΝΟΝ[2] *ἀρχὴ νέων θορύβων*[3] ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΤΙΣ[4] ΣΟΦΙΣΤΗΣ[5] ΑΝΗΡ,[6] ΕΙΓΕ[7] ΑΝΔΡΑ ΛΕΓΕΙΝ ΧΡΗ ΑΥΤΟΝ,[8] *τὸν ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἐξαισιώτατον,*[9] *ὃν οἱ μαθηταὶ υἱὸν θεοῦ ὀνομάζουσιν,*[10] *τὸν οἷα οὐδέποτε ἐπεποιήκει ἄνθρωπος θαύματα ἐργασάμενον*[11].....[12] ΗΝ ΓΑΡ ΠΑΡΑΔΟΞΩΝ ΕΡΓΩΝ[13] ΔΙΔΑΣΚΑΛΟΣ,[14] ΑΝΘΡΩΠΩΝ ΤΩΝ ΗΔΟΝΗΙ Τ' ΑΛΗΘΗ[15] ΔΕΧΟΜΕΝΩΝ[16] . . . . . [17] ΚΑΙ ΠΟΛΛΟΥΣ ΜΕΝ[18] ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΥΣ, ΠΟΛΛΟΥΣ ΔΕ[18] ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΟΥ[19] ΑΠΗΓΑΓΕΤΟ[20] *καὶ (ὑπὸ τούτων)*[21] Ο ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ *εἶναι ἐνομίζετο*[22]

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ΚΑΙ ΑΥΤΟΝ[23] ΕΝΔΕΙΞΕΙ[24] ΤΩΝ ΠΡΩΤΩΝ ΑΝΔΡΩΝ[25] ΠΑΡ' ΗΜΙΝ[26] ΣΤΑΥΡΩΙ ΕΠΙΤΕΤΙΜΗΚΟΤΟΣ[27] ΠΙΛΑΤΟΥ ΟΥΚ ΕΠΑΥΣΑΝΤΟ *θορυβεῖν*[28] ΟΙ ΤΟ ΠΡΩΤΟΝ ΑΓΑΠΗΣΑΝΤΕΣ[29]. ΦΑΝΗ*ναι*[30] ΓΑΡ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ[31] *ἔδοξε*[32] ΤΡΙΤΗΝ ΗΜΕΡΑΝ ΕΧΩΝ[33] [*θανάτου* ΠΑΛΙΝ][34] ΖΩΝ, ΤΩΝ ΘΕΙΩΝ ΠΡΟΦΗΤΩΝ[35] ΤΑΥΤΑ ΤΕ ΚΑΙ ΑΛΛΑ ΜΥΡΙΑ ΠΕΡΙ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΘΑΥΜΑΣΙΑ[36] ΕΙΡΗΚΟΤΩΝ[37]. ΕΙΣ ΕΤΙ ΚΑΙ ΝΥΝ[38] ΤΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΩΝ ΑΠΟ ΤΟΥΔΕ ΩΝΟΜΑΣΜΕΝΩΝ[39] ΟΥΚ ΕΠΕΛΙΠΕ[40] ΤΟ ΦΥΛΟΝ[41]. XVIII, 3. 4: . . . . . .[42] ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΤΟΤΕ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ ΧΡΟΝΟΥΣ ΕΤΕΡΟΝ ΤΙ ΔΕΙΝΟΝ ΕΘΟΡΥΒΕΙ[43] ΤΟΥΣ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΥΣ.

[1] Cf. *supra*, p. 50 not. 1 et 2. [2] Cf. *supra*, p. 51. [3] Cf. *supra*, p. 50 not. 2.
[4] Cf. *supra*, pp. 46 f. et 50 not. 1. [5] Cf. *supra*, p. 51 not. 2.
[6] Cf. *supra*, p. 52. [7] Cf. *supra*, p. 52. [8] Cf. *supra*, pp. 51 f.
[9] Cf. *supra*, p. 52 not. 2. [10] Cf. *supra*, p. 52 lin. 13.
[11-18] Hic aliquid deletum esse videtur; cf. *supra*, p. 54 § 3.
[13] Cf. *supra*, p. 53 not. 1 et 2. [14] Cf. *supra*, p. 53. [15] Cf. *supra*, p. 53 not. 3.
[16] Cf. *supra*, p. 53. [17] Cf. *supra*, p. 54 § 3.
[18] Cf. van Liempt, *l.c.*, p. 111₁. [19] Cf. *B. J.*, ii. § 268.
[20] Cf. *supra*, p. 60 not. 5. [21] Cf. *supra*, p. 54 lin. 28.
[22] Cf. *supra*, p. 54, lineam 27 ss. [23] Cf. *Antiqq.*, xviii. § 314; xx. § 74.
[24] Cf. *Antiqq.*, xix. § 133; xiii. § 306. [25] Cf. van Liempt, p. 112.
[26] Cf. *Antiqq.*, xx. §§ 2, 198. [27] Cf. *Antiqq.*, xviii. §§ 68, 255, 262, 294.
[28] Cf. *supra*, p. 60 not. 10. [29] Cf. *supra*, p. 55 not. 1.
[30] Cf. *supra*, p. 55 l. 30 f.
[31] Cf. Celsus, ii. 70: "τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ θιασώταις κρύβδην παρεφαίνετο."
[32] Cf. *supra*, p. 55 l. 30. [33] Cf. *supra*, p. 55, ultima linea.
[34] Cf. *supra*, p. 56 l. 4; 60 not. 13. [35] Cf. *Antiqq.*, viii. § 234; x. § 35.
[36] Cf. *supra*, p. 60 not. 15. [37] Cf. *supra*, p. 28 not. 1; p. 55, l. 37 ff.
[38] Cf. *supra*, p. 56. [39] Cf. *B. J.*, v. § 162.
[40] Cf. *supra*, p. 56 not. 3. [41] Cf. *supra*, p. 56 not. 2.
[42] Deest forsitan aliquid in principio capitis xviii., 3, 4; cf. *infra*, App. xv., not. 1. [43] Cf. *supra*, p. 42 lineas 35 ss.

ANGLICE:

Restored Text	*Traditional Text*
Now about this time arose (an occasion for new disturbances) a certain Jesus, a wizard of a man, if indeed he may be called a man (who was the most monstrous of all men, whom his disciples call a son of God, as having done wonders such as no man hath ever yet done). . . . He was in fact a teacher of astonishing tricks to such men as accept the abnormal with delight.	Now about this time arose Jesus, a wise man, if indeed he may be called a man. For he was a doer of marvellous acts, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with delight.
. . . . .	
And he seduced many Jews and many also of the Greek nation, and (was regarded by them as) the Messiah.	And he won over to himself many Jews and many also of the Greek nation. He was the Christ.
. . . . .	
And when, on the indictment of the principal men among us, Pilate had sentenced him to the cross, still those who before had admired him did not cease (to rave). For it seemed to them that having been dead[1] for three days, he had appeared to them alive again,[1] as the divinely-inspired prophets had foretold—these and ten thousand other wonderful things—concerning him. And even now the race of those who are called 'Messianists' after him is not extinct.	And when, on the indictment of the principal men among us, Pilate had sentenced him to the cross, still those who before had loved him did not cease (to do so). For he appeared to them on (lit. 'having') the third day alive again, as the divinely-inspired prophets had told—these and ten thousand other wonderful things—concerning him. And until now the race of Christians, so named from him, is not extinct.

[1] According to a recent publication of Prof. Vincente Ussani (*Casinensia*, Montecassino, 1929, pp. 612-14) which reached me after this chapter was in type and had been put into pages, the word 'again' is a later addition to the text of Josephus, unknown to the so-called Egesippus, to St. Jerome and other Latin as well as Greek witnesses (see above, p. 60 n. 13). This precious find makes me think that even as '*iterum*' ('again,' πάλιν in the Greek MSS.) the word *θανάτου*=*mortis* after *triduum*, above, p. 56 l. 2, was added by a corrector to an original intentionally vague, 'For after three days he had appeared to them alive,' in order to make Josephus attest that Jesus had *died* and *risen again* from death, whereas the real wording of Josephus left it an open question whether the condemned Messiah had died on the cross or had somehow escaped and reappeared alive and free. Anyhow, here is a new proof that the text has been tampered with by Christian scribes.

Figure 4. Eisler's Reconstruction of the Description of Jesus in Greek and English

Around the same time, there was a Hebrew version of the text called the *Sefer Yosippon* that put together bits and pieces of Latin versions of the Christianized text but removed the obvious anti-Semitic propaganda. This text was well known among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim audiences and is still regarded as a canonical scripture by Ethiopian Christians. Some even claimed that it was based on what they supposed had been the original Hebrew text (though it was more likely Aramaic for reasons given above) that Josephus mentions having written for Jewish audiences, but no mainstream scholars believed that in Eisler's time (Goodman 2019: 31-33).

Eisler, however, took the position that a version based on that never-seen Aramaic original did exist, and had been preserved in the Old Church Slavonic language in a set of 15th century manuscripts discovered in Russia in the late 19th century. Significantly, the Slavonic manuscripts of *The Jewish War* also contained a version of the description of Jesus from another of Josephus's works, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, well known as the earliest mention of Jesus outside the Christian tradition.

Upon its discovery, scholars assumed that, as with the *Hegesippus*, the Jesus material in the Slavonic Josephus manuscripts was the result of interpolations by Christian scribes trying to falsify an independent source for the Gospel story. But Eisler took the minority view that Josephus himself had written the passages. He then went a step further and argued that by reading the manuscripts closely, he could tell which parts were inserted later by Christians, take those parts out, and be left with something that was as close as it was possible to get to the long-lost Aramaic original.[15]

Eisler's text-critical methodology "revealed" three Greek editions of *The Jewish War* that he thought must have served as source texts for all the Josephus manuscript traditions still extant.

He claimed that the earliest one, which he referred to as "The Capture of Jerusalem," had been translated more or less word for word by scribes whose Greek was very nearly as poor as Josephus's was, making it a virtual carbon copy of the badly written and ungrammatical Greek exemplar, or rough draft, that Josephus had translated as best as he could from his own Aramaic original and brought to them for editing. The Slavonic Josephus manuscripts were written by making use of this poorly translated Greek exemplar, and so the Slavonic translation retained the sense of the Aramaic original that the Greek rough draft had so faithfully reproduced (even leaving words in Aramaic where neither the scribes nor Josephus knew the Greek equivalent).

From the received text, Eisler thus reconstructed Josephus's original "mercilessly cold, detached, and unsympathetic pen-portrait of the man Jesus."[16] According to this newly revealed eyewitness account, and as Eisler could now tell the world, Jesus had been a man of "simple appearance, mature age, dark skin, short growth, three cubits tall, hunchbacked, with a long face, a long nose, eyebrows meeting above the nose, so that spectators could take fright, with scanty hair, but having a line in the middle of the head after the fashion of the Nazireans, and with an undeveloped beard" (1931: 427).[17]

When this reconstructed description of Jesus appeared in *The New York Times*, it prompted no fewer than three American Christians to experience visions of the pulchritude of the Christ and write to Eisler to demand that he retract his calumny.[18] The Christian scholar J. W. Jacks was so outraged that he wrote an entire book, *The Historic Christ: An Examination of Dr. Robert Eisler's Theory According to the Slavonic Version of Josephus and Other Sources*, taking apart Eisler's theory. Jacks' conclusion makes it clear what motive he believed Eisler had for writing such scandalous lies:

> The Jewish people have had numerous pretended messiahs who have dragged them into sanguinary struggles. At last One presented Himself whose spiritual

> doctrine has been admired by all pure-minded souls, One whose only object was to establish the kingdom of God, to teach men to love their Father in heaven, and to love one another. Now Robert Eisler… and some other learned Jews would efface this marvellous page of history. (1933: 275)

And almost two decades later, no less a figure than the father of the history of religions, Mircea Eliade, made this cryptic remark in his diary:

> Robert Eisler was perfectly happy to reconstruct, what, in his opinion represented the physical portrait of Jesus. A man, a little man, like Eisler's Jesus— this Jewish scholars can accept… in order to calmly reject Christianity, the religion created by an ordinary human being. (1990: 11)

Comparing Eisler's Methodology and Higher Text Criticism

The anti-Semitic paranoia displayed by some of his critics aside, it is not hard to see which assumptions and aims are shared by Eisler and the Indologists that Hiltebeitel takes on in his two-part *Exemplar* essay "The *Mahābhārata* and the Stories Some People Tell about It," specifically, E. Washburn Hopkins, Christian Lassen, and the two Adolf Holtzmanns. Simply stated, Hopkins, Lassen, and the two Holtzmanns argued that the *Mahābhārata* was originally a bardic oral tradition about the Kurus and Bhāratas to which the Pāṇḍavas were added at a later date and positioned as its heroes. Following this model, these Indological higher critics and their successors also believed they could recover, beneath the layers of redaction, the core story, in which the Kauravas were the heroes and the Pāṇḍavas (as well as Kṛṣṇa and Vyāsa) were absent.

On the surface, the similarities are obvious. Eisler and the higher critics both wanted to find a lost ur-text under layers of distortion by philologically excavating the received text. Both also performed their excavations in line with a set of historical assumptions that led them to suspect that during the transmission of the text, an "inversion" had taken place in which the author's intent had been undermined by a subsequent group of redactors.

The big differences are 1) that Eisler's ur-text, whether it ever existed or not, is attested by Josephus himself, 2) that there was clear precedence for distortions in the other traditions of textual transmission of the document (i.e., the *Hegessipus* and the *Sefer Yosippon*), and 3) that the historical period he was looking at was recorded in detail in contemporaneous Roman documents. The higher critics, on the other hand, were 1) working in the absence of a historical author, 2) hypothesizing an oral epic based largely on their Eurocentric understanding of what an epic was, and 3) looking at a historical period that can be reconstructed (today, at least) only in the most general terms through historical linguistics, archaeology, and population genetics. Eisler's work, as speculative as it was, was still firmly rooted in lower criticism, which looks for an archetypal text, rather than the historically based higher criticism.[19]

To take this comparison one step further, I would suggest that the difference between the ideas about the epic put forward by the higher critics and the no less speculative ideas of Eisler is analogous (albeit in an admittedly counterintuitive way) to Simon Brodbeck's distinction between analytic (or historical) and synthetic (or literary) modes of reading the *Mahābhārata* (Brodbeck 2013: 135ff). To take the comparison *two* steps further and to bring us back to Freud, I would also suggest that Brodbeck's distinction between the analytic and the synthetic is analogous to the difference between the psychoanalytic operations of interpretation and construction. Eisler's portrait of "*der Mann Jesus*" and Freud's story of "*der Mann Moses*" are both constructions, introduced into the world rather than into a therapeutic situation, but with the same aim of working with the "upward thrust" of the repressed.

This characterization also applies to what I call Hiltebeitel's "short chronology" of the *Mahābhārata*, presented below as he recounts it in *Freud's Mahābhārata*:

> I hold that the Mahābhārata was composed at some time between 150 BCE and the turn of the millennium by a committee, workshop, or atelier of Brahmins over

> a short period of time of no more than two generations. By this I allow that the rough joins, heterogeneities, and seemingly "historical" contradictions one finds in the text can be understood as interpolations, but that rather than being entered hundreds of years after their adjacent content, they would have to have been no more than a few decades younger, and in many if not most cases just minutes, hours, days, or at most a year or two later than what surrounds them. (2018b: 209)

Three Constructions: Eisler's Jesus, Freud's Moses, and Hiltebeitel's Short Chronology

When Freud draws an extended metaphor from the textual criticism Eisler employs in *ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΑΣ*, it is not simply a case of Freud using an example from one field (philology) to explain a problem in an unrelated field (psychoanalysis). Instead, an examination of the language Eisler uses reveals there is *already* something psychoanalytic about his work before Freud ever gets to it. Being a keen student of psychoanalysis himself, Eisler uses some strikingly Freudian turns of phrase to describe his project to reconstruct a narrative of Jesus that escapes Christian censorship, calling it "nothing less than an attempt to recall into consciousness [*wieder ins Bewusstsein zu rufen*] for the historical memory of humanity all that which a wide-ranging and effective censorship since the time of Constantine the Great has attempted systematically to blot out from the tradition and has in fact nearly erased" (quoted in Armstrong 2005a: 167).

Beyond his choice of words, here are three key points to explain Eisler's relationship to and involvement in psychoanalysis during the time in which he was working on the Slavonic Josephus manuscripts. First, both Freud and Eisler were part of the generation of Viennese students deeply influenced by the phenomenological psychology of Franz Brentano. Freud had attended his lectures in Vienna and Eisler's mentor when he received his PhD in art history had been Brentano's student Alois Riegl.

Second, Eisler actually practiced psychoanalysis at least once, and when he did so it was directly related to his work on the Slavonic Josephus manuscripts. Between 1930 and 1931, he psychoanalyzed a vision of Jesus Christ in a series of letters with Robert Whitehead, the man who experienced the vision and wrote to him about it (Collins 2021b: 86-90). In one of his letters to Whitehead, Eisler cites Freud's early colleague Wilhelm Fliess and tells Whitehead that "science is now convinced that all men are bi-sexual beings." He also seizes on several Freudian slips made by Whitehead in his letters to Eisler. Eventually, Eisler submitted the case study to *Imago* in 1937, and when it was rejected, he published it in *Zeitschrift für Religionspsychologie* under the title "*Eine Jesusvision des. 20 Jahrhunderts psychologisch untersucht*" ["A Twentieth Century Vision of Jesus Psychologically Examined"]. Most importantly, in light of my argument that we should understand his description of Jesus as something like a psychoanalytic construction, in his analysis he took Whitehead's vision to be *a reaction to Whitehead's having read Eisler's own (re)construction of the description of Jesus from the Slavonic Josephus manuscripts.*[20]

Third and finally, in an event that postdates the publication of *ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΑΣ* but falls within the 1929-1939 period I delineated above, Eisler, like Freud, performed a dream analysis on himself. This happened sometime after August 1936 (probably around 1937). The dream, in which he diagnosed his "transparent wish fulfillment" and possible "cryptomnesia," was about finding an undiscovered Greek poem recorded on parchment buried beneath a sand dune (see Collins 2021b: 90-92).[21]

Freud's influence on Eisler is clear enough. But, as to the next obvious question, that of the extent to which we can perceive the influence Eisler had on Freud outside of the passage quoted from "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," there is not much that we can speak to

directly. Nor do we know whether Freud even read Eisler's work. While there is no way to be sure, it seems to me most likely that Freud's familiarity with Eisler's argument came second-hand (from newspaper accounts of his public lectures, letter to the editor by Eisler or one of his critics, or reviews of the book) rather than from reading the book itself, which is lengthy.

I also doubt that Freud could have heard the argument from actually attending one of Eisler's public lectures, because Eisler surely would have mentioned it in his correspondence if the two men had met.[22] It is possible that Freud was aware of Eisler's work on Josephus as early as October 10 of 1926, when an article on the subject appeared in the Sunday Supplement of the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, the newspaper edited by David Josef Bach, an early member of the psychoanalytic circle. And the summary Freud gives of Eisler's argument certainly looks like what he would have gotten from a newspaper article.

Whether he read Eisler's work itself or just read about it, we should take note of this fact: In order to explain his revised understanding of repression to the psychoanalytic audience who would read "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (unlike the general readership at which *Moses and Monotheism* is aimed), Freud used a textual rather than a biological or some other scientific metaphor. In doing so, he was drawing inspiration from the history of religions, one of the disciplines of the humanities that were showing the influence of his ideas, rather than from medical science.[23]

There is good circumstantial evidence that the impression that Eisler's work on Josephus left on Freud extended beyond suggesting the historical analogy for repression and ego distortion he used in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable." As we have already established, Freud's engagement with Eisler coincided with his project to demonstrate a non-Jewish origin of Moses in *Moses and Monotheism*. Eisler's construction had provoked a strong reaction among followers

of Jesus (i.e., Christians) in a way that paralleled the manner in which Freud's own work on Moses had struck a nerve with Jews. Noting this partial overlap between Freud's and Eisler's projects, Richard Armstrong writes,

> Unlike his contemporary Robert Eisler, Freud was not interested in reclaiming the Jewishness of the Judeo-Christian tradition… Though he admired Eisler's work, Freud took the more difficult step of undermining *Jewish* tradition by reconstructing Moses as non-Jewish… (2005b: 141).[24]

This difference aside, the fact that Freud picked Eisler's controversial work on Jesus rather than some other and less incendiary example of textual censorship suggests that Eisler's work on Jesus was "standing in" for his own ongoing and provocative work on Moses in his reevaluation of the clinical prospects of psychoanalytic treatment.

As the negative responses from both Jacks and Eliade indicate, Eisler's attempt to find a human, politically radical, Jewish Jesus in the Josephus text (which was itself written by a Jew and for a Jewish audience, according to the provenance Eisler gave to the supposed Aramaic version) was seen as a profoundly destabilizing gesture to Christian triumphalism. The motivation for Freud's writings on Moses, understandably upsetting to Freud's Jewish friends, was to understand why the Jews had always "attracted" anti-Semitism by seeking out the historical trauma that gave rise to what Freud saw as an "undying hatred" of monotheism itself. Jan Assman writes:

> Freud traced this "undying hatred" back to the "hostility" inherent in monotheism as a religion of the father. Not the Jew but monotheism had attracted this undying hatred. By making Moses an Egyptian, he deemed himself able to shift the sources of negativity and intolerance out of Judaism and back to Egypt, and to show that the defining fundamentals of Jewish monotheism and mentality came from outside of it. (Assman 1997: 167)

The respective arguments of ΙΗΣΟΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣΑΣ and *Moses and Monotheism*, while both are flawed as historical scholarship, make an extremely revealing

diptych. In Eisler's story, a group of Christians are repressing the unpalatable Jewishness of their founder by distorting the textual tradition. In Freud's story, a group of Hebrew authors are suppressing (aside from their guilt for murdering him) the unpalatable Egyptian-ness of their founder in a similar way. Both projects provoked accusations or insinuations of anti-Semitism. Freud was blamed for adding to the misery of the already suffering Jews of Europe with *Moses and Monotheism* and, although Eisler was simultaneously being attacked as a "learned Jew" trying to pervert the image of the Savior, his reconstructed physical description of Jesus bears a strong resemblance to the anti-Semitic caricatures in circulation at the time.[25]

The strong negative reactions that both Eisler and Freud received to what I have characterized as their "constructions" returns us to "Constructions in Analysis," written in part to counter the argument that psychoanalysis was mired in circular logic because it used the patient's resistance to the analyst's interpretations as proof of their accuracy ("Heads I win, tails you lose," in the English phrase Freud employs on page 257). At the end of that essay, Freud gives us a discussion of historical truth and trauma that James Strachey and Anna Freud, the editors of the Standard Edition, directly connect to the work he was doing on Moses at the time:

> If we consider mankind as a whole and substitute it for the single human individual, we discover that it too has developed delusions which are inaccessible to logical criticism and which contradict reality. If, in spite of this, they are able to exert an extraordinary power over men, investigation leads us to the same explanation as in the case of the single individual. They owe their power to the element of historical truth which they have brought up from the repression of the forgotten and primaeval past. (SE XXIII: 269)

In *Freud's Mahābhārata*, Hiltebeitel attempts to conceptualize the return in the epic of the repressed past, which he describes as a "more fluid multilingual and essentially pre-caste society than the one that must have soon evolved" (2018b: 246). But rather than the past being

primeval, in Hiltebeitel's understanding, it is urban and advanced, which accounts for its traumatic nature in the minds of the epic poets:

> In pursuing Freud's point in *Moses and Monotheism* that religious traditions should be studied from what has shaped their past unconsciously, including repressed trauma that affects historical memory, my new theory of the *Mahābhārata* focuses on its central myth, which seems to have intensified a Greek source. I argue that the myth's strength in India comes from what I have called an urban unconscious, which for Brahmanism was traumatic. (2018b: 262-263).

But we can also turn this idea that "religious traditions should be studied from what has shaped their past unconsciously" on its head by applying it, not just to the study of religions, but to *the study of the study of religions*. What traumas shaped the development of the study of religions? Freud was forced to rethink his topography of the mind and differentiate the psychoanalytic operations of construction and interpretation (though in subsequent years they have become less distinct) due to the crises he faced in the late 1930s. And, as the connection between Eisler's work on Jesus and Freud's work on Moses demonstrates, Freud's late work at this point was reflexively informed by the history of religions, as represented in the work of Eisler. I say "reflexively" because Eisler's thinking was itself already informed by Freud's own earlier ideas, now repackaged and modified such that Freud was able to adapt them into new ideas and insights that seemed uniquely applicable to his changed circumstances. In many ways, *Moses and Monotheism* is a rethinking of trauma through the lens of the psychoanalytically informed historical study of religion.

What I especially want to emphasize with the introduction of Eisler is the degree to which the history of religions was deeply intertwined with Freud's thinking at the time of his reassessment of repression and his move away from interpretations and towards constructions. As Abel Fainstein explains, constructions were meant to be deployed when an analysis was not

progressing, "to 're-launch,' as it were, free association and, eventually, the access to memories" (Fainstein 2011: 70). In other words, the pressing problem that constructions were needed to solve was the inability to come to a successful ending of a patient's analysis. And in Freud's mind, that problem was entangled with the problem of rising anti-Semitism and its role in the history of Judaism, which led him to engage with the work of another Austrian Jewish scholar whose reconstruction of the founder of Christianity was provoking a reaction in the Christian public similar to the one he anticipated from the Jewish public. Under these circumstances, and partly under Eisler's influence (which was already enmeshed with his own psychoanalytic practice), construction took precedence over interpretation.

Returning to Brodbeck's distinction between the analytic and the synthetic modes of reading the epic as an analogue to the difference between Freud's notions of interpretation and construction, we can now ask if there was a similar moment in which these modes of reading the epic likewise changed their relations to each other. Brodbeck thinks so, writing, "*since the completion of the Poona [Critical] edition*, the analytic approach is less appropriate than it was previously, and the synthetic approach more so" (Brodbeck 2013: 135, italics mine).

In the second section of this paper, I will follow this up and argue that what appears to be a rather late introduction of Freudian concepts in Hiltebeitel's epic (of) scholarship—the "Hiltebhārata"—is in fact the upward drive of a Freudian model that is present in his work since at least 1980, but is activated, transformed, and explicated in light of his own changed psychological, physical, spiritual, technological, and professional circumstances. I will also explain in more detail why I think we should view Hiltebeitel's short chronology as a construction like the ones put forward by Freud and Eisler.

II. Mind and Mahābhārata: Topographies of Freud and Hiltebeitel

In this section I will compare the topographies put forward by Freud and Hiltebeitel to model the operations of consciousness and the *Mahābhārata*, respectively. My justification for doing this is a noteworthy parallel between the thinking of Freud and Hiltebeitel. Freud's discovery that repression and other ego defenses[26] were not abnormalities of the mind, but processes inherent in the structure of the mind itself, required a new model of consciousness that accounted for these phenomena. Similarly, Hiltebeitel's insistence on the fundamental unity of the epic required him to come up with new explanations for the features that other scholars had pointed to as evidence for the presence of "layers" in the text. In *Freud's Mahābhārata* Hiltebeitel identifies these as the "six ingredients of the epic's heterogeneity," namely, "a main story, didactic material, upākhyānas, an author function, frame stories, and bhakti runs" (see 2018b: 87n41 and 251n181). With all this in mind, I will now look back at three key pieces of Hiltebeitel's writing from 1980, 2000, and 2018. In so doing, I will argue that each of them demonstrates the consistent presence and progressive refinement of a textual topography that Hiltebeitel has used to understand the epic and that is comparable to and increasingly informed by Freud's original metapsychological topography of unconscious, preconscious, and conscious systems.

1980: The First Topography

I will begin with a short timeline of significant events from Hiltebeitel's life during the period leading up to the development of the first topography and then expand on it below.

- **1963** Graduates with religion degree from Haverford College.
- **1964** Undertakes a PhD in the History of Religions at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

- **1966** Attends Georges Dumézil's Haskell Lectures at the University of Chicago.
- **1968** Begins teaching at George Washington University.
- **1970** Publishes his translation of Dumézil's *The Destiny of the Warrior.*
- **1972** Publishes "The Mahābhārata and Hindu Eschatology."
- **1973** Publishes his translation of Dumézil's *The Destiny of a King.*
- **1973** Completes dissertation, "Gods, Heroes, and Kṛṣṇa: A Study of the Mahābhārata in relation to Indian and Indo-European Symbolisms" with Mircea Eliade as advisor and Charles H. Long and J. A. B. van Buitenen as readers.
- **1974-75** Makes first visit to India and begins to study the Draupadī cult under the influence of Biardeau.
- **1974** Publishes "Dumézil and Indian Studies."
- **1975** Publishes critical review of Dumézil's *Mythe et epopee*, vols 2 and 3.
- **1976** Publishes *The Ritual of Battle.*
- **1980** Publishes "Śiva, the Goddess, and the Disguises of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī."

Although I date the first topography to 1980, we have to begin with 1976's *The Ritual of Battle*. As Hiltebeitel's first book it was based on his 1973 dissertation and was written during a period that coincided with his translation of two important works by Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of the Warrior* and *The Destiny of a King*.[27] During this time, Hiltebeitel was carving out a path for himself between the approaches of Dumézil and Madeleine Biardeau, differing from the former's argument that the divine parentage of the Pāṇḍavas was a late addition to the text, and differing from the latter in her rejection of the Poona Critical Edition.

Wendy Doniger sums up the situation with her usual flair in her foreword to the 1990 edition of *The Ritual of Battle*, clearly written with the benefit of hindsight.

> The combination of the Dumézilian and the Biardeauvian approaches makes this book both exciting and sensible…He succeeds in combining the Indo-European perspective of Dumézil with what he calls the Puranic or Hindu perspective of Biardeau, blessing this French marriage by citing the old Sankhya simile of the blind man and the lame man (p. 140).[28] He manages to walk the razor's edge between the two camps, taking a lead gratefully from each when the lead is good, challenging or correcting a hypothesis when he finds good grounds to do so, and refraining from clapping his hands in Oedipal triumph when he points out a flaw in the master. Where Biardeau tends to be vague, Hiltebeitel is specific; where Dumézil is Procrustean, Hiltebeitel reshapes the theoretical bed on which the data are to lie. (1990: 17-18)

Hiltebeitel was no longer walking the razor's edge in 1980 when he published "Śiva, the Goddess, and the Disguises of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī," marking a further expansion beyond the Indo-European scholarship of Dumézil and Stig Wikander and a deeper engagement with the village-centered structural anthropology of Biardeau, whom he cites more than forty times, while citing Dumézil just twice.

I would like to point out two elements in "Disguises" that are central to my understanding of Hiltebeitel's scholarship and that make the project I have undertaken in this paper possible. The first element is the creative tension between fieldwork and textual scholarship that serves as an analogue to the creative tension between clinical work and cultural theorizing in Freud's writing (before this tension was resolved in the last phase of his work). The second element is Hiltebeitel's habitual reflection on the development of his own ideas, displayed in passages like this:

> It was soon evident during my study of the [Draupadī] cult that much of its symbolism holds reference to Śakti and Śiva. *But what suddenly struck me one day*, *after weeks of noting various pairings of icons in different ritual contexts*, is that Draupadī is usually paired with one of her three eldest husbands and that, whereas she is the Goddess, Arjuna is inescapably the foremost representative of Śiva. This affinity of Arjuna and Draupadī with Śiva and the Goddess is an [indispensable] key to understanding the Draupadī cult. *Let it also invite us to a fresh look at their portrayal in the Sanskrit epic.* (1980: 153, italics mine)

While it is not too unusual to read a scholar reflecting on how he came up with a particular idea, in Hiltebeitel's case these reflections help us in our effort to reconstruct the development of his topography of the epic and the construction of the short chronology in a way that allows us to fruitfully compare his work to the projects of Freud and Eisler.

Hiltebeitel does not reference Freud or use explicitly psychoanalytic terminology in "Disguises," an essay published one year before Gananath Obeyesekere's influential milestone work of psychoanalytically informed South Asian anthropology, *Medusa's Hair*. But he does focus on symbols as transpositions in a way that is closely analogous to Freud's dream work, with its processes of condensation, displacement, symbolism, and secondary revision. At the risk of pushing things too far, I will merely point out that Freud developed his topography through the interpretation of dreams while Hiltebeitel began to develop his through the interpretation of the most dreamlike book of the *Mahābhārata*, the Virāta Parvan. With that in mind, I will remark here on some of the dreamlike qualities of the Virāta Parvan, in which the Pāṇḍavas are spending their last year of exile serving in the court of the Matsya king Virāta, and are disguised as a Brahmin dicing master (Yudhiṣṭhira), a eunuch dancing master (Arjuna), a cook (Bhīma), a pair of cowboys (Nakula and Sahadeva), and a lady's maid (Draupadī).

The Dreamlike Qualities of the Virāta Parvan

Let us first imagine the Pāṇḍavas' eventful thirteen-year exile as a metaphorical sleep, a period of dormancy, regeneration, and integration which is at the same time fitful and interrupted with nightmares, revelatory visions, and erotic reveries. The year in Virāta's court would then function as a hypnopompic dream, immediately preceding the "awakening" of the cattle raid in 4.24-62 when the Pāṇḍavas make themselves known to their enemy in an episode based on an

ancient Indo-European mythic trope. Although there is no real imagery of sleeping, dreaming, or awakening in this book of the epic, Hiltebeitel does note the "cosmogonic overtones" of the Pāṇḍavas' presence in the kingdom of the Matsyas, associating the name with the fish that comes up from the depths of the sea (a common image of the unconscious) in the Vaiṣṇava myth of Matsyāvatāra (1980: 150).[29] But I would argue that this symbolic name also recalls a further association of Viṣṇu with the sea, namely, the image of his dreaming sleep on the coils of the serpent Anantaśeśa.

Another dreamlike quality of the Virāta Parvan is the element of wish-fulfillment in the disguises of the Pāṇḍavas. It may be significant that it is relatively easy to see the wish-fulfillment in the disguises of Yudhiṣṭhira (a gambling addict in real life), Bhīma (a glutton in real life), and the twins (incarnations of the horse gods in real life), but much harder to make out in the cases of Arjuna and Draupadī. Hiltebeitel argues that Arjuna and Draupadī's disguises are carrying the heaviest loads in terms of symbolic work, representing the centrality of Śiva and the Goddess in an epic that seems to espouse a Vaiṣṇava worldview.

Finally, there is the bedtrick-cum-Grand Guignol of the Kicaka episode, a crescendo of dream imagery that reaches an *Inception*-like level of complexity.[30] Kicaka, the general of the Matsya army, begins to sexually harass Draupadī, whom he (like everyone else in the court) believes to be a lady's maid. She tries to stave off his advances by protesting that she is unavailable, being married to some powerful but invisible Gandharvas. But Kicaka pays no mind and abuses her in front of two of her actual (but disguised) husbands, Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma, the latter of whom is only restrained in his rage by his dispassionate older brother.

But after Draupadī gets him alone, she is finally able to convince Bhīma to kill Kicaka by threatening suicide and the two form a plan. Pretending to relent to his advances, Draupadī sets

up a tryst with Kicaka in her bedroom that night, in the time of dreams of darkness. But when Kicaka arrives the dream becomes a nightmare, because it is Bhīma, normally disguised as a cook but now disguised as Draupadī (in her disguise as a lady's maid), whom he finds in the bed. Bhīma then kills Kicaka with his bare hands and leaves a gruesomely mangled corpse. The next morning, when Kicaka's remains are discovered, Draupadī blames his death on one of her invisible Gandharva husbands, which is 33% correct.

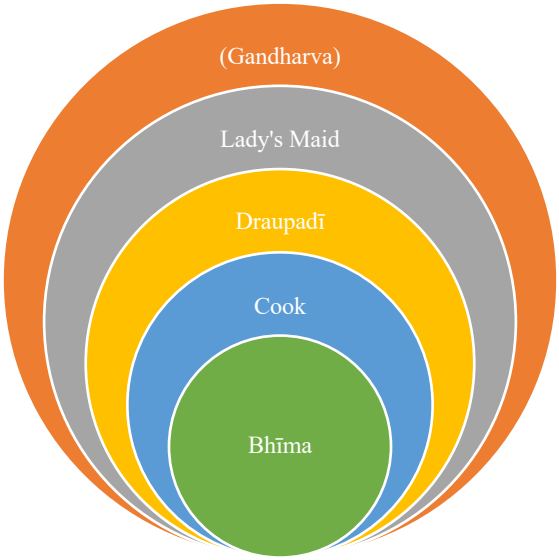

Figure 5. The layers of Bhīma's disguise in the Kicaka episode

The Mechanism Implies the Model: The Implicit Topography in "Disguises"

Much like Freud in his early work on neuroses, in "Disguises" Hiltebeitel describes a mechanism in which symbols pass between three systems: the tradition, the Sanskrit epic, and the vernacular or regional epics. But this mechanism implies a model in which symbols are 1) drawn from "tradition" (broadly construed), 2) deployed in the stable and "frozen" Sanskrit epic, 3) then transformed in regional, vernacular epic traditions, from which they 4) re-emerge to coexist in a relationship of mutual influence alongside their older source material in the larger tradition and in the minds of the constantly changing audience of the Sanskrit epic. Hiltebeitel explains:

> One would thus need to recognize the pliancy and selectivity of an oral tradition in its symbolic articulation of some of the fundamental continuities of Hindu culture, for which the epic is not only the first great effort at synthesis but a means to transmit this synthesis through the centuries, in India and abroad. It is thus impossible to study the epic as a story frozen in its Sanskrit textual forms. For one thing, there are good grounds to suspect that certain features of the story descend from an Indo-Iranian and Indo-European past. But more than this, one must assume that the epic poets made selective use of oral traditions and popular cultural themes. Preposterous as it sounds, considering the immensity of the text, one can pretty safely assume that the bards knew more about the main story, both in terms of variants and underlying symbolism, than they told. It is thus worth investigating whether what they left untold but implicit, or what they alluded to through symbols, is not still echoed in the vast oral and vernacular epic and epic-related traditions that perpetuate the story [in] Indian culture to this day. (1980: 152)

In light of Hiltebeitel's later work, I think I am justified in reading the paragraph above as suggesting a topography of the epic, one as much worth investigating as that cultural material which the epic bards left "untold but implicit." The figure below is my attempt to render this implicit topography visually.

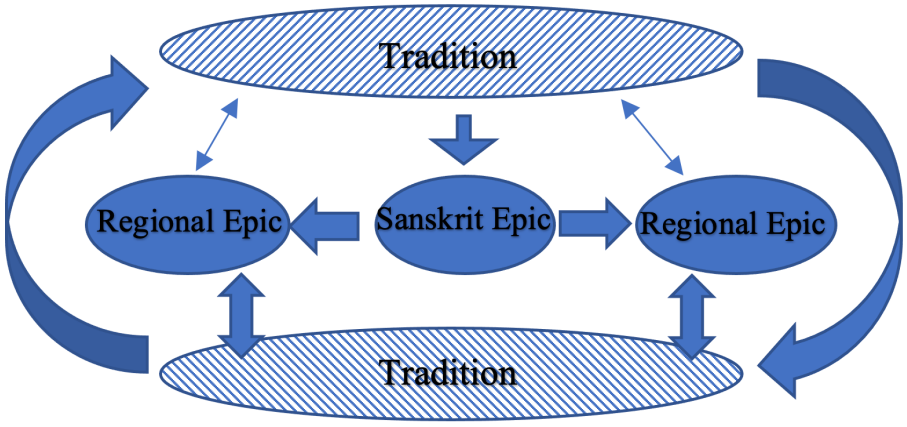

Figure 6. Rendering of Hiltebeitel's First Topography

One significant claim Hiltebeitel makes in "Disguises" is that that "the epic… evokes, through its symbolism, certain cultural themes, myths, ritual practices, and social norms that are not fully attested historically until 'post-epic' times, sometimes in later texts, sometimes even in contemporary folk cults and practice" (1980: 151). In other words, elements of a symbol that lie

behind the screen of the epic, or that overflow the meaning that can be "bound up" in that symbol, can reappear in the regional traditions.

Not only does this claim obviate the need for layers of redaction in the epic, it also recalls Freud's observation in "Constructions" that "when a neurotic is led by an anxiety-state to expect the occurrence of some terrible event, he is in fact merely under the influence of a repressed memory (which is seeking to enter consciousness but cannot become conscious) that something which was at that time terrifying did really happen" (SE XXIII: 268). The differences are clear enough, since Hiltebeitel is not yet talking about trauma in 1980, but the neurotic's detailed fantasy-fear about a future catastrophe that has already in fact happened (and been repressed) provides a useful model for the way that symbolic meanings absent in the epic are re-introduced in regional traditions where they are expanded upon and elaborated.[31] I will introduce an example in the next section.

Repression in the Epic Text and Tradition

While there are many instances in the *Mahābhārata* of repression as a curse (such as Karṇa's curse of forgetting the mantra he needs to defeat Arjuna), there is also an important episode in the Āraṇyaka Parvan in which repression is a boon. Taking a look at the way that this act of repression distorts and fragments the narrative in ways similar to what Freud describes in "Constructions" will, I hope, go some way toward justifying the time I have spent emphasizing my argument that Freud's late thinking on repression and the related issue of constructions as opposed to interpretations was deeply influenced by the methods of philology and the history of religions, especially the kinds of arguments (such as Eisler's critical reading of Josephus) that had already been themselves influenced by Freud's psychoanalytic episteme.

The *Mahabhārata* story at issue concerns a Kṣatriya princess named Reṇukā who lives in a hermitage with her husband, the Brahmin sage Jamadagni, and their five sons. One day she goes out to the stream to collect some water, and as she is filling her pot, she sees a Gandharva named Citraratha bathing and engaging in erotic play with his concubines a little farther downstream. Distracted by her momentary attraction to Citraratha, Reṇukā spills the water she was collecting and leaves a wet spot on the front of her clothes. When she returns to the hermitage Jamadagni sees the wet spot on his wife's clothes and deduces her mental infidelity. He becomes enraged and one by one he orders each of his sons to cut off his mother's head. The four oldest are too horrified at their father's words to speak, let alone obey, so Jamadagni curses them to become dumb like animals. Only Rāma obeys his father's command without hesitation and cuts off Reṇukā's head with his axe.

After Rāma has decapitated his mother Reṇukā at his father's order without hesitation, Jamadagni offers his obedient son whatever he wants. Rāma asks for four boons, two of which are his 1) mother's resurrection and 2) the reversal of the curse his father had placed on his brothers for being unwilling to kill their mother. These boons magically undo the consequences of the last few moments' events, which is itself a kind of repression. But the concept is more readily identifiable in the two boons he asks for himself. Seeming to separate out the traumatic nature of the act of matricide he has committed from its karmic implications, Rāma asks both to 3) be "unremembering of the murder" (*asmṛtiṃ vadhasya*) and 4) be "untouched by its evil" (*papena tena asparśam*). But, in line with Freud's understanding of the return of the repressed, as the story progresses, the epic is ambiguous on whether a total repression is possible, even for a sage as powerful as Rāma's father.

The Rāma Jāmadagnya episode of the epic is a story in which repression works as a literary theme. But it also offers a rich and textured example of the way in which some symbolic meanings behind the story are not captured in the Critical Edition but are worked out in elaborate complexity in the larger epic tradition. It is useful here to recall once more Freud's observation in "Constructions" that in cases of neurotic delusions, "the 'upward drive' of the repressed… has striven to carry the important memory-traces into consciousness; but a resistance has succeeded… in displacing it on to *adjacent objects of minor significance* [italics added]," because in later versions of the Rāma Jāmadagnya cycle, elements of the matricide episode begin to pop up in other parts of the myth.

According to the Critical Edition, Reṇukā goes to the stream to get water and sees a stranger named Citraratha bathing in the water, leading to the matricide episode that ends with her resurrection and the boon of repression. Then, in the very next episode of the Rāma Jāmadagnya myth, elements of this "down by the river" story, transformed but still recognizable, re-emerge when Reṇukā encounters yet another male stranger. This time it is Arjuna Kārtavīrya, a king who comes to their hermitage for hospitality and ends up stealing the family's calf. This theft sets into motion a series of escalating reprisals that culminates with Rāma murdering every single Kṣatriya in existence, filling five lakes with their blood, and consecrating the plain surrounded by them as the battlefield that will become Kurukṣetra and be the site of yet another near-complete annihilation of the Kṣatriyas many generations later. Let us now identify the elements of the matricide episode that recur, in different forms, in the cattle theft episode.

The major returning motif is Reṇukā's disastrous encounter with a male stranger. Obviously, a woman coming into contact with a man outside of her family is so commonplace in the epic that we do not need the return of the repressed to explain this admittedly superficial

similarity, especially when there are also major differences. The connection between the two encounters only becomes clear when we turn to subsequent iterations of the myth cycle found outside the Sanskrit epic (where the story clearly originated).

In accordance with Hiltebeitel's observation about the work done by the regional epics and the larger tradition, the 18th century Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam* reinforces the connection between the two figures by identifying Arjuna Kārtavīrya as the man who distracted Reṇukā at the river, leaving out Citraratha completely (Collins 2020a: 88). And in another Tamil variant of the story Arjuna Kārtavīrya replaces Rāma himself as the son born to her to replace him when he leaves her forever (Doniger 1999: 204-206). In the South Indian Goddess cults studied by Biardeau in *Stories about Posts* (translated by Hiltebeitel), Arjuna Kārtavīrya is merged with the Buffalo Demon who is the victim of the Goddess, who is in turn identified with Reṇukā (Biardeau 2004: 209-212). And according to a temple legend collected in Maharashtra in the late 19th century, Arjuna Kārtavīrya is the brother-in-law of Reṇukā, who is portrayed as jealous of the wealth that he and her sister enjoy (Collins 2020a: 87).

Arjuna Kārtavīrya's later identification with these four figures—1) the bathing Gandharva Citraratha who awakens Reṇukā's sexual desire, 2) Rāma's younger brother who replaces him as his mother's beloved child, 3) the Buffalo Demon who is slain by and becomes a devotee of the Goddess, and 4) Reṇukā's brother-in-law who makes her envy her sister—speaks to the complex familial associations this figure represents, even when these associations are excluded from the Critical Edition. In the longue durée of the epic tradition, the repressed encounter at the river (sometimes left out of the stories and sometimes left in), seems to exert an influence on other, related episodes and imprint them with aspects of the trauma it describes. In the four transformations listed above, 1) the seducer returns as the visitor to the hermitage whose

encounter with Reṇukā leads to the massacre of the Kṣatriyas, 2) he takes the place of the matricidal Rāma in his mother's heart, undoing Rāma's attempts to restore their relationship by wiping his mother's memory, 3) he is conflated with the victim and devotee of the Goddess in a reversal of roles, and 4) he remains an object of Reṇukā's lust, but with that lust sublimated into a desire for wealth and status, and with her sister placed between them as an obstacle.

There are other elements from the matricide episode that escape the repression granted by Rāma's father as well. Even within the Critical Edition, we can see transformed and displaced elements from the (repressed) matricide episode in the Arjuna Kārtavīrya story. Arjuna Kārtavīrya's theft of the wailing calf from its mother recalls Jamadagni's forcing Rāma to separate himself from his mother by separating her head from her body. And Biardeau sees Rāma's vengeful elimination of the Kṣatriya class as a kind of decapitation of society to match the decapitation of his mother (Biardeau 1993: 83).

Since Rāma's twenty-one-fold extermination of all the male Kṣatriyas necessarily takes place over the course of as many generations, he presumably leaves the Kṣatriya widows to raise their young sons until they are old enough to father more sons and then be slaughtered themselves. While it is definitely a pattern of systematic *destruction*, Rāma's violent campaign is also a compulsively repetitive *creation* of fatherless mother-son pairs. In his own family, Rāma was forced to kill his mother by his jealous father. But in the families he leaves transformed in the wake of his campaign of vengeance, the mothers live to raise their sons while their fathers lie dead, creating a mirror image of his own family situation after the matricide.

There is also a possible connection between Reṇukā's encounter at the river and Rāma's creation of five lakes of blood. The transformation of a body fluid (blood) into a natural body of water (a lake) plays with the ambiguity of whether Reṇukā wet herself with water from the river

or with female sexual fluid produced on arousal, as the commentary of Nīlakaṇṭha states explicitly.[32] The possibility that Rāma's creation of five lakes of Kṣatriya blood is an oblique reference to his matricide is worked out in later literature. One noteworthy example is found in the late 20th century Malayalam poem *Maḻuvinṯe Katha* ("The Story of the Axe"), in which his mother's (Kṣatriya) blood is specifically blamed for her momentary attraction to the man at the river:

> High rose my axe, Lord Śiva's gift, and
> My mother's head rolled on the ground.
> There lay, at our feet
> That face ever so gentle,
> That body which stood for humility,
> That hot blood which yearned for the pleasures of the world. (1980: 125)

Perhaps the most dramatic examples of the return of the repressed are the stories in which Reṇukā is regarded as a form of the headless goddess Chinnamastā or Lajjāgaurī. There are a whole body of myths from the South Indian cults of Reṇukā-Yellama, examined by Doniger and by Hiltebeitel's student and partner in fieldwork Perundevi Srinivasan, in which the undoing of Rāma's matricide is a catastrophic failure. One such myth has already been mentioned above as the one in which Arjuna Kārtavīrya is identified as the son of Reṇukā. In this story, when Jamadagni gives Rāma the mantra to revive his mother, Rāma is so distraught that when he goes to rejoin Reṇukā's head to her body he mistakenly joins it to the decapitated body of an Outcaste woman. The resulting monstrosity wreaks havoc on the world until the gods supplicate her by granting her the power to cure smallpox. Then they once again separate her head from her body, placing her head inside the temple sanctuary and her impure Outcaste body at the door (Doniger 1999: 204-206).

Putting Rāma and Reṇukā aside, another illustrative example, taken from "Disguises," is Hiltebeitel's analysis of Arjuna's disguise as a eunuch. In the essay Hiltebeitel explicates the

meanings of the name taken by Arjuna when he disguises himself (Bṛhannaḍā or Bṛhannalā), his resemblance to the iconography of Śiva's Naṭarāja form, and his role as a eunuch, which he examines in light of modern folklore and customs surrounding *hijras*, the caste officially recognized in 2014 as a third gender in India (McCarthy 2014).[33] And regarding the significance of the name Bṛhannaḍā or Bṛhannalā, a recent essay by Nell Shapiro Hawley extends some of Hiltebeitel's insights by looking at this episode as it appears in the 200 CE play the *Pañcarātra*. In writing of the "bitextuality" of the figure of Arjuna in disguise, Hawley borrows this term from Yigal Bronner to simultaneously evoke the undecidable *ḍā* or *lā* in the name, the ambiguous gender of the character, and the concept of bisexuality, which concerned not only Freud but also Robert Eisler and, as we shall see, Hiltebeitel.

2000: The Second Topography

Twenty years after "Disguises" Hiltebeitel wrote "The Primary Process of the Hindu Epics," from which I am going to extract his second topography. As with the first topography, we need to backtrack a bit to put it into context, so we will begin in the early 1990s, at the midpoint between the two essays. In the retirement talk he gave in 2017, Hiltebeitel described the period from 1990 to 1992 as "the most formative phase of my work in terms of passing some hurdles." He provides more details about major events from this period, and with astonishing clarity, in the preface to *Freud's Mahābhārata*. Still more can be deduced from his publication history. Basically, in the period between the two topographies, Hiltebeitel underwent some major professional and personal crises, returned to textual study after years of anthropological fieldwork, and was introduced to the post-colonial Weberian Freudianism of Gananath

Obeyesekere. There is a lot to untangle here, and I want to focus on one particular event, so I will again provide a bullet-pointed timeline to set up that more detailed analysis.

- **1984** Hiltebeitel's father dies after suffering from Parkinson's for the last fifteen years.
- **1988** Publishes *The Cult of Draupadī*, Vol 1: *Mythologies: From Gingee to Kurukṣetra,* dedicated "in memory of my father who taught us to see."
- **1988-1990** B. R. Chopra's *Mahabharat* runs on Doordarshan
- **1989-1990** Works on *The Cult of Draupadī*: Vol. 2, *On Hindu Ritual and the Goddess*: "While I had invested great energy and love in my first volume, which was on Draupadī cult mythologies, published in 1988, the disruptions in domestic life had left me disenchanted with the second volume; and since it seemed quite possible to think I had done enough with two volumes on the Draupadī cult, I seriously entertained the thought that I had brought my Draupadī cult studies to a disenchanted end, and would stop visiting Draupadī temples and festivals in the future, at some emotional loss" (2018b: xv).
- **Early 1990** Fieldwork at the Vaṭukku Poykaiyūr Draupadī temple.
- **Late 1990** Dream of Draupadī temple at the Pine Barrens in New Jersey: "I didn't want to admit to myself that I had had this enchanting dream, thinking that if I didn't admit it, I could keep on having it. Yet I cannot say whether the dream was a recurrent one, which is what I wished to think, or whether it originated as a solitary dream or even a daydream. My own part in discovering the temple is obscure, as is how I knew it was a Draupadī temple. I don't recall ever seeing Draupadī or one of her icons. But it was an Indian-style Draupadī temple, with one strange feature. Instead of a mortar and pestle in a corner, there was an old four-legged washing machine with wooden hand-pumped clothes

wringers of the type my mother used in the house we lived in when I was four and five. I had first heard about the Pine Barrens from my high school girlfriend, whose family vacationed in nearby Wildwood. And by the time of the dream, I had driven past and through the Pine Barrens several times en route from Connecticut to Washington D.C., along the scenic Garden State Parkway. I must have had the dream sometime after the spring of 1990, for that is when I did fieldwork at the Vaṭukku Poykaiyūr Draupadī temple, which I identify with the dream for three reasons. One, which is part of my recollection of the dream, is the visual sight of wispy evergreen casuarina trees near the shoreline Vaṭukku Poykaiyūr temple, of which I was reminded by the scrub pines that grow along the Atlantic seashore. Second, an association with the dream, is that I did the fieldwork at Vaṭukku Poykaiyūr with Eveline Masilamani-Meyer, who would soon be visiting me from Switzerland. And third, which I had forgotten but which clinches the connection, I wrote in my 1991 book that the anthropologist Lawrence Babb 'tells us that it was "claimed by some" of his Singapore informants "that the shrine of Draupadī [in Singapore] was originally established by a community of boat repairmen from the village of Vadukku Poigaiyiur near Nagapattinam," on the Tanjavur District coast of the Kaveri delta.' I had evidently transposed the boatmen's journey from Singapore, all the way to New Jersey. But why would I expend energy trying to keep this dream in my unconscious or, in current terms, to make it a recurrent lucid dream?" (2018b: xv)

- **1990** Breakup of marriage begins: "I was experiencing a kind of emasculation, with no woman in my life" (2018b: xiv).

- **1990-1992** Experiences block in producing any scholarship from fieldwork in Kūttāṇṭavar-Arvāṉ temples.
- **1991** Publishes "The Folklore of Draupadi: Sārīs and Hair" where he puts forward an "adjectival metaphor of 'an underground folk Mahābhārata'" (1991b: 421).
- **1991** Makes decision to write a second book on the *Mahābhārata* (see Hiltebeitel 2001: ix).
- **1992** Gives eight-lecture course titled "Le Mahābhārata dans les traditions populaires de l'Inde du Sud" at the Sorbonne at the invitation of Madeleine Biardeau: "During my second or third lecture, with the anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere in attendance, I stated a working principle that, in interpreting such things in the Kūttāṇṭavar cult, I assumed the priority of the Sanskrit Mahābhārata. From his startled look I sensed the remark caught Obeyesekere by surprise; I surmise that it made him think I sounded more like a Sanskritist than an anthropologist" (2018b: xiv).
- **1992** Begins to develop short chronology: "My first moment of clarity on the Sanskrit Mahābhārata came with long-lasting results, but I am still surprised it appeared in this early period and in the form and place it did. Sometime in the summer of 1992, I was invited to the Śiva-Viṣṇu Temple in Lanham, Maryland, for lunch and to give a talk about my Sanskrit epic research, which had grown so perilously thin. There were only a few people in attendance, but my host's college-age daughter asked for my thoughts about the origins of the Mahābhārata, to which I replied that I had 'come to think of it first and foremost as a work of literature.' Her resulting scowl told me she was well enough informed to realize I had said something unpalatable to her views—that the *Mahābhārata* was a sacred oral history dating back to a preliterate age. The clarity of my

position surprised me, as would its staying power. I doubt that I would have formulated it that prematurely, had it not been for the need I had to return to the Sanskrit texts while differentiating them in my mind from the vernacular, folk Mahābhārata traditions I had been busy with. Not until 1999, having recently read Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, did I write, 'I believe that the largest inadequacy of *Mahābhārata* scholarship, including my own up to 1991, is simply the failure to appreciate the epic as a work of literature.' By that time, and leading up to my 2001 book, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of Yudhiṣṭhira*, [sic] I was theorizing the Mahābhārata as a dateable written text composed over a short period of time…" (2018b: xii).

- **1992** Publishes "Colonialist Lenses on the South Indian Draupadī Cult."
- **1994** Begins new romantic relationship.
- **1994** Publishes "Epic Studies: Classical Hinduism in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*."
- **1995** Publishes "Dying Before the Mahābhārata War: Martial and Transsexual Body-Building for Arvān̲."
- **1998** Publishes the edited volume *Hair: Its Meaning and Power in Asian Cultures* with foreword by Obeyesekere.
- **1999** Resumes fieldwork in Draupadī temples with Perundevi Srinivasan
- **1999** Publishes *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics.*
- **2000** Publishes "The Primary Process of the Hindu Epics" with the second topography.
- **2001** Publishes *Rethinking the Mahābhārata.*

Let us briefly take note of Hiltebeitel's description of how he first enunciated the short chronology in 1992. Three things stand out to me and mark this episode as a crisis point in which

a new idea seems to surface in the form of a mild self-reproach rather than a fully articulated and consciously argued position. First of all, there is the anti-climactic setting: a sparsely attended lunch talk for a non-academic audience. Second is Hiltebeitel's assessment of his textual research program at the time as "so perilously thin," a retrojected precursor to his 1999 admission that "the largest inadequacy of *Mahābhārata* scholarship, including my own up to 1991 is simply the failure to appreciate the epic as a work of literature" (1999b: 156). Third is the therapeutic-construction-like aspect of the statement: It feels right to him as much because of how it elicits his host's daughter's negative reaction as because of how it seems to resolve some formerly intractable historical problems.

The incident I want to focus on now (which I did not include in the timeline) took place when Hiltebeitel was doing fieldwork among the transgender Kūttāṇṭavar-Aravāṉ devotees called Aravāṉis, or (formerly) Alis. It is worth quoting at length:

> My problem with the Kūttāṇṭavar cult and its Mahābhārata surfaced for the first time in 1982, in the room C. T. Rajan and I had taken at the Rolex Hotel in Villupuram, the hub town near Kuvakkam village, where its Kūttāṇṭavar festival was gearing up for the big ceremonial events that would occur on its sixteenth night and seventeenth day. The Rolex was also popular among Alis who had come to town for the festival, and we hosted several of them in our room for tea, biscuits, and conversation, during which they volunteered to show us how they put on makeup and plaited their hair with strings of jasmine. They urged me to take photographs, which made me wonder if I was being exploitative. But my moment of lasting discomfort came when one Ali, who lingered behind after the others had left, asked if we wanted "to see my" (that is, his/her) "operation." To my surprise, Rajan seemed unfazed by this offer, and turned to me for our answer. But I had felt a chill run down my spine, and responded with a rather too firm "No," judging from the look on our guest's face, who soon collected himself/herself and left. Today, my reaction reminds me of Freud's remark that there is an "unplumbable navel" in every dream beyond which the interpreter cannot go. Freud was talking about a moment in his "specimen dream" of "Irma's Injection." While he was looking into Irma's mouth, he had been reminded of a vagina. But Freud, having looked, was talking about sexual matters he did not want to discuss publicly, not what he did not want to look at.
>
> Rajan and I soon discussed my "No" as an exceptional breach of my loyalty to the anthropologists' credo of participant observation, which it certainly

> was. This was additionally puzzling to me, since I had recently gone so far as to drink a chilled bottle of sticky, foul-tasting orange soda called Kali Cola when it had been offered to me during the raking of the coals to form a fire pit on a sweltering afternoon, resulting in a bout of dysentery. But it was more than a rejection of participant observation, as came home to me in 1990, when the same pattern confronted me, this time in the form of a joke. Lee Weissman, Rajasekharan, and I had been enjoying the night-long sights and sounds of this, my second "eunuch jamboree," as we had come to call the sixteenth night's revelries in which the Alis "have fun" in activities like dancing, magic shows, beauty pageants, and sex in the fields—for which the rate quoted for oral sex was "12 rupees for Indians, 50 for Americans." That rate was not offered seriously, and thus required no decision; and the three of us roared with laughter. But I was reminded of the offer eight years earlier. Both offers had touched the uncomfortable nerve of a latent "unruly homosexuality" (as Freud called his feelings about his friend, Wilhelm Fliess). (2018b: xiii-xiv)

I will make only two observations about this passage. First, it follows a familiar psychoanalytic pattern in which a latent memory is pulled into consciousness through an act of association. Second, Hiltebeitel's comparison of his awkward overreaction to the Ali's offer to Freud's "unplumbable navel" of the dream deserves to be thought through a bit more. In Hiltebeitel's analysis, the Ali's 1982 offer is an actual sexual proposition that he suddenly recalls when laughing about the faux sexual proposition implied in the "50 rupees for Westerners" line because "both offers had touched the uncomfortable nerve of a latent 'unruly homosexuality.'"

But nothing about the 1982 situation as described sounds like a sexual proposition to me, or anything that would account for it having touched an "uncomfortable nerve of latent 'unruly homosexuality.'" Why does the Ali make this offer to Hiltebeitel in front of Rajan? Why does Rajan seem to think Hiltebeitel would be interested? The answer to both questions is clear. It was not a "come-on," but a genuine offer to observe (as Hiltebeitel had already been doing up to that point with their hair-plaiting, makeup routines, etc.) a specific aspect of Ali identity: castration, or at least the scars of a castration. Hiltebeitel's overreaction is pure castration anxiety, hiding in plain sight—or, better yet, disguised as itself. The very next line after this story confirms my

reading: "All this came home to me personally in 1990, because I was experiencing a kind of emasculation, with no woman in my life."

The connection between the 1990 oral sex joke and the 1982 incident cannot therefore have been about "unruly homosexuality." The connection rather lies in the ambiguity of the term "oral sex," which, even if that was not the exact terminology used at the time, is the way Hiltebeitel recalled it. "Oral sex" does not specify either giving or receiving. It can be either. I would suppose that, while laughing at the prospect of paying the fifty rupees, there was at some point a moment of imagining the act itself. It seems likely that he briefly imagined that the Alis were the ones *receiving* oral sex from their clients, since the only reason he would have recalled the 1982 offer to see "the operation" at that moment was that he were imagining, as part of visualizing the joke, being at eye-level with the genital region of an Ali, and seeing what he had refused an offer to see eight years before.

As the timeline above indicates, these two moments (1982 and 1990) of castration anxiety were separated by the death of Hiltebeitel's father. The second moment, or the point at which the first one was called into consciousness, also coincided with the breakdown of a marriage. And it directly preceded the dream of the Draupadī temple, a two-year period of writer's block concerning his research on the Alis, his meeting with Obeyesekere under the auspices of Biardeau, and the putting forward of an ultimately unsatisfactory model of the relationship between regional epic traditions and the Critical Edition, a model that he regarded a decade later as "inchoate" and "romantically subaltern."

The essay that represents this phase of his thinking is "The Folklore of Draupadī: Sārīs and Hair." In it he puts forward an "adjectival metaphor of 'an underground folk Mahābhārata.'"

> It has no prototype outside the Sanskrit text (which can never be assumed to have fallen out of the 'folk epic' frame of reference). If such a folk Mahābhārata exists,

> however, it would seem to be centered on images of the goddess and the control of land. Its lines of transmission and adaptation are too vast to ever trace fully. But those lines that do emerge suggest the crossing of many geographical and linguistic boundaries, and symbols and motifs that recur in a wide spectrum of 'reflexive' and interpenetrating genres: from Mahābhārata vernaculars to folk dramas, from folk dramas to ritual idioms, from ritual idioms to temple tales, from temple tales to sisters' tales, from sisters' tales to regional folk epics, from regional folk epics to Mahābhārata vernacularizations (Hiltebeitel 1991b: 421 quoted in 2000: 35-36).

This "underground folk *Mahābhārata*" functions as a kind of construction in Freud's sense, not the solution to a problem but a way of restarting a stalled analysis, which it does in the subsequent essay, "The Primary Process of the Hindu Epics."

But unlike a Freudian construction, it does so not by bringing memory traces into consciousness, but by raising questions it cannot answer. Hiltebeitel boils these down to four: 1) Where should we begin in understanding the relationship between the regional traditions and the Sanskrit epic? Which is the chicken and which is the egg? 2) Whence comes the new material in these oral traditions? What streams feed into what A. K. Ramanujan described as the "pool of signifiers?" 3) How do we envision the complex development of the oral traditions? 4) How do we move back and forth between the general and the particular? (2000: 36).

The way forward, Hiltebeitel decides, is an appropriation of Freud's "primary process," which was first introduced in 1895's "Project for a Scientific Psychology" and further elucidated in *The Interpretation of Dreams.* Completely unconstrained by temporality or the principle of non-contradiction, the primary process is instead governed by the pleasure principle with the purpose of the immediate discharge of tension through hallucinatory wish fulfilment. In the primary process, libidinal energy is mobile, allowing for displacement, in which one object is replaced by another, and condensation, in which one idea merges with others.[34] But for Hiltebeitel, "[what] is interesting is not so much what Freud posits about the content and

'energies' of primary process but the relation of this process to the 'formation of dreams' through the dream-work." (2011: 37)

The first question Hiltebeitel wants to answer is that of where to begin. "The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, there, 'always already,'" Hiltebietel writes, "have their primacy and first time unreadability precisely in two literary works of culture that exist in Sanskrit" (2011: 40).[35] We always start then, with the Sanskrit Critical Editions, rejecting any prior oral stage of the epic's development.[36]

The second question Hiltebeitel wants to use the primary process to answer is that of what makes up the narrative repository that Ramanujan called the "pool of signifiers," namely, "signifiers that include plots, characters, names, geography, incidents, and relationships" (1991: 46 quoted in Hiltebeitel 2011: 33). For Hiltebeitel, the pool is full of "peopled signifiers:" family members, gurus, ghosts, gods, demons, and talking animals that represent the social matrix of kinship systems, caste, clan, lineage, and tribe.

The third question concerns the description of the developmental patterns of regional epics. Rejecting the linear models of regional epics deifying their heroes and amalgamating them to pan-Indian gods or appropriating Sanskritic tropes to extoll their own unique regional values and identities, Hiltebeitel suggests something far more complex:

> Rather than being translations of the classical epics, regional epics are ruptures from them. It is their discontinuities and dislocations that stand out, and their subversions and inversions are no longer versions but 'aversions…' Primary process images are reworked into them but at a culturally decisive 'symbolic remove.' (2011: 41)

The inversions and subversions common to regional epics, like the elements of dreams, are not bound by the rules of non-contradiction and so they "can be countercultural or non-Brāhmanical

at the same time that they draw from primary storehouses of mainstream Brāhmanical culture" (2011: 41).

The final question is that of the general and the particular. How do we relate the individual retellings in folk epics to the primary process? Here Hiltebeitel draws on Obeyesekere's notion of the "psychic structures of the long run," which the latter describes in his work on Buddhist parricide stories in Sri Lanka like this: "A psychic structure of the long run exercises a hold on the imagination of people because it is *constitutive* of a variety of 'domains' and straddles different, even contradictory, universes of meaning and experience such as those born of psyche, bios, cosmos, and polis" (Obeyesekere 1990: 202, italics in original). Hiltebeitel concludes that, because they tend to express or employ psychic structures of the long run that draw on shared values and meanings to express particular anxieties or wishes, regional epics can be treated as "case studies of primary processes long at work" (2011: 47).

Despite what seem to be a lot of new ideas in this essay, Hiltebeitel's second topography does not differ radically from the first. It still sees the Sanskrit Critical Edition as primary. But the earlier argument that the frozen Sanskrit epic expressed "certain cultural themes, myths, ritual practices, and social norms that are not fully attested historically until 'post-epic' times" (1980: 151) is now more fully elaborated as Hiltebeitel addresses the pool of signifiers, the development of regional epics, and the relationships between these epics and the primary process that produced them. Therefore, my representation of the second topography is much like the first, but with additional terms to represent the various screens, filters, and force fields that shape the symbolic content as it circulates.

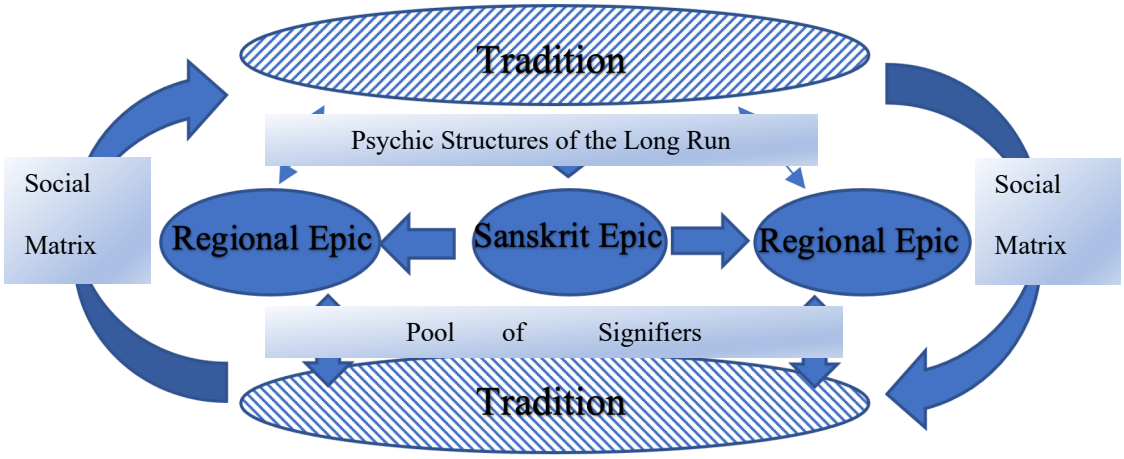

Figure 7. Rendering of Hiltebeitel's Second Topography

It is worthy of note that even as he turns to psychoanalysis to address the unsolvable problems inherent in his topography of the epic, Hiltebeitel repeatedly disavows Freudianism. First, he qualifies what he means by "primary process" in way that places a good number of thinkers between himself and Freud, writing that the idea "comes from Sigmund Freud but through intermediary readings of Victor Turner, Paul Ricoeur, and Gananath Obeyesekere" (2011: 36). Then he insists that he does not "import into this discussion many of the full Freudian implications that this metaphor normally carries" (37). Then he reiterates his ambivalence by contrasting his work to that of Robert Goldman and Jeffrey Masson, whom he describes as "truer Freudians" than him. Finally, he professes his lack of interest in certain elements of Freud's theory. He does so in a passage that only mentions those elements in order to dismiss them. But why mention them at all? Why not leave them out of the essay entirely, which would seem to be the simplest course of action with ideas that do not have any bearing on the argument at hand? These rhetorical devices all demonstrate a resistance that will no longer be a factor by the time of the third topography.

2018: The Third Topography (*"Biography Is Destiny"*)

The preface to *Freud's Mahābhārata* represents a dramatic turnaround in Hiltebeitel's relationship to psychoanalysis. Instead of distancing his ideas from orthodox Freudianism, Hiltebeitel is now using revealing autobiographical details to demonstrate the parallels between his own life and that of Freud. The entire preface bears close reading, but, as in the last section, I will provide some bullet points to set the scene (although one date will need to be revised, as I will explain below)

- **1999-2000:** Begins working alongside Srinivasan with an informant who is an exorcist and participant in the cult of Duryodhana-Periyandavar.
- **2006** Diagnosed with essential tremor with the expectation that it will become Parkinson's.
- **2007** Hiltebeitel's mother is rushed to hospital with a mysterious illness and is subsequently wheelchair-bound.
- **2008** Officially diagnosed with Parkinson's.
- **2008** Publications of Mahadevan's "On the Southern Recension of the Mahābhārata, Brahman Migrations, and Brāhmī Paleography" and Wulff Alanso's *Grecia en la India: El reportorio griego del Mahābhārata* [*Greece and India: The Mahābhārata's Greek Repertoire*].
- **2010** Serves as a reader on my dissertation in which André Green's Dead Mother Complex plays a prominent role.
- **2011** Publications of *Reading the Fifth Veda* and *When the Goddess Was a Woman*, two volumes of Hiltebeitel's essays edited by Adluri and Bagchee.

- **2012** Begins work on Freud project: "The first chapter written for the whole study, about three dead mother stories in the *Mahābhārata*, is now chapter 3 of *Freud's Mahābhārata*. But both books have been impacted by André Green's article 'The Dead Mother,' which is about an imago that has been constituted in the child's mind, following maternal depression, brutally transforming a living object, which was a source of vitality for the child, into a different figure, one who may eventually give the patient 'the feeling that a malediction weighs upon him that there is no end to his dead mother's dying…' I started work on the project in the fall of 2012, and I soon began to announce the book in publications as 'forthcoming,' with 'Uncanny Domesticities' as part of the title, giving name to a trope that ran through early chapters as applied to Freud, Bose, and the Goddess" (2018a: xv).
- **2014** Death of Hiltebeitel's mother: "My mother's death in June 2014 was to me a surprise, since I had decided she would live to 104[37], and that we would have more time to grow alike in our senility, like Molloy and his mother in Samuel Beckett's trilogy. I was in Colombia when I received the news that she was losing consciousness, and I decided not to go back. She was with Simon, who was overseeing her last shift from assisted living to hospice care. I urged him to follow up on his plans to come with his wife and two girls to Colombia to join me and my wife the next day, and leave her with Adam. She died holding Adam's hand soon after Simon and his family had gotten to Colombia. Through all this, I was prepared by Freud's biography to recall that he did not mourn his mother's death, felt no grief over it, and did not attend her funeral. Freud, too, had the fear that his mother, who died at ninety-five, would outlive him. More than this, I

believe that my mother's grip on things was not unlike that of Amalia Freud as Freud and her grandchildren knew her" (2018a: xiii-xiv).

- **2016** Publishes *Nonviolence in the Mahābhārata.*
- **2017** Retires from GWU and converts to Catholicism.
- **2018** Publishes *Freud's India* and *Freud's Mahābhārata.*
- **2020** Completes *World of Wonders* while living in Colombia.

There are a few obvious themes in the timeline above: Hiltebeitel's difficult relationship with his mother, his declining health, and his deepening engagement with psychoanalysis. Equally important in the development of the third topography were the publications of Mahadevan's "On the Southern Recension of the Mahābhārata" and Wulff Alanso's *Grecia en la India.* Hiltebeitel took Mahadevan's evidence for the fairly quick composition of the substantially expanded Southern recension of the epic by a group of Pūrvaśikhā Brahmins from the Kuru-Pañcāla region as an historical example of the kind of Brahmin atelier that he argues composed the *Mahābhārata* itself between 300 and 100 BCE. Wulff Alanso's scholarship also reshaped his view of the epic's historical development in ways I will explain in the next section.

But most of the changes reflected in Hiltebeitel's third topography, I would argue, happened below the level of conscious thought, which Hiltebeitel seems to tacitly acknowledge in the preface to *Freud's India* when he justifies the inclusion of his autobiographical vignettes in the books: "I tell such stories after much thought and vacillation because I lived with them, and recalled many more like them, as this book took shape, and I feel that it is a fuller and more honest book thereby" (2018a: xv). This paragraph from the preface to *Freud's Mahābhārata* also speaks to the level of free association that went into writing the book in which his new theory of the epic came to him "like a bolt from the blue" (2018b: 265):

> Now, I am aware that there is risk these days in highlighting myth. Interpretation of myth no longer has the caché or urgency it had among psychoanalysts in Freud's time, but that is the time this book recalls. As Bernard This says, "Freud is not a mythographer. . . . In studying the productions of the unconscious, and the fantasms that recall these ancient stories that Hellenists translate, Freud had known to produce what was significant from his familial constellation." Up through chapter 5, when I make points about myth, it may seem at times to Freud-attuned readers that in imagining Freud's and Bose's responses to material with which I can only sometimes demonstrate their familiarity, that I risk imputing a free association with Indian myth to them. Although I also bring in other methods to the study of Indian myths, I would not discourage that impression. (2018b: xvii)

This brings me to a passage that stood out to me when I first read *Freud's Mahābhārata* in 2018:

> This two-book project began with the research and initial draft of this chapter, and with a debt to Diane Jonte-Pace. In about 1994 I read her 1993 review of feminist writings on the pre-Oedipal, and that prepared me to be interested some years later when, as I was preparing for a class on Freud in my "Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion" course, I discovered her 1996 article "At Home in the Uncanny: Freudian Representations of Death, Mothers, and the Afterlife." That was in the fall of 2012, and for this whole project the rest followed. Jonte-Pace's article works with three texts about dead mothers, and so will this chapter. In writing it, I was attempting to see whether Jonte-Pace's accounts of an "undeveloped" "non-Oedipal counterthesis" in Freud's scattered treatments of mothers, death, dead mothers, matricide, the hereafter, and the uncanny could illumine the *Mahābhārata*. (2018b: 55)

At the time I read the above passage, I was working on revising my 2010 dissertation, "Headless Mothers, Magic Cows, and Lakes of Blood: The Paraśurāma Cycle in the *Mahābhārata* and Beyond." It stood out to me because, in his detailed recounting of the events that led to writing that initial draft of the chapter, Hiltebeitel leaves out that he had previously read about André Green's Dead Mother Complex in that very dissertation, which uses Green extensively in its discussion of the story of Rāma Jāmadagnya and Reṇukā.[38]

Hiltebeitel recounts that he first discovered Jonte-Pace in 1994, but did not discover her 1996 work until 2012, which marked the beginning of his project. But the actual year in which

he discovered the 1996 article and also taught Freud in "Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion" was 2010, a fact I know because it was then that he sent a PDF of the Jonte-Pace article to me in an email with the subject line, "an article that reminded me of your thesis."

A few months after I got my PhD, he had kindly given me the job of editing the *Oxford Bibliographies in Hinduism* entry for "Rāma Jāmadagnya/Paraśurāma," with a stipend attached. After that, though, I did not publish anything coming from the dissertation. Instead, I started writing an entirely different book for a series that had offered me a badly needed and significantly larger stipend. In 2013, when that book was ready for publication, I asked him for a blurb. The one he gave me was:

> This is a surprising and stimulating book, most surprising as a first book. Rather than revise his dissertation on Paraśurāma, Collins has elected to look at Hinduism through a number of its back windows. No book has gone so far in exploring the sum of shadowy figures who embody the self-deconstructive potential of the sacrifice after which violence and scapegoating are modeled. The total effort is innovative and gratifying, and the back windows are eye-opening.

I took issue with the blurb in that I did not see the need for him to say anything about the book I had *not* written. I asked him through the publisher to remove that passage and he refused, saying that he felt strongly that it should stay in. But he did send a longer version of the blurb that he now wanted me to use.

> This is a surprising and stimulating book, most surprising as a first book. Rather than revise his dissertation on Paraśurāma, Collins has elected to look at Hinduism through a number of its back windows. No book has gone so far in exploring the sum of shadowy figures who embody the self-deconstructive potential of the sacrifice after which violence and scapegoating are modeled. <u>That Collins chooses to do so through questions raised by René Girard and through neo-Vedānta as the end of the sacrifice (*yajñānta*), will be contested, as will his understanding of the *Mahābhārata* as a work of centuries rather than a literary masterpiece of a short period of composition alive with the contradictions or juxtapositions he finds there. But the total effort is innovative and gratifying, and the back windows are eye-opening</u>. (my emphasis)

At that point I decided to quit while I was behind. Clearly, he was disappointed both in my failure to come around to his short chronology and in my failure to publish the dissertation that he had read (as well as, apparently, certain aspects of my argument). It seems likely to me now that Hiltebeitel's subsequent forgetting of my dissertation in a work filled with detailed recollections of the past was a symptom of that disappointment, part of what Freud so astutely called the psychopathology of everyday life. But it also pushes the timeline for the Freud project back a full two years, since he traces its beginning to the "Theories and Methods in the Study of Religion" he taught at GWU and his reading of the Jonte-Pace article.

I was frankly surprised but very gratified when GWU contacted me in November of 2017 and said that Alf had requested that they ask me to come and give a talk at his retirement celebration in Washington, D.C. with Norman Girardot and Perundevi Srinivasan. After the retirement talk, we resumed a sporadic online communication that had fallen off since I got my position at Ohio University.[39] In March of 2019 I was finally working on the Paraśurāma book and I sent him an email with the subject line "The Dead Mother Complex for Alf." Attached was a revision of a chapter of my 2010 dissertation containing a long analysis of the Reṇukā story based on Green's Dead Mother Complex.

He replied with an email that read "Brian, [Thanks] for sending this! I just read it with scales falling from my eyes." It may be significant that Hiltebeitel, who tells us in the preface to *Freud's India* that he "converted to Roman Catholicism during the writing of this book" (2018a: xiv) was using a Biblical allusion to the conversion of the Jewish Saul into the Christian Paul in Acts 9.[40] But I still do not know exactly what he meant for me to understand by it.

The Greek Source Hypothesis and the Return of the Indo-European Repressed

Now we will look more closely at the "new theory of the epic" inspired by *Moses and Monotheism* that presents us with the third topography:

> In pursuing Freud's point in *Moses and Monotheism* that religious traditions should be studied from what has shaped their past unconsciously, including repressed trauma that affects historical memory, my new theory of the *Mahābhārata* focuses on its central myth, which seems to have intensified a Greek source. I argue that the myth's strength in India comes from what I have called an urban unconscious, which for Brahmanism was traumatic. An urban unconscious may not convince everyone, but it is needed to explain the lack of memory about the rise of cities during India's second urbanization, and it fits the known facts about village Brahmanism, goddesses, and cities. That is, it allows for a fit between the history of the second urbanization as we can reconstruct it and the myth of the Earth's unburdening, with the Earth's own crisis paralleled by the experiences of the epic's chief heroines. If, as I suggest, this myth functions as a screen through which still older memories would not pass, it weakens arguments for an ancient oral *Mahābhārata* going back to "Vedic" times. Yet[,] as with Freud's Judaism, what is unconscious and repressed returns as something positive—not as monotheism, however, but as a polytheistic Vedic past in which Vedic divinities are constantly being upstaged by Viṣṇu, Śiva, Brahmā, and the Goddess, the new post-ṚgVedic gods of bhakti who set Kṛṣṇa to the task of relieving the Earth's burden. The *Mahābhārata* story is thus the "recovered memory" of a Vedic past just as it is a return of partially unconscious and forgotten meanings about that past. (2018b: 262-263).

Whereas in the former sections I provided a visual rendering of each topography after my explanation, I will do the opposite here, placing the image directly below and then explaining how I have used it to represent the argument presented in *Freud's Mahābhārata*.

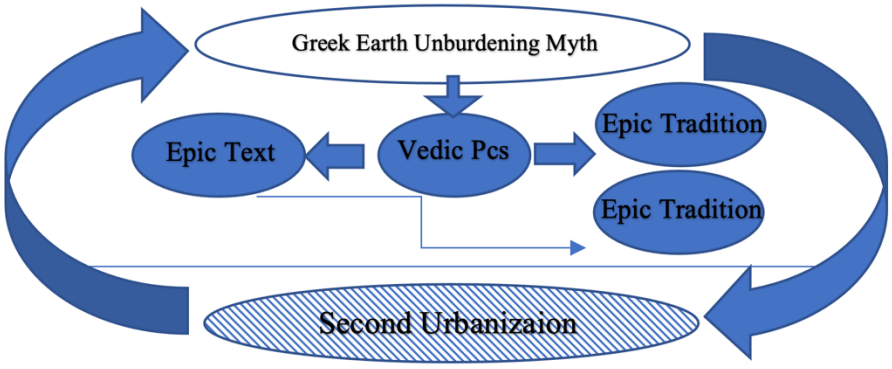

Figure 8. Rendering of Hiltebeitel's Third Topography

Hiltebeitel's second topography was an elaboration of the first, but this third topography presents a real departure, as one look at the top of the figure will demonstrate. First, Hiltebeitel has made something of a return to the earlier ideas of Dumézil by following Wulff Alanso's argument that the main story of the epic is based on the Greek eschatological myth of the Trojan War.[41] Crucially, the Greek source is described as a "repertoire" consisting of the source material for the Greek Epic (or Theban or Trojan) Cycle, of which only Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* remain intact. In Wulff Alanso's argument, much of the emphasis is placed on the *Cypria*, an epic poem only known through fragments and summaries. As the first epic in the cycle, the *Cypria* gives a background for the destructions of Thebes and Troy. Hiltebeitel explains:

> In each epic (and epic tradition), a divine plan is set in motion long before the war. In the Greek case, texts close to the *Iliad* in time (Hesiod, the *Odyssey*, the *Cypria*) add range to that epic's "Plan of Zeus." It becomes Zeus's secret. Zeus undertakes it to bring about the Unburdening of the Earth after he agrees to do so with the earth goddess Gaia, and deliberates with Themis, the "divine embodiment of the natural order," in whom Wulff sees a similarity to dharma. In India, the *Mahābhārata* text tells that the "secret of the gods" (*devaguhyam*) or "work of the gods" (*devakārya*) involves the gods' plan, endorsed by Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva, and known by Indra, for Viṣṇu to descend to earth as Kṛṣṇa to relieve the Earth's burden of overpopulation… The *Cypria* interprets the Trojan War as "the story of an announced annihilation not only of Troy but of an entire generation of heroes." (2018b: 95)

Wulff Alanso does not really address the pre-history of Greco-Indian contact and more or less sidesteps Dumézil, but he does acknowledge that "the contemporary scholar who has made the most contributions to our field of study, N. J. Allen, is a Dumezilian" (2014: 29).[42] In his final work, *Arjuna-Odysseus: Shared Heritage in Indian and Greek Epic*, Allen pursued a comparison of the *Odyssey* and the *Mahābhārata* to establish the presence in the Sanskrit epics of what he judged Dumézil to have identified as a "quantity of IE heritage that bypassed the Vedas and can be demonstrated only by comparison" (Allen 2020: 5).[43]

Wulff Alanso himself argues for historically attested cultural contact as an explanation for the presence of Greek themes in the Sanskrit epics rather than claims of shared Indo-European cultural patterns. But the two claims are not incompatible. To better understand this, let us look at David Gordon White's recent analysis of the *Mahāvaṃsa*, an epic history of Sri Lanka composed in Pali by the fifth- or sixth-century Buddhist monk Mahānāma, in which the prince Vijaya's encounter with the sorceress Kuvaṇṇā almost exactly parallels Odysseus's encounter with Circe in the *Iliad.*[44]

In *The Ritual of Battle,* Hiltebeitel had looked at this same episode and connected the *Mahāvaṃsa* story to the theme of Indo-European sovereignty defied as a goddess that the hero must win as his bride or consort. But White identifies the core of the story behind *both* epic episodes as an Indo-European protomyth of an encounter between a hero and a "dæmon," as he calls it, at the grove or pond for which it serves as a *genius loci.*

> While direct borrowing is a near certainty, given that Mahānāma's account is a virtual palimpsest of Homer's far older version, I believe that both tales also issued from a common stock of narratives fully as ancient as the archaic language that was the source of Homer's Greek and Mahānāma's Pali. Then, in the wake of the Alexandrian Conquest, the opening of overland and maritime trade routes between the Mediterranean world and Inner, South, and East Asia set the stage for a sort of "second act" in the transmission of words, stories, and material culture. In other words, Mahānāma was motivated to "translate" the Circe episode into a South Asian vernacular not only because it was a ripping good story, but also because he found it strangely familiar when he first came upon it. (White 2020: 137)

There is a striking resemblance between White's argument for Mahānāma's reception of the Homeric story as "strangely familiar" (uncannily familiar?) and the psychoanalytic model of symptom formation. Freud's formula for the development of a neurosis is represented by Hiltebeitel as "the impact of early trauma, defense, outbreak of neurosis, and partial return of the repressed" (2018b: 204). In this comparison, the trauma is the original story, the defense (not so

much because it defends against any threat as because it serves to "wall off" a past experience) is the dispersal of Indo-European culture with its attendant forgetting of the past, the neurosis is the renewed contact of the now distant cultural cousins, and the return of the repressed is the introduction of the Kuvaṇṇā episode into the *Mahāvaṃsa*.

In Hiltebeitel's third topography, the early trauma is the second urbanization of South Asia, the defense is the adoption of Vedic orthodoxy with its exclusion of the urban, the outbreak of neurosis is the period of uncertainty in which the "out-of-sorts" Brahmins composed the epic and were in contact with Greek culture, and the return of the repressed is the destructive Mahābhārata war, modeled on the older idea of the destruction of Thebes and Troy. Adding White's model of a Proto-Indo-European linguistic monogenesis combined with millennia of cultural differentiation and the circulation of people and ideas, we could also add here a Jungian "collective unconscious" in the form of the cultural substrate that informed both the Greek Epic Cycle and the Veda.

The Vedic Preconscious, the Urban Unconscious, the Epic, and the Tradition

In my rendering of the third topography, I have the Greek source being absorbed into a blue circle labeled "Vedic Pcs [preconscious]." As the system in Freud's topography that separates the conscious and the unconscious, the preconscious operates according to the secondary process, which demands "unity, connection, and intelligibility" (SE XIII: 95 quoted in Silber 1973: 54). The systematization of the Veda in the late Vedic period and its subsequent associations with order, grammar, and inalterability make it particularly well suited to serve as the preconscious system. So too does its mnemonic component, since the preconscious contains material that is unconscious but can be made conscious by an act of recall.

The preconscious acts a selective censor, not unlike the scribes Robert Eisler claimed were altering the text of Josephus to remove any trace of the Semitic features and political aspirations of Jesus. Describing the censoring function of this Vedic preconscious, Hiltebeitel writes,

> [Having] noted that the Mahābhārata casts itself as occurring in a vague Vedic time, earlier than the second urbanization, I posit that the Unburdening of the Earth myth is a screen or filter through which the epic's reality effects and uncanny fictions are projected back into the older Vedic past. As a screen, it marks off anything prior to the second urbanization as what I call "Vedic allusion" rather than history, and it implies that the epic story has been built on top of an "urban unconscious." (2018b: 259)

This idea of the Urban Unconscious is represented in the topography by a solid line separating it from everything above. It is effectively blocked out by the Vedic screen memory, which serves as the ersatz past. In Hiltebeitel's view, the mistake made by scholars from Hopkins to Fitzgerald (as well as by his host's unamused daughter at the Śiva-Viṣṇu temple in Maryland), has been to take a fantasy literally.

Hiltebeitel also has a model that gives his description of the proximate trauma that re-activated the repressed trauma of the Urban Unconscious at the time of the epic's composition:

> I interpret the Earth's overpopulation against the background of India's second urbanization, which could have been strongly felt well before Aśoka, but also later than Aśoka for it to take hold as the myth in the epic: a development that confronted the older rural and village-based Vedic Brahminism with a trauma that the epic poets reflect upon not only in the cataclysmic slaughter that relieves Earth's burden on the epic's battlefield but also in the poets' proliferated tales exalting forest-based gleaners. (2018b: 259)

In the topography, the Unburdening Myth and the Vedic Preconscious are in a mutually constitutive relationship, even though the latter acts as a screen blocking out the former. The Vedic Preconscious functions not only as a censor but as a screen memory, creating an idealized Vedic past. But that idealized Vedic past is only the setting for the actual screen memory, which

is drawn from the plot of the Greek Earth Unburdening Myth. This raises a new problem: How do we conceptualize the absorption of the Greek Earth Unburdening Myth into the Vedic Preconscious in light of the shared Indo-European substrate? The Greek repertoire that served as source material for Homer and the *Cypria* is older than classical Greece, possibly brought in from the Eurasian steppe by the Myceneans and/or composed under the influence of Near Eastern and Egyptian culture, with which they had strong economic and cultural ties. Whatever the specifics, the story originated in the same network of Eurasian contacts overlaid on a demonstrably monogenetic language family-area that also contained the (linguistically non-Indo-European) Indus Valley and certainly the Vedic proto-kingdoms. Were certain elements of the myth "strangely familiar" to the epic authors in the same way that the story of Circe appeared to Mahānāma some centuries later in Sri Lanka? These are questions that can be taken up at a different time.

Having looked at the Vedic Preconscious and the Urban Unconscious which it blocks out, it now remains to incorporate the elements of the epic text and tradition into the topography. Here we do not depart too much from the earlier topographies. The Sanskrit epic is the Conscious system (and a neurotic one) with the epic tradition, including regional cult practices and vernacular epics, existing as ruptures through which symbolic forms can be transformed, elaborated, and circulated in the same way as they do in the second topography.

The details of this process are what Hiltebeitel is trying to understand through his contemporaneous fieldwork with participants in South Indian Mahābhārata cults. One such participant, with whom Hiltebeitel and Srinivasan first began working with since 1999 or 2000, was an exorcist and a participant in the cult of Duryodhana-Periyandavar who had lost his father. As I was finishing this essay, Srinivasan kindly shared with me something Hiltebeitel wrote

about this man that looked at his story alongside Freud's 1923 historical case study, "A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis."

Freud's case study concerns an artist, Christoph Haitzmann, who cannot resume painting after the death of his father and is driven to make a pact with the Devil to break through his artists' block. But later, after suffering through convulsive bouts of demonic possession, Haitzmann prays to the Virgin Mary to dissolve the pact with Satan and set him free. Likewise, the exorcist, after his own father dies, goes through a period of worry over his livelihood until he makes an accommodation with the demonic Duryodhana. But instead of praying to the Virgin Mary for help, he invokes Draupadī to "keep the accommodation with Duryodhana under control" (Hitlebeitel, unpublished manuscript). Acknowledging the differences between the cases, Hiltebeitel goes on use Freud's observations about Haitzmann to raise some questions about the case of the exorcist.

It is unclear whether this ethnographic collaboration between Hiltebeitel and Srinivasan will be published, but even this cursory description of it evokes the psychoanalytic ethnography of Obeyesekere. Working within his third topography, Hiltebeitel is finally able to fruitfully integrate Obeyesekere's influence with his revised understanding of the *Mahābhārata*, and specifically the ways in which the tradition requires the active participation of devotees, working through their own traumas through its symbolic repertoire. There are, I think, obvious parallels here with Freud's work, in which a revised understanding of repression in individual neuroses was inextricable from a revised understanding of the origins of monotheism, and (perhaps even more so) with Eisler's work, in which contemporary visions of Jesus were psychoanalyzed and interpreted as directly related to his ongoing excavation of Jesus from the Josephus text.

In all three cases, the full meaning of a historical text is only made explicable through 1) an explanation of the trauma surrounding its present-day reception, 2) a "construction," launched from within the traumas and crises of the present moment, of its original context and meaning, that is then 3) checked against the reactions provoked by that construction, all with the aim of 4) recapitulating the partially conscious social feedback loop through which a crisis text takes on meaning.

To conclude this section, Hiltebeitel's third topography is, to me, the most compelling statement of his short chronology of the epic to date. His deep dive into Freud's life and work has proved to be remarkably productive and revitalizing. As evidence, when he was finishing the Freud books, Hiltebeitel was also able to produce *World of Wonders* in only eleven months. Not only is this book the most rapidly produced in his career, it also represents yet another fresh look at the epic. Hiltebeitel argues this time that the primary aesthetic experience of the *Mahābhārata* is *adbhuta* ("wonder") and that the text is meant to dazzle the reader with spectacular, almost cinematic, imagery, and thereby impart its philosophical, political, and theological teachings. He further suggests that the prevalence of *adbhuta* in the text is evidence of a literary theory of *rasa* common to both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* that comes three or four centuries before the concept appears in the philosophical aesthetic tradition.

Conclusion: Epic Constructions

In the introduction to *Non-Violence in the Mahābhārata*, Hiltebeitel reproduces this haunting sonnet by Keats:

> When I have fears that I may cease to be
> Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
> Before high piled books, in charact'ry,
> Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;

> When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
> Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
> And think that I may never live to trace
> Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
> And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
> That I shall never look upon thee more,
> Never have relish in the faery power
> Of unreflecting love!—then on the shore
> Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
> Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

As the poem so beautifully tells us, two things can make a scholar consider his mortality. The first is a shelf full of books, for he cannot know if there is time enough to read them all.[45] The second is a head full of ideas, for he cannot know if there is time enough to express them all. Over the course of his life (I do not say "career"), Hiltebeitel has combined these two challenges, meeting the immensity of the *Mahābhārata* on his shelf[46] with the immensity, in terms of both volume and ideas, of his scholarly output. That is really the gist of the argument I have tried to make here.

Over the course of writing this paper, which bears little resemblance to what I set out to do, the two Freud books from 2018 took an increasingly central role in my analysis to the point that this paper started to resemble them in its format. Now, at its completion, I can see that the first half of the paper, the *upākhyāna,* recapitulates the aims of *Freud's India*. It attempts to add new context to the development of Freud's ideas in order to reassess their place among the major 20th century theories of religion and the study of ancient texts. Likewise, the second half of the paper has come to resemble *Freud's Mahābhārata* in its use of biography and its focus on theory-building and historical periodization. This was mostly an unintentional resemblance, but to the extent that it serves as an homage to Hiltebeitel's epic scholarship, I am happy about it.

After writing so much about rethinking the *Mahābhārata*, in the Freud books Hiltebeitel rethinks how to study the *Mahābhārata*. As we have seen, both Hiltebeitel's short chronology

and his new theory of the epic both came as sudden realizations in periods of crisis and as attempts to reconcile the particulars he encountered doing anthropological fieldwork with the historically constituted shared meaning of the Sanskrit epic. In taking Freud's "crisis text" *Moses and Monotheism* as his model for reading the crisis text that is the epic, Hiltebeitel also gives us an opportunity to recover the intertextuality of Freud's late work and recognize its often misunderstood place in the genealogy of religious studies.

Freud's last three works were similarly concerned with reconciling the problematic particulars of therapeutic case studies with his general theory of culture. This happened at a period in which the rise of the Third Reich was threatening to destroy his life and legacy. It also happened as he found his own methodology transformed and returned to him in the work of Robert Eisler, a somewhat strident Jewish scholar who was being publicly excoriated by some and praised by others for his intentionally provocative construction of Jesus as a Jewish rebel. This construction may not have been accurate, but it did reveal just how scandalous Jesus's Jewishness was to many Christians. In Eisler's construction, we see the roots of the psychoanalytic construction, introduced to jump-start a stalled analysis, but leading to a new insight that the truth *in* the narrative is as important as the truth *behind* the narrative.

During Hiltebeitel's Freud project, the parallels between his and Freud's intellectual journeys would have become clearer to him and even surfaced into consciousness as he read Richard Bernstein's *Freud and the Legacy of Moses*, which likewise explores Freud's crises at the time he was writing that book. Seeing his own life and work in terms of Freud's life and work led Hiltebeitel to actualize the psychoanalytic framework that had been part of his thinking on the epic since 1980 and arrive at his most compelling and original assessment of the *Mahābhārata* to date.

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[1] See Figure 1.

[2] As of this writing, Rajagopalan 2020 is the exception, concluding:

> Hiltebeitel… offers readers a radical reimagination of the role played by the trauma of the urban space, that affected or underscored the compilation of the Mahābhārata by unknown brahmins in the early centuries of the Common Era. In doing so, the author invokes Freud's essay on *Moses and Monotheism*, using its argument of underlying trauma in the constitution of religious traditions, to advance their claims. As such, the book sticks to its pointillist tone, perhaps forcing this reader to consider whether the work is aptly named at all. Indeed, one would not be remiss in reading the work as "Hiltebeitel on Freud and the Mahābhārata," nor find oneself in an erroneous position by saying that the work is less about Freud and more about its author and his reading of the Mahābhārata itself. Freud haunts the critique like a lingering scent but adds little weight to a work that is carried by the incisive and thoughtful interpretation given by Hiltebeitel.

I have a different interpretation of Freud's importance to this book and Hiltebeitel's work in general, as I hope to show here.

[3] Eisler does actually write about the epic, citing Deussen, in his 1910 two-volume masterwork on ancient cosmology, *Weltenmantel und Himmelszelt: Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Urgeschichte des antiken Weltbildes* [*World Cloak and Sky Canopy: Religious-Historical Investigations on the Prehistory of the Ancient Worldview*] (vol 2, 499-500).

[4] It is noteworthy that in the letter cited, Freud immediately goes from "more important things connected with it must of course remain unsaid" to the "brief technical essay" that was most likely "Analysis Terminable and Interminable."

[5] For quotations from Freud, I will use the Standard Edition, noting the volume and page number,

[6] As Press and others have noted, Freud used construction (both the term and the practice) in the famous cases of the Wolf Man and the Rat Man, but did not designate it as a psychoanalytic concept until 1937 (see Press 2011).

[7] This is likely, at least in part, to have been a response to the deeply sick cultural moment in which Freud found himself in his final years. But, as Marsha Hewitt has observed, more generally, "it is not the case that Freud's writings on religion can be hived off from the rest of his psychoanalytic theory" (2020: 9).

[8] It is hard not to read "[a]t the present day, the only defensive mechanism to which the official censorship could resort would be to confiscate and destroy every copy of the whole edition" as anything other than a reference to the Nazi book burnings of 1933, in which Freud's own books were burned, as well as a foreshadowing of the ones that would soon take place in Austria (e.g., April 30, 1938, in Salzburg). Herein also lies one of many links between this essay and *Moses and Monotheism*, the chief inspiration for Hiltebeitel's Freudian reading of the *Mahābhārata.* As

Gilad Sharvit and Karen S. Feldman note in the introduction to *Freud and Monotheism: Moses and the Violent Origins of Religion,* "Freud began to work on *Moses and Monotheism* the summer of 1934, only a year after his works were added to the Nazi list of blacklisted books and burnt in the great fire that portended the dark times to come" (1).

[9] See Figure 1.

[10] See Figure 2.

[11] On "Higher" and "Lower" criticism see Adluri and Bagchee 2018.

[12] For a general overview of his life, work, and significance, see my *The Magic of the Combinatory Mind: The Forgotten Life of 20th Century Austrian Polymath Robert Eisler*. London (Palgrave Pivot, 2021) and my podcast "A Very Square Peg: A Podcast About Robert Eisler," (New Books Network, 2020, https://newbooksnetwork.com/category/nbn-special-series/very-square-peg/). For a discussion of the Josephus controversy, see my "By Post or by Ghost: Ruminations on Visions and Epistolary Archives," *Jewish Quarterly Review* Vol. 107, No. 3 (Summer 2017), 393-404. One episode that gives a sense of the man and his life bears mentioning here: In 1938, the year after Freud cited him in his essay, Eisler found a long-sought way out of Nazi-controlled Vienna when he was elected to the Wilde Readership in Comparative and Natural Religion at Oxford. Unfortunately, Eisler was arrested and sent to Dachau before he could take it up. After fifteen months in Dachau and Buchenwald, he made it to Oxford to find that that in his absence the administration had appointed the Anglo-Catholic philosopher and historian of religions E.O. James to the readership. Furthermore, James was refusing to leave the three-year post as Eisler was originally assured that he would (since "no Englishman would seek to profit from such a situation," he was told with confidence). Without employment, Eisler was soon confined by the British in a refugee camp on the Isle of Man. At the British camp, he was at least free to visit museums and give lectures to his fellow detainees. One of them described Eisler as a "great nuisance, insisting on the best hour and room for lectures and so on" but averred that "his lectures were about the most interesting he had ever heard" (See Collins 2021b: 107).

[13] Josephus had been a general who fought against the Romans in Galilee during the First Jewish–Roman War. But he surrendered to a Roman commander named Vespasian and was imprisoned for two years, during which time he had a divine revelation that Vespasian would become emperor. When his prediction unexpectedly came true, Vespasian released him and Josephus became an advisor to the emperor's son, Titus, who would succeed his father as the second emperor of the Flavian dynasty (see Goodman 2019: 1–7).

[14] They are called "Parthians, Babylonians, and the most remote tribes of Arabia, with our countrymen beyond the Euphrates and the inhabitants of Adiabene" in H. St. John Thackeray's famous translation (1966: 80).

[15] Eisler's argument was based partially on what he identified as "aramaicisms" in the text, like the use of the word *maglavije* for "whip," derived from the Aramaic *maglab,* which has no cognates in either Greek or Slavonic (Josephus et al. 2003: 41).

[16] Eisler very likely saw his own scientific mind reflected in Josephus's commitment to historical accuracy. As evidence, we can look at a letter he wrote in 1930 to Robert Whitehead, a yoga-practicing, mystically minded "man of business" whose vision of Christ Eisler was attempting to psychoanalyze by mail. Before introducing the ideas about homoeroticism Freud had developed with his early collaborator Wilhelm Fliess (Eisler provided a footnote in his letter to Whitehead announcing

> Science is now convinced that all men are bi-sexual beings and that male and female individuals are not absolutely different, as ignorance would have us believe, but polar types with an infinite variety of transitions between them. Nobody is absolutely 'normal' in sexual matters, the word 'normal' being itself a conventional word devoid of objective meaning. It is not a defect or a vice to have these or those particular feelings in this respect, only the fools and fanatics, who make our laws and would have us believe, that there are divine reasons for making such idiotic laws and social conventions, think that they know better.

Eisler prefaced his remarks by asking Whitehead to remember "the old adage that 'science has no heart'" (Eisler 1930b).

[17] About Eisler himself, the art historian Aby Warburg's wife Mary wrote to her husband after Eisler's 1922 lecture on Orphic religion at the Bibliothek Warburg, that he looked "very Jewish" but acknowledged that a thing like that "could not be helped" (Warburg 1922). His sometimes-friend Gershom Scholem wrote of him: "Gentiles were made uneasy by his markedly Jewish appearance, and the Jews by his apostasy" (1980: 43).

[18] One letter (who also identified himself as a fallen angel trapped on the earthly plane who wrote from first-hand experience) described Jesus as

> a very handsome man who bore himself very upright. He was clean shaved with tender sweet lips, a delicately chiseled nose while his face was round

> though bearing the slight oval shape of the patrician, he looked to be: the face was even proud in its quiet celestial beauty whose striking charms were softened and wonderfully sweetened by the soft tender beauty of his clear lovely eyes, his brow was neither too high nor too broad, softened as it was by the clinging abundance of his waving hair. He was about the middle height of a healthy man yet in his striking appearance one thing stood out and that was a special roundness of the outstanding chest and the breadth of the shoulders which gave him the appearance of a person of great strength—great physical strength and he walked with the alert carriage and carried himself with the air of a competent very much alive man of business. (Quoted in Collins 2021b:67)

[19] Notably, Eisler treated higher criticism with hostility and derision. In his 1938 book on the Gospel of John, he disparagingly described the arch-heretic Marcion—remembered for attempting to purge the Hebrew Bible from the Christian canon—as a "Pontic dreamer and schemer" who "decided to pirate and to force into his service the Gospel of Luke… and the Epistles of Paul—two Apostles who were dead and safely buried and thus unable to protest against the arbitrary proceedings of this fantastic patron-saint of the wildest 19th-century 'Higher Criticism'" (Eisler 1938b: 211).

[20] In 1930 he wrote to Whitehead: "You were probably subconsciously offended at the 'coldly objective description of Jesus' reproduced by Mr. [G.R.S.] Mead on p. 34 [of *The Quest*]. A powerful wish to see Jesus' glorified self with your own eyes developed in your subconscious mind…" (Quoted in Collins 2021b: 87).

[21] No one who has read the astonishingly self-revelatory thirteen vignettes in the preface to *Freud's India* (2018a: x-xiv) will miss the implication here that one could profitably compare the scholarly biographies of Freud, Eisler, and Hiltbeitel.

[22] He did meet Jung at Eranos in 1935 (see Collins 2021b: 84-85).

[23] In 1926's "The Question of Lay Analysis" Freud had already written:

> [W]e do not consider it at all desirable for psycho-analysis to be swallowed up by medicine and to find its last resting-place in a text-book of psychiatry under the heading 'Methods of Treatment'…As a 'depth-psychology', a theory of the mental unconscious, it can become indispensable to all the sciences which are concerned with the evolution of human civilization and its major institutions such as art, religion and the social order. It has already, in my opinion, afforded these sciences considerable help in solving their problems. But these are only small contributions compared with what might be achieved if historians of civilization, psychologists of religion, philologists and so on would agree themselves to handle the new instrument of research which is at their service. The use of analysis for the treatment of the neuroses is only one of its applications; the future will perhaps show that it is not the most important one. (247)

[24] As a Jew who was denied a chair at Heidelberg in 1926 because of his race (and who would later suffer imprisonment in Dachau and Buchenwald by the Nazis and lose his brother Otto in the Maly Trostenets death camp) Eisler was an avowed enemy of the rising tide of anti-Semitism that was making Freud's life in Vienna miserable. And while he can be called an anti-clerical writer, that term does not necessarily translate to "anti-Catholic" (another prejudice common to some higher critics). Eisler was in fact an agnostic who converted to Catholicism in order to marry the baroness "Lili" Von Pausinger. He was also an admirer and acquaintance of the priest Alfred Loisy, excommunicated by Pius X in 1908 for his humanist views and best known for the line, "*Jésus annonçait le Royaume et c'est l'Église qui est venue* [Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom, and what arrived was the Church]."

[25] This (literal) footnote illustrates the point: In 1943 Friedrich Murawski, a priest who had risen through the ranks of the Nazi movement, was expelled from his high post in the SS when it was discovered that he had plagiarized Eisler's argument and repackaged it as a critique of the inherent Jewishness of Christianity in a 1940 pamphlet called *Jesus der Nazoräer, der König der Juden* [*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*]. (See Collins 2021b: 102-103)

[26] These were listed by Anna Freud in 1936 as regression, repression, reaction formation, isolation, undoing, projection, introjection, turning against the self, and reversal into the opposite, with sublimation as a possible tenth (see Akhtar 2009: 70).

[27] Presumably, Hiltebeitel attended either the Haskell Lectures, the seminars (or both) that took place at the University of Chicago late in 1966 and which formed the basis for *The Destiny of a King* (see Dumézil 1973: [ii]).

[28] Here is the point of the book at which this device appears:

> Finally, one facet of what some have condescendingly called the "leisurely pace" of the *Mahābhārata* is its device of presenting countless *darśanas*, perspectives, on the drama that forms its core. I have tried to suggest here, although in Part Three I will steer a middle course between them, that the Indo-European perspective of Dumézil and the Purāṇic, one might say "Hindu,"

> perspective of Biardeau are both valid, and that, to borrow from a Sāṃkhya similitude, they may at some points be as necessary to each other, in making a way through the *Mahābhārata* forest, as the blind man and the lame. (Hiltebeitel 1990: 140)

[29] Parpola has conjectured that the source of the Pāṇḍavas may have been the Iranian tribe called the Massegetae by Herodotus and noted for being both polyandrous and fierce warriors, with "Massegetae" deriving from "Proto-Iranian **masya* from Proto-Aryan **matsya*" (Parpola 2015: 149). I sometimes wonder if the symbolism of the Pāṇḍavas being reborn from Matsya is also an acknowledgement of their Iranian ancestry.

[30] See Figure 5.

[31] Hiltebeitel's 1972 article on eschatology in the epic takes this up, but his most thorough treatment of the topic of future catastrophes and past traumas comes in the Freud books.

[32] *sundaraṃ puruṣaṃ dṛṣtvā bhrātaram pitaraṃ sutam/ yonir dravati nārīṇāṃ satyaṃ satyaṃ janārdana//* "When she sees a handsome man, whether it be her brother, father, or even a son, a woman's [vagina] grows wet. This is the truth, the truth, Janārdana" (in Goldman 1971: 22).

[33] He leaves out the custom that I have heard about that *hijra*s have to right to inspect any newborn child to see if they are intersex (since this is the only nonbinary gender identity that can possibly be identified at birth), and to claim the child as one of their own if they are. This would go along with the prayer from the AV to "defend thou [the child] in the process of birth; let them not make the male female."

[34] See Akhtar 2009: 220.

[35] On this point, Hiltebeitel tells us that he had originally misremembered A. K. Ramanujan's phrase, "no Indian ever **reads** the *Mahābhārata* for the first time" as "no one ever **hears** the *Mahābhārata* for the first time" (2011: 31). So had I, as I realized over the course of reading the essay. I would hazard a guess that others have done the same. Why? Because "no Indian ever hears the *Mahābhārata* for the first time" makes sense while "no Indian ever reads the *Mahābhārata* for the first time" does not. When we get that déjà vu feeling from reading a story and thinking, "Why do I feel like I know this?" that feeling of déjà vu is because we know we are, in fact, *reading it for the first time even though it feels as though we are not*. Hiltebeitel understands the phrase (which fits in perfectly with his rejection of a prior oral tradition) this way, drawing on a paper Ramanujan gave at a 1968 comparative epics conference organized by Victor Turner:

> Recounting his own youthful "native" experiences of the epic, Ramanujan begins with a hearing, but one from a text-conversant paṇḍita who recounted Mahābhārata stories in a tailor shop. So the hearing implies a prior reading, even though the reading is not Ramanujan's. Moreover, the reading and hearing are multilingual and intertextual. (1980, 31)

So Hiltebeitel sees a prior reading as having been performed by the paṇḍita, not by Ramanujan himself. But hearing the epic from someone who has read it is not the same as my having read it.

[36] Of course, the phrase "oral stage" takes on a new meaning when talking about the epic and psychoanalysis. There are some instructive parallels to make between the two meanings of orality here. For Freud, orality was the pre-Oedipal demand to be fed, to consume. Likewise, the oral-stage *Mahābhārata* is often imagined as devouring and incorporating unrelated material into itself. The search for an ur-epic is thus the search for the epic before it began to devour.

[37] Coincidentally, this would make the year in which he expected his mother to die 2018, the year of publication of his work on Green's Dead Mother Complex.

[38] When he does mention Reṇukā in the dead mothers section of *Freud's Mahābhārata*, it is in a footnote on page 58 that cites the work of Goldman and Fitzgerald.

[39] My emeritus colleague George Weckman tells me that in 1968, when he at Hiltebeitel were both graduating from the Divinity School under the guidance of Eliade, both of them were up for the Ohio University job in Athens, OH and Eliade decided to recommend Hiltebeitel for George Washington and Weckman for Ohio. Much later, Hiltebeitel traveled to Athens at Weckman's invitation, where he visited the famous Serpentine Mounds, a nearby Paleo-Indian site.

[40] "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized," in the KJV. I note here that *Nonviolence in the Mahābhārata: Śiva's Summa on Ṛṣidharma and the Gleaners of Kurukṣetra* begins with gleaners from the Hebrew Bible but is also built around what he calls (somewhat puzzlingly) the "summa" of the *Umā-Maheśvara Saṃvāda*. "Summa" can only be a reference to Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*. This movement from the Hebrew Bible to the pinnacle of Catholic theology may relate to some other issues he was resolving during the writing of the book.

[41] This seems as good a place as any to say that his important *The Mahābhārata and Greek Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2014) needs to be retranslated from the Spanish or at least carefully edited and republished.

[42] Trained as a social anthropologist, the late Nick Allen expanded Dumézil's trifunctional framework with a fourth function that acts a kind of limit-category, split into positive and negative aspects. The positive aspect of the fourth function is the transcendent/divine while the negative aspect is the chaotic/destructive. Somewhat confusingly, since the fourth function is split into two, he describes the scheme as pentadic (or five-fold) rather than quadratic (or four-fold).

[43] *Arjuna-Odysseus* contains essays comparing the journeys of Arjuna through the Himalayas with Odysseus's journey from Calypso's island, another comparing Yudhiṣṭhira with Agamemnon, and another comparing Durgā with Athena.

[44] In both stories, the hero and his men have arrived at a deserted island: Odysseus having been driven there by the god Poseidon in revenge for the blinding of his son, Vijaya because he had angered his father, the king. In both stories the heroes or their men try to obtain food and/or water on the island, thereby attracting attention to themselves: Odysseus by killing a stag and Vijaya's men by attempting to gather edible lotus roots and drinking water from Kuvaṇṇā's pond. Both Circe and Kuvaṇṇā are spinning or weaving when the heroes first see them. Circe then imprisons Odysseus's men in a pigsty, while Kuvaṇṇā imprisons Vijaya's men in a chasm. Both Odysseus and Vijaya set out alone to save their men and are recognized for their royal rank. Odysseus and Vijaya overpower Circe and Kuvaṇṇā with their swords drawn, at which point the women beg for their lives and offer themselves sexually to the heroes. After they swear an oath not to harm the heroes or their men, Circe and Kuvaṇṇā become lovers to Odysseus and Vijaya and provide hospitality to their men.

[45] And some books conjure mortality by the fact of their existence; *À la recherche du temps perdu*, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, and the *Mahābhārata* spring immediately to mind.

[46] In his retirement talk, Hiltebeitel recalled, "In 1995, Jim Fitzgerald helped me immensely to refurbish my Sanskrit by sending me [Muneo Tokunaga's] machine-readable transliteration of the Mahabharata, from the Poona Critical Edition. It gave me a new agility in whizzing around the text that I never imagined possible: one that seemed at first to be cheating on it" (2017, n.p.)