The figures of Joseph and Daniel influenced Freud negatively, because contrary demands led him to renounce these biblical dream interpreters. Although this was a more or less obligatory scientific gesture, Freud exaggerated his repudiation and narrowed his own theories when he turned away from the future and focused on the past a dream expresses. Nevertheless, psychoanalytic treatment required a future orientation, and Freud moved in circles that brought him closer to his prophetic precursors than he cared to admit.

Ancient and modern dream interpretation have more in common than is often assumed. While Freud relied on a philological model based on the correspondence between dreams and their meanings, he also employed a more radical, displacement model of associative interpretation. Both interpretive directions have biblical precedents: Joseph and Daniel follow the clues provided by symbols and metaphors; in addition, by aiming toward future events, they anticipate the modes of displacement that Freud recognized in the dream work. Never fully reconciled with his powers of suggestion, however, Freud minimized his identification with biblical interpreters.

As Freud refined and revised his techniques of dream analysis, he curtailed the element of displacement by concentrating on recurring symbols. He conceived the patient's associations, increasingly linked to the past, as predetermined expressions of prior causes. Had Freud allowed real freedom to the free associations, he might have been obliged to acknowledge the continuing relevance of biblical dream interpretation. Instead,
Freud views the dream as a disguise that conceals deeper meanings, not future prospects.

Dreams and disguises are central to the stories of Joseph and Daniel, which also refer to signs, tokens, and interpretations. Unlike their easily duped contemporaries, these biblical protagonists see through external appearances to actual and virtual truths. The dream interpreter recognizes the meaning of obscure images and words, whereas most other characters are so deceived that they hardly even recognize their own kin.

Joseph and Daniel mediate between sleeping and waking visions, between night dreams and day fictions, and rise to power as interpreters. They discern potential realities beyond vague intimations, and rather than trace a dream back to past thoughts, they weigh its significance to future events. The dreams Joseph and Daniel interpret are not wish fulfillments, except in the sense that they allow interpreters to fulfill their own ambitions. The biblical meaning of dreams lies in the future, to be awaited or sought, in the dreamer’s prophesied fortunes and the future of the interpreter as empowered prophet. The books of Genesis and Daniel present no theory of dreams, but demonstrate the active power of dreams over life.

Questions of authority confront every interpreter. Dream interpretation is associated with power struggles, since the successful interpreter appears to control others through his awareness of the future. With adept modesty, Joseph and Daniel attribute all interpretations to God, at the same time that they presume to divine God’s meanings. The biblical narratives do not simply validate their claims. Joseph never receives such explicit reassurance as do the earlier patriarchs who experience theophanies; God does not openly intervene in his life. 1 While the story is not entirely secular, it does recount Israel’s fate from an essentially human perspective. 2 In the Book of Daniel, God’s presence to the prophet is evident, yet the nature of Daniel’s authority as dream interpreter remains unclear.


2. E. A. Speiser discusses the narrative perspective in his Genesis (New York: Doubleday, 1964): “The theme is essentially personal and secular. Other aspects, to be sure, are in evidence here and there, yet they are never allowed to distract attention from the central human drama. In retrospect, of course, the story of Joseph was seen as a link in the divinely ordained course of human history. But while the writing is by no means oblivious to this approach, the theological component has been kept discreetly in the background” (p. 292).
"Will You Rule Over Us?"

The narrative of Joseph and his brothers opens with a conflict and sides with Joseph from the outset. "These are the generations of Jacob," the story begins, and turns immediately to Joseph, bypassing the sons of Leah (Gen. 37:2). Jacob favors Joseph, and the narrative reflects this preference; as the central protagonist, Joseph dominates every scene in which he appears.

Joseph's predominance exists, then, on several planes. Most obviously, he is his father's favorite. Having himself wrested the birthright from Esau (Gen. 27), Jacob apparently has no compunctions about preferring the first son of his second marriage. Jacob makes Joseph a special robe (k'tonet passim) which indicates his elite status and privilege to a life without strenuous labor (Gen. 37:3). This is the first in a series of garments that will differentiate between those who can and cannot see beyond mundane appearances. Joseph is Israel's favorite, where "Israel" names both Jacob and the nation that will continue his seed. Moreover, Joseph is favored by God, as the hero of a narrative that allows him to assure the continuance of God's people. Human choice and divine will will interact: Jacob creates Joseph's fate, if it is not predetermined, by setting him above his brothers.

The preferential treatment of Joseph has explicit consequences for the family romance: "When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him" (Gen. 37:4). Jacob has been thwarted in his passionate preferences before, agreeing to serve Laban seven years to marry the younger daughter, only to receive Leah instead (Gen. 29:18-25). Like Judah in a later chapter, Jacob is tricked into sleeping with a woman without knowing her true identity. By favoring Rachel's eldest son, Jacob recalls his love of Rachel and effectively provokes the rivalry of Leah's sons, Joseph's half-brothers. Hence the sons of Leah act as a counterprogressive force in the plot, true to their origins in the postponement of Jacob's marriage to Rachel by Laban's deceit.

Dreams quickly take on significance in this plot: "And Joseph dreamed a dream and told it to his brothers, and they continued (va-yosifu) to hate him more" (Gen. 37:5). When he tells his dreams, the chosen son intensifies his brothers' rivalry. Even the verb describing their continued hatred resonates with Joseph's name; in this way, too, Joseph continued

3. All biblical and Talmudic translations in this and the following chapter are based on the original Hebrew and Aramaic sources. Transliterations employ these approximate equivalents: Alef=‘; Vet=ѵ; Vav=v,w; Chet=ch; Tet=t; Kaf=k; Khaf=kh; Ayin=‘; Tsadi=ts; Quf=q; Sheva mobile=’; Tav=t.
FREUD'S DREAM OF INTERPRETATION

(va-yosif) the tradition of his father's sibling rivalry. Presumably Joseph cannot be blamed for having dreamed; but his ingenuous reaction is to tell his brothers: "Hear this dream which I have dreamed: behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and my sheaf stood up and remained upright; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf" (Gen. 37:6-7). Joseph relates his dream text to those it concerns, establishing it as a point of reference for subsequent events.

The brothers' response combines apprehension and irony. Joseph begins his career as a dreamer; his brothers interpret for him: "Will you reign over us? Will you rule over us? (Gen. 37:8). Their recognition of meaning is qualified by its rhetorical form. Joseph's brothers take the interpretation for granted, but phrase it as a question, wondering whether the dream is fantasy or prophecy. They hate him more "for his dreams and for his words" (Gen. 37:8), either because they perceive his ambition or because they fear his legitimate claims to power. Joseph's manner of telling his brothers, as if he were naively warning them of what will happen, is especially disconcerting.

The dreams of Genesis 37-41 come in pairs. Joseph's second dream intensifies the first by shifting from an agricultural scene to an astrological event: "Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bowed down to me" (Gen. 37:9). Albeit in the form of a question, his father interprets this dream as bearing on the lives of those who hear it: "Will I, your mother, and your brothers come and bow down to the ground before you?" (Gen. 37:1). Like the brothers' earlier remark, this rhetorical question leaves open the possibility of an affirmative response. In consequence, the brothers envy Joseph, but Jacob takes the dream more seriously and "heeded the thing (shamar et ha-davar)." The status of words and signs is at issue: the brothers previously hated Joseph because of his words (d'varav); now Jacob specially attends to the matter (ha-davar). This key word echoes narrative


7. Central problems of dream interpretation revolve around the opposition between words and images, already implicit in the multifaceted Hebrew word davar. Com-
developments when Jacob sends Joseph on a mission to find out the well-being of his brothers and their flock, and asks that Joseph send word (davar). Only Jacob respects the signs of Joseph’s divine mission.

Joseph’s brothers continue to oppose him by their words. They plot against him, seeking to prevent the domination his dreams predict: “Here comes that dreamer (ba’al ha-chalomot). Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits... and we shall see what will become of his dreams” (Gen. 37:19–20). The brothers’ words combine disparate emotional attitudes. “We shall see” carries a strong ironic tone, implying: We shall show that his dreams were nonsense. But this bitter irony is unsettled by the brothers’ nagging fear that they do indeed have reason to oppose Joseph’s dreams. Like the rhetorical questions they posed earlier, their present words may be interpreted anew, and the reinterpretation will work against them, as “we shall see.”

These characters in the story rise against the prescribed plot, trying to shake off a fate that they themselves foresee in their brother’s dreams. Joseph’s siblings express an ambivalence that may also characterize the reader’s response: are Joseph’s dreams true prophecies or wishful fictions that betray delusions of grandeur? In spurning Joseph, his brothers doubt the validity of dreams and, more broadly, question the existence of a God who has singled out Joseph. Their skepticism is human, all too human perhaps, since they do not share Jacob’s adulation of Joseph. Similar to any reader who questions what is narrated, the skeptical brothers are unwilling to accept the course of the narrative; but even their rebellion serves higher ends.

After they sell Joseph to the Midianites, the brothers dip his coat (k’tonet passim) in the blood of a kid and take it to their father. When Jacob recognizes the garment, he assumes that Joseph has been devoured by a wild animal. Similar to his blind father Isaac, Jacob misreads the external signs. His own sons are like wild animals, with the exception of Joseph, who will show his ability to decipher signs.

In a world that is permeated by deceit, only Joseph sees beyond ap-

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8. Von Rad, in Genesis: A Commentary, writes of “a dark knowledge about the irrevocableness of such prophetic dreams. Only when it is expressed, only when it is told, does the prophecy contained in the dream become potent. . . . The brothers’ hate is therefore a rebellion against the matter contained in the dreams, against the divine power itself” (p. 353). In German, see Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis Kapitel 25, 19—50, 26, pp. 308–9.
pearances. Two further scenes of disguise and false recognition occur in the subsequent chapters. Tamar, to attain the fertility she has been denied, disguises herself as a prostitute and sleeps with her father-in-law, Judah. As blind as his father Jacob and his father’s father Isaac, Judah does not recognize the woman. In surety for payment, Judah leaves his seal, cord, and staff. Afterward, to reveal Judah’s inequity at a crucial moment, Tamar presents these tokens and employs the same phrase that Joseph’s brothers use in presenting Jacob with Joseph’s bloody garment: “Pray recognize (<i>haker-na</i>).” This theme continues when Joseph’s clothing again causes him difficulties as a slave in Egypt. Potiphar’s wife, failing in her efforts at seduction (in contrast to Tamar, who does seduce Judah), uses Joseph’s garment to incriminate him falsely. Potiphar is unable to perceive Joseph’s innocence beneath his superficial appearance of guilt; he incorrectly construes the signs. These mistakes enhance the drama of Joseph’s convincing recognitions as an interpreter of dreams.

The Joseph narrative illustrates the tensions between divine providence and human will. Although the narrative ultimately seems to confirm Joseph’s divine mission, the perspective is worldly. After Jacob learns of Joseph’s disappearance, the narrative shifts to the story of Judah and Tamar. A disruption in the life of Joseph corresponds to a disruption in the narrative progress; the continuity of Jacob’s line through Joseph has been threatened by the “breach” enacted by his brothers. The clearest statements of Joseph’s support from God precede and follow the story of Potiphar’s wife: “YHWH was with Joseph, and he was a successful man” (Gen. 39:2; compare Gen. 39:21–23). The implied idea of God’s presence in personal history assures that the worthy succeed, and Joseph’s closeness to God benefits all of the household he oversees. Only here does the narrative assure us that the story is governed by God’s will. The intricate plot


10. Commentators dispute the place of Genesis 38 in the surrounding narrative. See, for example, Gerhard von Rad, <i>Genesis: A Commentary</i>, p. 356; Robert Alter, <i>The Art of Biblical Narrative</i>, p. 3–10; and James S. Ackerman, “Joseph, Judah, and Jacob,” in <i>Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives</i>, vol. 2, ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis and James S. Ackerman (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), pp. 103–4. The outcome of this debate is not, however, crucial in the present context.

11. Josephus and several rabbinic commentators, unwilling to allow the biblical ambiguity, explicitly assert that Joseph’s dreams are of divine origin. See Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>, II.II.3:13–14, and Yalkut Shim’oni, chap. 141.
Disguises and Interpretive Power

developments of Genesis 37-40 also intimate that a divine plan is at work. Joseph had to dream his dreams so that his brothers would hate him more; Jacob had to send Joseph after his brothers so that they could sell him to the Midianites; Potiphar’s wife had to tempt Joseph so that he would resist and be imprisoned; the servants of Pharaoh had to be placed in prison with Joseph, so that he could interpret their dreams and rise to prominence as Pharaoh’s interpreter. Dreams and the recognition of their disguised meanings are critically linked to power and future possibilities.

“Do Not Interpretations Belong to God? Tell Me”

Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker “both dreamed a dream on a certain night, each man dreamed his dream according to its interpretation” (Gen. 40:5). This description of dreams accompanied by interpretations prepares us to believe that Joseph will correctly guess their (predetermined) meanings.12 This reading of the biblical account conforms to Freud’s favored model of correspondence. In the past, Joseph has been known as a dreamer; now he becomes an interpreter.

Joseph is strikingly self-confident at this crucial point. Hearing that his fellow prisoners have dreamed, he responds: “Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me” (Gen. 40:8). By answering in this way, Joseph modestly denies any special powers, while simultaneously diminishing his own responsibility for what he will say. With unaccountable assurance, he suggests that he acts as a mouthpiece for God.13 The exact phrasing of Joseph’s reply is significant, for he does not assert that interpretations come from God, but rather asks, “Do not interpretations belong to God?” Rhetorical questions continue to provide meanings and raise issues that remain open to interpretation.

The manifest contents of the dreams recounted by Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker conform to the professions of these two men. The first tells of vines, grapes, and a cup placed in Pharaoh’s hand; the second tells

12. Ernest Ludwig Erlich, in Der Traum im alten Testament, argues that “each man dreamed his dream” only clarifies a potential ambiguity, excluding the possibility that the two men dreamed the same dream. He adds, nonetheless, that “each according to its interpretation” may hint at the productive power of dream interpretations (p. 67).

13. Erlich writes that “the tendency which lies at the basis of the Joseph story with regard to dream interpretation is thus clearly circumscribed: dream interpretation is only successful when God inspires the interpretation, when it comes from Him.” This contrasts the prevailing Egyptian view of dream interpretation as “a science, which one must have learned” (ibid., p. 68).
of baskets and foods. Both dreamers mention the number three, which Joseph interprets as signifying three days hence, the day of Pharaoh's birthday.14

The pair of dreams gives rise to distinct and opposite fulfillments (Gen. 40:12-19). Joseph plays on minuscule differences that indicate completely incommensurable fates. In the first case, Joseph tells the cupbearer that Pharaoh will "lift up your head" and restore him to his office. In the second case, Joseph tells the baker that Pharaoh will "lift your head from you" by hanging him on a tree. While both heads will be lifted, Joseph's interpretations anticipate utterly disparate results. The future is foretold in linguistic subtleties, for those who are able to perceive them.

Without confirming or denying Joseph's claim to divine aid as an interpreter, the narrative states that all occurs "as Joseph interpreted to them" (Gen. 40:22). Joseph's interpretations are prophetic, in each case corresponding to future events. The cupbearer returns to his office, while the baker is hanged. From a literary standpoint, these dreams are a necessary link in the narrative chain that leads from Joseph's initial dreams to those of Pharaoh. Everything that occurs in Genesis 39-40 is justified by its part in allowing Joseph an opportunity to act as Pharaoh's dream interpreter. The basis of Joseph's ability to interpret dreams remains obscure, although its importance to the narrative line is evident.

Symbolic interpretation is Joseph's implicit method: three branches or baskets signify three days; an act of placing a cup in Pharaoh's hand symbolizes a return to the position of cupbearer; the birds eating from baskets stand for birds that will devour the flesh of the doomed baker. Apart from his evident recourse to symbols, Joseph attempts to validate his interpretive claims by reference to divine inspiration. The narrative gives no alternative explanation of his success.

Joseph's approach to dream interpretation becomes clearer in relation to that of Sigmund Freud, whose Interpretation of Dreams refers to Joseph several times. Freud observes that in his own dreams, because of the biblical prototype, characters named Joseph often stand for Freud himself (Td 466n/ID 522n). According to Freud, Joseph performs typical symbolic dream interpretations: "Seven fat cows, after which come seven thin cows that consume the first; that is a symbolic substitute for the prophecy of seven years of famine in the land of Egypt, which consume all the abundance created by the seven fruitful years" (Td 117-18/ID 129). Freud disparages Joseph's methods, in spite of his own reliance on symbols: "It is,

14. As Benno Jacob observes, Joseph may recognize that pardons and punishments are likely to occur on Pharaoh's birthday. See Jacob, Das erste Buch der Tor: Genesis, pp. 737-38; in English, see The First Book of the Bible: Genesis, p. 271.
of course, not possible to give instructions concerning how one finds the way to such a symbolic interpretation” (Td 118/ID 129). Success in this kind of dream interpretation “remains a matter of sudden inspiration (des witzigen Einfalls), of unmediated intuition” (ibid.). Freud suspects the biblical dreams of being “artificial,” like those created by authors to introduce symbolic meanings.

Pharaoh’s dreams form a significant, symbolic pair. The dream of cows precedes a corresponding dream of ears of corn, touching on the primary sources of food: livestock and agriculture. At this point, too, the mode of presentation shifts. Previously, each dream report was followed by an interpretation (Gen. 37:5–8, 37:9–10, 40:9–13, and 40:16–19). Now the dream is first presented by the narrative before Pharaoh recounts it in slightly different terms. The variations are potentially significant. For example, Pharaoh adds an emotional comment about the cows: “I have never seen their like for badness in all the land of Egypt” (Gen. 41:19); and he adds that, after the lean cows had devoured the fat cows, “it could not be known that they had eaten them, for they appeared as bad as before” (Gen. 41:21). These differences show sensitivity to the possible discrepancies between dreams and dream reports. They also suggest that the narrative, like Joseph, has knowledge of realities beyond what is manifestly expressed. The narrative voice is omniscient, although it does not explicitly speak for God.

We do not know how Joseph arrives at his symbolic interpretations of Pharaoh’s dreams; his success is assured by the plot, which requires that he attain a position of power. Joseph ascribes his dream interpretations to divine agency (Gen. 40:8; Gen. 41:28,32), and even Pharaoh asserts that “God has made all this known to you” (Gen. 41:39). One potential message of the text is that God chooses Joseph for a definite mission, sends dreams to prophesy that mission, and influences the sequence of events leading to Joseph’s successful interpretations of Pharaoh’s dreams.

“As He Interpreted to Us, So It Was”

The Joseph narrative is subtler than a simplistically pious reading would suggest; Joseph’s interpretations need not have been predetermined by God. Although Joseph refers to God’s will, His messages leave considerable freedom for interpretation. The fulfillment of Joseph’s prophecies does not prove their inherent correctness, and the narrative maintains diverse possibilities.

15. Compare Freud’s further reference to Pharaoh’s dreams and Joseph’s interpretations in Td 330–31/ID 369.
A key phrase for alternative readings of the narrative occurs in the cupbearer's belated report of Joseph to Pharaoh. He recalls his experience when imprisoned together with the baker: "One night we dreamed a dream, I and he, we dreamed each of us according to the interpretation of his dream" (Gen. 41:11). As in Genesis 40:5, the convoluted syntax may suggest that each dream has a corresponding, fixed interpretation. But the cupbearer's subsequent account of Joseph's interpretive success is more complex: "We told him, and he interpreted our dreams for us; each man according to his dream he interpreted. And as he interpreted to us, so it was: he restored me to my post, and he hanged him" (Gen. 41:12–13). This more literal translation of the final phrase, instead of the passive form—"I was restored to my post, and he was hanged"—emphasizes the significant ambiguity of the original. Pharaoh was, of course, the person empowered to perform these acts (compare Gen. 40:20–21). Yet some interpreters understand the verse as saying that through his interpretations, Joseph effects the ascent and demise of Pharaoh's two servants. The cupbearer's words, "As he interpreted to us, so it was (ka'asher patar-lanu ken haya)," may imply that Joseph's interpretations produce the results he foretells. In this case, Joseph does not simply get it right by guessing a hidden meaning; rather, he makes his words good by somehow influencing their fulfillment.

Several rabbinic sources tell a relevant anecdote concerning the power of dream interpretation. Genesis Rabbah recounts the story precisely in the context of Genesis 41:13.

A certain woman went to R. Eliezer and said to him: "I saw in my dream that the second [beam or story] of my house was split." He said to her: "You will conceive a male child"; she went away and so it was. A second time she dreamed thus and went to R. Eliezer, who told her: "You will give birth to a male child"; and so it was. A third time she dreamed thus and came to him again but did not find him. She said to his students: "I saw in my dream that the second [beam or story] of my house was split." They said to her: "You will bury your husband," and so it was. R. Eliezer heard a voice of wailing and said to them: "What is this?" They told him the story, and he said to


them: "You have killed a man, for is it not written, 'As he interpreted to us, so it was'?")

R. Jochanan said: "All dreams follow the mouth, except for wine."\(^{18}\)

This story gives a sharp turn to the biblical verse, "as he interpreted to us, so it was." The consequences of dreams appear to derive from the way they are recalled, retold, and interpreted. This problem reemerges at the center of an extended Talmudic dispute.\(^ {19}\)

Another version of the R. Eliezer story, in the Palestinian Talmud, shows subtle awareness of the problematic relationship between interpretation and reality. The woman's dialogue with R. Eliezer's students occurs after her second experience of the dream: "His students said to her: 'He's not here.' They said to her: 'What do you seek from him?'" This time, confronted by the students, the woman is wary (or a writer wishes to avoid using the first-person form), and she begins to tell the dream in third person. A grammatical infelicity gives her away: "That woman saw in my dream the second [beam or story] of my house broken." The students respond to the equivocation caused by her anacoluthon: "You will give birth to a male child, and that woman's husband will die." The dream evokes two distinct interpretations, and the students ineptly offer both alternatives. R. Eliezer's irate reply echoes Genesis Rabbah: "You have killed a soul, because dreams only follow their interpretation" (Ma'aser Sheni 4,6). Rabbinic commentators suggest that the power of a dream does not reside in its ambiguous images, but depends upon the effect of interpretive words. The dream disguise, then, does not veil any preexisting reality, and rather points to diverse contours of meaning in different contexts. This view indicates that Joseph's dream interpretations may simultaneously conform to reality and cause reality to conform to them.

Pharaoh accepts Joseph's interpretations without hesitation. While Joseph presumably could not influence Pharaoh's earlier decisions regarding the cupbearer and baker, the later situation is not so clear. After interpreting Pharaoh's dreams as prophecies of fruit and famine, Joseph adds some helpful advice: "Now let Pharaoh find [see] a man clever and wise, and set

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him over the land of Egypt” (Gen. 41:33). Joseph implicitly proposes, Take me! when he offers a detailed plan of action (Gen. 41:34–36). Persuaded that Joseph’s plan is good, Pharaoh concludes that there is no one else “clever and wise as you are,” and accepts his proposal (Gen. 41:39–40). At once Joseph is transformed from a dreamer into a shrewd businessman and politician.20

Pharaoh does not wait fourteen years to see whether the crops will flourish and fail as Joseph predicts, but immediately appoints him agricultural overseer. After this change of fortunes, Joseph has both the motive and the means to assure that his prophecy will be fulfilled. He governs the land astutely for seven years, gathering surplus, and after the cycle of prosperity runs its course, famine sets in. Pharaoh’s dream is not a good one, but Joseph makes it good in terms of his own fate. By virtue of Pharaoh’s reaction, the plot takes its necessary course.

The story concludes when, as a result of the famine, Joseph’s brothers travel to Egypt for grain. In consequence of Pharaoh’s dreams and Joseph’s interpretations, Joseph’s present position enables fulfillment of his childhood dreams. The Joseph narrative is both a tale of apt interpretation and a story of words and actions that direct events. The prophet’s words are not merely predictive, but also causative. In conflict with his surroundings, the prophet successfully imposes his dream—or his interpretation of others’ dreams.

As the circle closes, the problem of recognition returns. Confronted by his brothers, the narrative repeatedly asserts that Joseph recognizes them. Yet Joseph disguises his voice and they do not recognize him, despite their interpretation of his childhood dream, which foretold that they would bow down to him. Only Joseph the interpreter is not deceived by appearances.

“This Is Your Dream”

Disguises are less prominent in the Daniel story: whereas Genesis 37–42 narrates Joseph’s ascent in a style of limited omniscience, from a human perspective, the Book of Daniel more insistently asserts the efficacy of God’s will. The narrative ascribes Daniel’s talents and successes to God, and represents prophecies and miracles that evidently transcend mundane reality. In other respects Daniel is similar to Joseph: both rise to power in a foreign realm by interpreting the king’s dreams. Like the Joseph narrative,

20. Compare Philo’s essay “De Iosepho,” also known as “The Life of the Statesman,” which discusses the politician’s ability to actualize his dreams of what ought to be (chaps. 22–24).
the stories of Daniel center around acts of interpretation, but the Book of Daniel is more concerned to show God’s providence behind the scenes or between the lines. Although Daniel has little to do with disguises, he does repeatedly demask dreams, discerning meanings in delusive images. The ultimately potent image is God’s hand: a ruling force that governs the apparently random events of human experience.

The opening verses in the Book of Daniel situate its story historically, while they subordinate historical events to a divine plan: “In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it” (Dan. 1:1). The fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the First Temple result in the Babylonian exile, which is the setting for Daniel’s life. The narrative does not dwell on causes of Nebuchadnezzar’s victory, and merely asserts that “the Lord gave King Jehoiakim of Judah into his hand” (Dan. 1:2). The battle also assumes theological significance, because Nebuchadnezzar plunders “vessels of the House of God, and he brought them to the house of his god.” These vessels reappear at a climactic moment, when their disrespectful use presages the fall of Belshazzar (Dan. 5:3–4).

Nebuchadnezzar’s spoils include noble children of Israel, chosen to serve in the royal palace by virtue of their extraordinary intelligence. Perhaps they are designated to become translators as well as advisers, for they are taught the writings or learning (sefer) and language (leshon) of the Chaldeans (Dan. 1:3–4). Ultimately, Nebuchadnezzar’s plunder from Jerusalem undermines his own kingdom: by teaching Daniel the Chaldean traditions, Nebuchadnezzar educates a competent prophet of their destruction. Daniel learns to translate between Hebrew and Aramaic, as he learns to translate dreams into prophetic, historical narratives.

Twice in the opening chapter, the narrative ascribes Daniel’s success to God. His wish to abstain from the king’s food is satisfied because “God granted Daniel grace and compassion before the chief officer” (Dan. 1:9). Moreover, God gives Daniel and his three companions “knowledge and skill in all writings [or learning] and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding of visions and dreams of all kinds” (Dan. 1:17). The book takes on the hyperbolic quality of a folk tale when, before the king, Daniel and his friends answer questions “ten times better than all the magicians and con-

21. As a story of exile, the Book of Daniel frequently refers to differences of language and custom. The figure of Daniel is especially esteemed by rabbinic traditions because he exemplifies the Jews’ continuing capacity to retain contact with God even when governed by hostile nations. Dreams illustrate Daniel’s unwavering devotion to God, whose dream messages challenge human claims to independent power.
jurors in all his realm’’ (Dan. 1:20). Despite the odds against Daniel, the reader knows that with God’s assistance he will prevail over Nebuchadnezzar.

At this point in the story, although the exact chronology is unclear, ‘‘Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, his spirit was troubled (titpa‘em rucho), and his sleep left him’’ (Dan. 2:1). This description echoes Genesis 41:8: ‘‘And in the morning his spirit was troubled (titpa‘em rucho).’’22 Like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar first calls together his wise men and asks them to interpret his dream. But unlike Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar implies that he has forgotten his dreams and asks to be told both the dream and its interpretation. This demand baffles the king’s wise men and gives Daniel his chance. Daniel’s prophecies will not be easy to test, so that his royal sanction initially depends on his ability to tell the king what he has dreamed.

Since the story takes place in a foreign land, it is perhaps fitting that the language now shifts.23 The background narrative of chapter 1 and the opening verses of chapter 2 are in Hebrew, but as the scene becomes concrete, the Chaldeans and Nebuchadnezzar speak Aramaic. During this comic exchange, Nebuchadnezzar three times asks to be told the dream and its meaning, while the Chaldeans tenaciously request that Nebuchadnezzar first tell them the dream (Dan. 2:3–9). Nebuchadnezzar doubts the honesty of his dream interpreters and demands that they relate the dream, for then ‘‘I will know that you can tell its interpretation’’ (Dan. 2:9).

The Chaldeans’ final response infuriates Nebuchadnezzar, who does not wish to acknowledge the limits of his power. They inform him that ‘‘there is no man on earth who can tell the king’s matter (milat malka)’’ (Dan. 2:10), and as a last resort the magicians taunt Nebuchadnezzar by insisting with some irony that only ‘‘the gods whose dwelling is not with [mortal] flesh’’ can satisfy his demand (Dan. 2:11). They unwittingly play into the hands of Daniel, who will confidently resort to God’s assistance.

22. Some early commentators suggest that Nebuchadnezzar’s trouble is spelled with an additional Tav in order to imply an enhancement or exaggeration of Pharaoh’s condition. See Mizrachi and Gur Aryeh to Gen. 41; and compare Genesis Rabbah 89:5.

The magicians' ironic evasion prepares for the success of Daniel's pious revelations.

In contrast to the wise men, Daniel confidently asks for time so that he can tell the interpretation to the king. He does not yet know what he will say, but prays for God's mercy and awaits divine aid. Whereas Genesis does not explain how Joseph arrives at his interpretations, we learn that "the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision" (Dan. 2:19). Daniel's initial manner of proceeding replaces a dream for a dream: he does not begin by substituting an interpretation for Nebuchadnezzar's dream, but by experiencing a vision of his own that solves the mystery.

Nebuchadnezzar repeats his question to Daniel, who at first seems to allude to Genesis 41:16 and Daniel 2:10–12: "The secret about which the king inquires, no wise men, conjurers, magicians, or diviners can tell the king" (Dan. 2:27). By agreeing with their own protests that for them the request is impossible, Daniel sets himself apart from his competitors. He also recasts Joseph's words to Pharaoh's servants: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" (Gen. 40:8). Rather than claim credit for his ability to interpret, Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that "there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets and has made known to Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in later days" (Dan. 2:28). Renouncing the idols worshiped in Babylonia, Daniel insists on the presence of a singular "God in heaven."24 At the same time, Daniel tells the king that God has revealed the dream in order that Nebuchadnezzar may "know the thoughts" of his heart (Dan. 2:30). This passage becomes important for the psychologically oriented traditions in rabbinic dream theory.

Daniel next relates the dream, which consists of an image and its destruction:

You, O King, did watch, and behold, a great image. This image, which was mighty and of surpassing brightness, stood before you, and its form was awesome. The head of the image was of fine gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet part iron and part clay. As you watched, a stone was hewn out, not by hands, and struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. Then the iron, clay, bronze, silver and gold were crushed, and became like chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that no trace of them could be found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Dan. 2:31–35)

The dream Daniel relates is itself iconoclastic, in the original sense of the word: image-breaking. The "image" is evidently a statue, but Daniel's vague word, tselem, may also mean "shadow" or "picture." Finally it is no more than a dream image, an image of an image, and Daniel will pierce behind this illusion to arrive at a statement of its worldly significance. Like Joseph and Freud, Daniel indicates that the dream imagery conceals a higher or deeper reality.

"This is the dream," Daniel continues, "and we will tell its interpretation before the king" (Dan. 2:36). The first-person plural form suggests that the interpretation cannot be accomplished by Daniel alone, but exclusively with God's help. Daniel addresses the king in an ambiguous way, accentuating the theological import of the story: "You, 0 king, king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given kingdom, power, might, and glory" (Dan. 2:37). Another, somewhat less flattering, translation of these words is also possible: "You, O king—to whom the King of kings, God of heaven, has given kingdom, power, might, and glory." Yet Nebuchadnezzar is not willing to acknowledge any king higher than himself, and wishes to hear only that into Nebuchadnezzar's hands God has given man, wild beasts, and fowl of the skies (Dan. 2:38). Nebuchadnezzar's hands again symbolize his power, which is annulled within the dream itself, beyond the mundane realm over which Nebuchadnezzar exerts his influence; the stone that crushes his statue is hewn "not by hands" but by divine decree.

Daniel's interpretation grants Nebuchadnezzar a limited power in order to prophesy its revocation; his flattering address introduces a devastating historical narrative. God has given Nebuchadnezzar power over all things of the earth, and "you are the head of gold" (Dan. 3:38). Man cannot live by head and hands alone, however, and in the dream Nebuchadnezzar's lower parts initiate his destruction. Interpreting from the dreamer's standpoint, Daniel conceives the dream image as a representation of Nebuchadnezzar himself. He also places the dream in a larger historical process: "After you another kingdom will arise, inferior to you; and another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over the whole earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron" (Dan. 2:39-40). Commentators have debated the identity of these prophesied kingdoms, and have neglected the remarkable fact that Nebuchadnezzar himself does not ask for details.

Like Pharaoh, who immediately accepts the validity of Joseph's prophecy (Gen. 41:37), Nebuchadnezzar immediately bows down to Daniel, although his prophetic interpretation remains untested (Dan. 2:46).

25. Daniel's interpretation may allude to ancient traditions concerning the ages of men. See, for example, Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 109–201; and compare Ovid, Metamorphoses I, 89–150.
Empirical verification is not at issue. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges that Daniel’s God “must be the God of gods and Lord of kings,” while his practical reaction is to submit to Daniel’s interpretation and grant him political power (Dan. 2:48; compare Gen. 41:40).

“Worship the Image of Gold”

Apparently in consequence of Daniel’s account and interpretation of the dream, Nebuchadnezzar builds a similar statue and improves upon it. He chooses both to receive and ignore Daniel’s message: remaining within the imagery of greatness, he defies the transcendent power of God’s hand. Instead of responding to the prophecy, Nebuchadnezzar constructs a statue in which his improved image (tselem) is entirely of gold. Art imitates the dream, and alters it, possibly at odds with Daniel’s interpretation. Whereas the dream image receives a single interpretation in terms of future events, the statue Nebuchadnezzar builds suggests several further meanings. Like Daniel, the reader of the story must interpret.

Nebuchadnezzar tries to force his subjects to bow down before his image—his realized dream or fantasy. On one level, the image stands for Nebuchadnezzar himself, since the head of gold now extends to the entire body. By representing himself in this way, he tries to forestall the message Daniel has given him; his golden image usurps the course of history. On another level, within biblical contexts, this statue alludes to the Tower of Babel, traditionally interpreted as a challenge to God.26 The image may also represent a pagan deity before which Nebuchadnezzar demands that his subjects worship. A peculiar scene follows, in which the officials who are invited to the statue’s dedication hear the proclamation: “To you it is commanded, 0 peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast at once into a burning fiery furnace” (Dan. 3:4–6). Nebuchadnezzar opposes Daniel’s prophecy, which observed the ephemeral character of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. The king tries to shift the mode of performative language, transposing a prophecy of decline into a decree that assures enduring greatness.

Nebuchadnezzar strives to actualize his dream image, and at this point the narrative takes on the quality of a dream. Nebuchadnezzar’s innumerable officers bow down to a golden statue while a motley band plays a weird symphony. This eerily comic moment is also the most treacherous point in the story, for now human and divine power come into direct conflict. The

26. See Rashi and Ibn Ezra to Genesis 11.
Jews of Babylonia, symbolized by Daniel’s companions, refuse to engage in what they perceive as an idolatrous ceremony, and so provoke the king’s wrath. When Nebuchadnezzar becomes enraged at these men who believe in a power greater than his own, the theological problem appears as a contest of hands: “If you do not worship,” Nebuchadnezzar tells the dissenting Jews, “you shall be cast at once into a burning fiery furnace.” With a fine but misguided touch of irony, he adds, “and what god is there that can deliver you from my hand?” (Dan. 3:15). His rhetorical question obviously intends the response “None,” but the Jews heroically rely on a hand greater than human hands: “Our God that we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand” (Dan. 3:17). Once again, as in the Joseph story, a question acts as a focal point for the plot reversal.

The story’s dreamy, fairy-tale quality intensifies and reaches its first climax. Previously Daniel and his companions were “ten times better” at answering questions than the other wise men of Nebuchadnezzar’s realm; now Nebuchadnezzar commands that the furnace be heated to “seven times its usual heat” (Dan. 3:19). Nebuchadnezzar’s urgent and excessive demand leads to a catastrophe: the executioners are themselves destroyed by flames, and the three dissenting Jews fall into the furnace (Dan. 3:21–23).

Until this moment, the narrative voice relates events and, occasionally, also the thoughts of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. Here the narrative assumes Nebuchadnezzar’s point of view, in order to emphasize his sudden recognition of fallibility. “Did we not throw three men, bound, onto the fire?” he asks (Dan. 3:24). The account describes Nebuchadnezzar’s perceptions rather than what actually happens: “I see four men, unbound and unharmed, walking in the midst of the fire” (Dan. 3:25). Nebuchadnezzar himself explains that “the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego . . . sent His angel to deliver his servants” (Dan. 3:28). The earlier order required that all Nebuchadnezzar’s subjects bow down to his statue; at present Nebuchadnezzar decrees the greatness of the Jewish God (Dan. 3:29).

In accordance with the earlier shift to Nebuchadnezzar’s perception of the miracle, the narrative takes on a first-person form, as if incorporating a letter from the Babylonian king into the text. Nebuchadnezzar relates an idealized, spiritual autobiography that bears obvious resemblance to the preceding story, although the exemplary dream differs. The king is frightened by a dream, finds that his wise men cannot interpret it, and finally learns its meaning from Daniel. In this instance, Nebuchadnezzar himself recounts

the dream, which may be considered either as completely new or as a sec-
dond version of the first dream: "I did watch, and behold, a tree in the midst of
the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew, and became strong,
and its top reached the heavens, and it was visible to the ends of the earth.
Its leaves were fair, and its fruit abundant; there was food for all on it”
(Dan. 4:7–9). Where the first dream presents the artistic grandeur of a
statue, the second dream consists of a natural image.

Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream also includes a scene of destruction,
but the ostensible agent is a voice rather than a stone: “I saw . . . a holy
watcher coming down from heaven. He cried aloud and said, ‘Hew down
the tree and cut off its branches’” (Dan. 4:13–14). This voice seems to
speak for Nebuchadnezzar’s conscience, to the extent that he recognizes his
own failings, at the same time that it comes to him as an external decree
(g’zerah). The commenting voice refers directly to Nebuchadnezzar: “Let
him be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in
the grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from that of a man, and let
the heart of a beast be given to him” (Dan. 4:12–13). As patients of Freud-
ians have Freudian dreams and patients of Jungians have Jungian dreams,
Nebuchadnezzar has learned Daniel’s prophetic style. 28 Daniel confirms
that the tree is a symbol of Nebuchadnezzar, who will be destroyed. He
predicts the worst: “You will be driven away from men, and your dwelling
will be with beasts of the field. You will be made to eat grass like cattle,
and shall be wet with the dew of heaven” (Dan. 4:22). The tree is a thinly
veiled figure that represents Nebuchadnezzar’s downfall.

Through the interpretative voice of another, then, Nebuchadnezzar’s
dreams are linked to madness. One moral of the story is that to defy God is
madness, and Daniel is the mediator between God’s presumed message and
Nebuchadnezzar’s subsequent decline. The narrative is out of Nebuchad-
nezzar’s hands at the moment of his fall (Dan. 4:25–30). When he loses
control of his reason, Nebuchadnezzar loses control of his self-presentation
as well. The first-person narrative suddenly shifts to a third-person form.
After the illness passes, Nebuchadnezzar resumes his account: “At the end
of the days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven, and my un-
derstanding returned to me” (Dan. 4:31). A return to first-person narration
signals a return to consciousness. By acknowledging God, Nebuchadnezzar
regains self-control: “I blessed the Most High and . . . my reason returned

28. This particular dream is, in fact, congenial to C. G. Jung, who cites it in his
“Allgemeine Gesichtspunkte zur Psychologie des Traumes,” in Über psychische
In English, see “General Aspects of Dream Psychology,” in Dreams, trans.
to me” (Dan. 4:31–33). Nebuchadnezzar’s humiliation renders his will to autonomy paradoxical, for only by recognizing a power outside himself does he come back to himself.

What is the status of Daniel’s interpretations? Daniel does not perform attractive interpretations for Nebuchadnezzar, but the king’s personal history makes them appear sound. Since the meaning of dreams is inseparable from their interpretation, one might infer that—within the fiction—Daniel’s prophetic remarks undermine the king’s sanity.

“Mene Mene Teqel Upharsin”

The events of Daniel 5–6 parallel those of Daniel 2–3, although in the later instance Daniel’s interpretations are explicitly textual. King Belshazzar, a son or more distant descendant of Nebuchadnezzar, continues the tradition of his forerunner’s scorn for the Jewish God. Drunkenness and disrespect lead him to desecrate the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar took from the Temple in Jerusalem (Dan. 5:2; compare Dan. 1:2); his consorts engage in idolatrous praise of “the gods of gold and silver, brass, iron, wood, and stone” (Dan. 5:4). The list of idolatrous gods echoes the composition of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream image (Dan. 2:31–33). This narrative once again assumes a dreamlike character: “In that hour, the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote over against the candlestick on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote” (Dan. 5:5). A mysterious hand challenges the hand of the king’s mundane authority; like Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:32), Belshazzar must recognize that God’s power transcends his own. The supernatural event is presented from the standpoint of the king, who “saw (chazez),” as Nebuchadnezzar “saw” in his dreams (Dan. 2:31). The verb of seeing is also employed by Nebuchadnezzar when he perceives the Jews’ miraculous escape from the furnace (Dan. 3:25), and when he has visions in his bed (Dan. 4:6–7). This verb to some extent crosses the boundary between waking and sleeping “visions”; human beings are deluded, and only prophets can interpret the deceptive imagery. Visionary delusion can also become a pathway to higher truths.

Belshazzar’s vision of a writing hand is not a dream, yet its interpretation proceeds like that of a dream. Similar to a dream image, the writing on the wall requires an interpretation, but one that the king’s magicians cannot accomplish. Taking on the role assumed by Pharaoh’s cupbearer in Genesis 41, Belshazzar’s queen informs the king that Daniel can interpret the alarming vision. As Nebuchadnezzar demanded that he relate both his dream and its interpretation, Belshazzar now demands that Daniel both “read the writing, and make known its interpretation” (Dan. 5:16). Like a dream that has been forgotten, the mystic writing is inaccessible to all, apparently including the king. His vision reveals and conceals its meaning, in textual form.

Before interpreting, Daniel recapitulates past events of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign in order to explain the moral and theological significance of what has happened. One may wonder how Daniel can recount Nebuchadnezzar’s fall and safely upbraid the present king; the narrative follows its own inner logic rather than any demands of realism. In order for Daniel’s reading of the inscription to be fully convincing, the prophet first underlines its theological justification: “You lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven” (Dan. 5:23).

Daniel then reads the writing on the wall: “mene mene teqel uphar-sin” (Dan. 5:25). This inscription remains the most enigmatic verse in the Book of Daniel. Numerous ancient and modern commentaries on these words have only multiplied the possible meanings. The riddle has remained, and some commentators even suggest that the author of the story misunderstands the traditional account that had been handed down. The accepted understanding of the inscribed words was “numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided” until the publication of an article suggesting that these words name units of currency: “a mina [or, ‘it was counted’], a mina, a shekel, and two half minas.” The older interpretation reads the inscrip-


tion as a series of verbs, which Daniel then fits into a narrative of Belshazzar’s demise. The more recent interpretation identifies the words as substantives, names for units of currency corresponding to the devaluation of successive kings or empires. But there is something comic about scholars’ philological efforts to outdo Daniel and show the true meaning of the inscription, which serves literary purposes in the story. The real or actual meaning of “mene mene teqel upharsin,” if such can be postulated, has no significance for the narrative. The same may be said of Pharaoh’s and Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams, which gain importance only as interpreted by Joseph and Daniel.

Daniel’s interpretations evidently involve paronomasia, a play on words. Daniel successfully rewrites an ungrammatical sequence of signs to devise coherent statements, in which the initially inscribed words are modified slightly. Mene becomes menah: “God has numbered your kingdom and brought it to an end”; teqel becomes teqiltah: “You are weighed in the balance, and are found wanting”; upharsin first becomes peres, then perisat and paras: “Your kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and the Persians” (Dan. 5:26-28). The essential matter is not what the inscription “in fact” means but what Daniel makes it mean. His approach to the writing on the wall may be conceived as an emblem of dream interpretation and of interpretation in general. Daniel’s interpretation does not necessarily arrive at the definitive meaning of the words he interprets—as scholars have abundantly shown. Nevertheless, his interpretation does convince those for whom it is intended, and within the fiction the results he predicts do occur.

After Daniel’s second dream interpretation to Nebuchadnezzar, the king follows the course outlined by the prophecy and becomes mad; and after Daniel’s prophecy to Belshazzar, “that very night Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, was slain” (Dan. 5:30). This event may reflect the double meaning ascribed by rabbinic commentators to the verse, “as he interpreted to us, so it was” (Gen. 41:13). On the one hand, perhaps Daniel correctly predicts what will happen. Or, on the other hand, perhaps Daniel influences the events he prophesies, and helps to produce the effects he predicts. Even if Daniel does not take part in a conspiracy with Darius the Mede, he may foresee that a rebellion is imminent.

As a literary whole, the narrative in its present form claims to depict Daniel’s rise to power through the hand of God. But if the writing of God’s hand is open to such divergent interpretations, then His larger theological meanings are not necessarily secure. To follow Daniel’s example would be
to recognize the multiple significations of dreams and texts, and to invent their meaning anew in conjunction with a prospective future. Although Joseph and Daniel seem to pierce through disguises, their commentaries may also be marked by further deceptions and distortions, rather than by sheer revelations of naked truth.

"Your God . . . Will Deliver You"

Daniel’s subsequent encounter with the lions recasts the episode in which his three companions miraculously escape from Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace. Meanwhile, the story gradually shifts from questions of dream visions to problems associated with writing. Thus when Darius, like Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3:4–6), requires a ritual obeisance from his subjects, he does not simply proclaim this command, but is persuaded to write it. Darius’s officers wish to trap Daniel by placing him at variance with an irrevocable decree.

Daniel is caught between Jewish practice and a Babylonian decree against petitions other than those made to the king; he shows his faith by unswervingly obeying what he understands to be God’s command. Darius appears content to make an exception for his favored minister, yet when the king’s other officers discover Daniel praying to the Jewish God, they remind Darius, employing the familiar form of rhetorical questioning: “Have you not signed a decree that every man who shall address a petition to any God or man besides you, O king, during the next thirty days, shall be thrown into a lions’ den?” (Dan. 6:13). Again divine and human power, or the decrees of divine and human hands, come into conflict. The narrative repeatedly depicts kings’ threats to Jewish practices. In this case, Darius “set his heart on Daniel to deliver him,” only to discover that his hands are tied by the decree he has signed.

Whereas Nebuchadnezzar has said to Daniel’s companions, “What God is there that can deliver you from my hand?” (Dan. 3:15), Darius says with some trepidation but without irony to Daniel, before throwing him to the lions, “Your God, whom you serve continually, will deliver you” (Dan. 6:17). He doubts his own words until Daniel has survived his overnight stay in the lions’ den. In a letter to the peoples of the earth (Dan. 6:25–27), analogous to Nebuchadnezzar’s letter (Dan. 3:31–4:34), Darius acknowledges the Jewish God. Finally accepting a hand or power that is beyond

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33. There is also a distant echo of the early moment in the precursor story, when Joseph’s brothers throw him into a pit. The Joseph-Daniel pair thus comes full circle when the dream interpreter is rescued from the malicious hands of those who envy him.
human force, the king refers to "the living God . . . who delivers and saves, and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth" (Dan. 6:26–27). As evidence, Darius writes that Daniel's God saved him "from the hand of the lions" (Dan. 6:28).

The hand is a key word and figure in this narrative. In Babylonia, foreign kings repeatedly exert their power over the Jews, who resist when a secular hand interferes with the invisible hand of God. The hand that wields power is also the hand that can sign unalterable decrees, but the Book of Daniel shows that no royal hand can imprint the final word on a man's life. On the contrary, God can annul what a king's hand commands, and can even produce a miraculous writing hand that condemns a sacrilegious king. An underlying premise, which the narrative strives to confirm, is that human hands are bound unless they act in accordance with what God's hand requires. Daniel's authority as prophet rests on his interpretive ability to read the writing on the wall and to foretell the fate that is signified by a dream vision. Daniel's activity as dream interpreter suggests a deterministic view, not of individual character, but of God's propitious influence. Acts of interpretation indicate a divinely favored destiny and refer equally to dreams and texts.

The use of the word "hand" (yad) in contexts suggesting "power" is an anthropomorphizing figure of speech. Prophets also depend on figuration when they reveal higher realities and deeper truths. There can be no ultimately literal representation of divine sense, for language intrinsically relies on rhetoric and disguise.

Rabbinic traditions, then, revise the meaning of prophetic dream interpretation. "As he interpreted to us, so it was," applied to Joseph and Daniel, comes to mean that the prophet exerts power over the events he predicts. In connection with textual interpretation, this view may provoke doubts over the determinate meaning of a biblical verse such as "mene mene teqel upharsin." We need not conclude that interpretation is arbitrary and open to infinite variation, although the writing on the wall is still enig-


matic. Interpretation is not simply a cognitive process of discovery, but a performative act of invention. Daniel, a reader of cryptic words, invents fate by reinscribing the inscription into a new narrative. The interpreter's narrative gives direction to the life of the dreamer, as rabbinic commentators knew—and occasionally feared.

Daniel's activity as reader of a divine inscription parallels rabbinic interpreters' conception of oral Torah as a reading of written Torah. This association is not surprising, since dreams were conceived as texts to be interpreted. Talmudic and later rabbinic discussions of dream interpretation extend the notion that an interpreter may play an active role in the fulfillment of prophecy.

Repudiating Joseph and Daniel, Freud claimed to place responsibility on the dreamer, whose retelling and associations provide clues to the dream thoughts. Freud based his research on the past and situated dreams in the context of prior mental processes, disregarding what biblical interpreters took for granted: that every dreamer is most concerned with the implications of a dream. Although Freud conceived free associations as leading back to the dream thoughts, his method also encouraged a forward glance; he tacitly aimed his theories of dream interpretation toward the future, which is integral to every curative practice. Biblical dream interpretation thus supports an aspect of Freudian psychoanalysis that Freud was reluctant to acknowledge. Uneasy with the model of displacement, Freud shied away from the fullest consequences of his novel method.

Whereas Daniel read the writing on the wall, in an ambitious fantasy Freud imagined an inscription on the wall of his house, a marble plaque that would recall his accomplishment to future generations: "Here, on 24 July 1895, the secret of dreams was revealed to Dr. Sigm. Freud" (AP/OP, letter 137). The inscription Daniel reads points toward the future; Freud's engraving invents a future that preserves the past.