

Preface

Sigmund Freud's dream of interpretation arose from his wish to sever all ties between himself and ancient dream interpreters. Much remains concealed, past and future, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, for Freud evaded his forerunners and produced distortions analogous to those of the dream work. Freud's specific rejections of Judaic dream interpretation also recall psychoanalytic "denial," by which intellectual judgment represents yet disavows a repressed thought.

This book interprets disparate traditions of dream interpretation and situates them in relation to broader issues of interpretation. It does not follow a linear path from the Hebrew Bible to Sigmund Freud, but rather constructs a space defined by three concentric spheres. The innermost core contains readings of biblical and Talmudic dream interpretations; the intermediate sphere reflects on Freud's approach to dreams; the exterior surface places Freudian, biblical, and Talmudic interpretation in the context of current literary theory. Ambivalent, Freud's writings mediate between ancient and modern realms.

The opening chapter examines Freud's attempts to decipher his patients' dream reports. After he renounces prior methods, Freud attempts to establish his own scientific approach. He both relies on philological assumptions about interpretation and introduces the radical practice of free association, which alternatively stabilize and destabilize the relationship between dreams and their meaning. Torn between conflicting demands, Freud's language suggests that psychoanalysis resembles war, a staged battle, or a seduction, and is—in any event—a risky venture.

Chapters 2 and 3 return to biblical and Talmudic narratives, which emphasize the prophetic component of dream interpretation. Biblical stories imply that God communicates through dreams; rabbinic sources combine respect toward and mistrust of dream visions. Like secular narratives, dreams sometimes vie with Scripture, and certain dream interpreters stand in competition with rabbis. The debate over interpretive activity revolves around the extent to which interpretations may determine the future they predict.

The final chapter reinterprets Freud in connection with haunting questions of prophecy and telepathy. Freud dismisses claims for prophecy in

dreams, admitted only the familiar mechanisms of transference and the dream work. Nevertheless, when he derives the meaning of dreams from dreamers' associations, Freud cannot entirely exclude elements of suggestion and prophetic influence. Freudian practices are closer to Judaic tradition than Freud chose to admit.

This discussion is not a comprehensive survey of psychoanalytic and Judaic dream interpretation. It provides literary readings of the relationship between the Bible, the Talmud, and Freud, which appears precisely through Freud's recurrent denials. In spite of his elusiveness, Freud is a link between ancient traditions and postmodern trends. Freud's repression of biblical and Talmudic examples has enabled recent critics to rediscover these veiled precursors—not in theory, but in the actual practices of Midrash.

For influential discourses and dialogues over the past fifteen years, I am indebted to Harold Bloom, Daniel Boyarin, Leslie Brisman, Edward Casey, Brevard Childs, Jacques Derrida, Avner Falk, Shoshana Felman, Peter Laderman, Jean-Luc Nancy, Paul Ricoeur, and Heinrich Weidmann. Special thanks go to the members of my family, for their patience with countless visions and revisions. I also thank the students who participated in my Emory University course on "Jewish Dream Interpretation." Finally, Patricia Stockbridge has provided invaluable assistance with word processing.

All translations in this book are my own, except where otherwise indicated. Citations refer the reader to the most accessible German and English editions.

* * *

He dreamed of ancient hieroglyphics that resembled nothing he had seen before. But the meaning was transparent: I know, I am in the know.

He dreams of a modern script that is absolutely lucid. But the meaning is ineffable: I know nothing, I am not.

The interpretation of a dream always creates a new dream.