FREUD: INTERPRETER AND SEDUCER

Freud was intrigued by the Roman god Janus. As a dream interpreter, Freud was also two-faced, divided between orientations toward the past and toward the future. He looked back in time for causes of mental events, but his method of free association inspired the creation of new meanings and guided his patients forward. The father of psychoanalysis was ill at ease with his own hints at fulfilling a prophetic role, and made efforts to disguise this aspect of his work.

One of Freud’s basic psychoanalytic strategies is to hide his face and act as a blank screen. This self-effacing performance encourages the patient to transfer his or her emotional attachments onto Freud in a first step toward working through childhood complexes. The analytic psychodrama leaves Freud’s image an enigma, because within the walls of his office he surrenders his identity to the phantoms that haunt his patients. Freud also eludes the reader, who invariably projects personal concerns onto his texts. In diverse contexts, Freud figures as the scientist, the clinician, the philosopher, the cultural critic, the demystifier. His blank expression may adapt itself to every available mask.

Behind his masks, Freud is always an interpreter. His practices of interpretation are both radically new and burdened by traditional assumptions, producing a conflict that complicates but does not diminish the force

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of Freud’s methods. At the same time, his hermeneutics cannot be entirely separated from the transference, and reveal a seductive potential. Psychoanalysis is never simply true to existing reality; Freud changes the subject of analysis in accordance with his interpretations.

Freud’s Path to Dreams

Near the middle of his life’s way, Freud strays from the familiar paths of neurological science: he awakens from a vivid dream and tries to grasp its meaning. To make his inventions appear more credible, Freud tells this tale. The wanderer follows a long line of spiritual travelers, yet he experiences a disconcerting isolation in the byways of nineteenth-century medicine. When Freud emerges from darkness onto his “royal road,” the light of a sudden recognition overwhelms him: “The dream is a wish fulfillment.” Freud’s autobiographical references suggest that this discovery inspired the writing of his dream book.

The initial task for The Interpretation of Dreams is to establish dream interpretation as a valid field of scientific inquiry. This topic had not so much been neglected as consigned to the realm of popular nonsense. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, dozens of books in German and French purported to explain the nature of sleep and dreams; Freud carefully refers to those scanty aspects of prior theories that lead toward his own. The first chapter of The Interpretation of Dreams simultaneously undermines earlier beliefs about dreams and insists that dreams are valid objects of inquiry.

Freud compares his work to a journey through a forest, both in The Interpretation of Dreams and in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess. After Fliess complains that the opening chapter of his book might discourage readers, Freud explains that “the whole thing is planned on the model of an imaginative walk (Spaziergangsphantasie).” His letter describes a stroll that is also a hike through an imaginative realm. Freud explains: “First [comes] 2

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2. For Freud’s immediate purposes, the most important previous works on dreams are Karl Albert Scherner, Das Leben des Traums (Berlin: Heinrich Schindler, 1861) and Johannes Volkelt, Die Traum-Phantasie (Stuttgart: Meyer and Zeller, 1875).

the dark forest of the [previous] authors (who do not see the trees), without prospects, rich in false paths (aussichtslos, irrwegreich). Then a hidden gorge (verdeckter Hohlweg) through which I lead the reader—my dream specimen with its peculiarities, details, indiscretions, bad jokes—and then suddenly the summit, the view, and the inquiry, ‘Which way would you like to go?’ " (BWF 400/CL 365). Freud alludes to his dream of Irma as the concealed gorge leading to a newly attained height.

The dream of Irma’s injection (‘the specimen dream of psychoanalysis’) holds a privileged place both in The Interpretation of Dreams and in Freud’s intellectual autobiography. Although he does not fully analyze the wishes and conflicts it reveals, Freud traces his theory of dreams as wish fulfillments to this example, and adds in a later footnote: ‘‘This is the first dream that I submitted to a thorough interpretation’’ (Td 126n/ID 139n). References to Freud’s dream report are printed in italics (originally in spaced type), as if to accord them special status and to establish the norm for dream texts. Even the punctuation, employing dashes and ellipses, seems designed to reflect the dream experience or the halting process of fixing it on paper.

Dream of 23–24 July 1895
A large hall—many guests, whom we are receiving. —Among them

Irma, whom I immediately take aside, as if to answer her letter, to rebuke her for not yet accepting the "solution." I say to her: If you (du) still have pains, it is really just your fault. —She answers: If you only knew what pains I feel in my throat, stomach, and abdomen; they're tying me into knots. —I am frightened and look at her. She appears pale and bloated; I think, in the end I must be overlooking something organic. I take her to the window and look down her throat. She shows some recalcitrance, like women who wear false teeth. I think to myself, she really doesn't need to. —Then the mouth opens wide, and I find a white spot to the right, and in another place I see extensive white-gray scabs on remarkably curled structures, which are apparently modeled after the turbinal bones of the nose. —I quickly call Dr. M. over, who repeats and confirms the examination. . . . Dr. M. looks completely different than usual; he is pale, limps, and his chin is beardless. . . . My friend Otto now also stands beside her, and my friend Leopold percusses her through her bodice and says: She has an area of dullness on the lower left, points to an infiltrated skin area by her left shoulder (which I perceive, as he does, despite the garment). . . . M. says: No doubt, it is an infection, but no matter; dysentery will follow and precipitate the toxin. . . . We also know immediately whence the infection comes. Recently when she felt unwell, my friend Otto gave her an injection with a propyl preparation, propyls . . . propionic acid . . . trimethylamin (the formula of which I see printed in bold type before me) . . . . One does not make such injections thoughtlessly. . . . Probably the needle wasn't even clean. (Td 126–27/ID 139–40)

Freud's interpretation of his prototypical example is punctuated by refusals to tell the full story. In a cynical footnote, Freud observes that he "was probably right not to place so much trust in the reader's discretion" (Td 125n/ID 138n). Like the relationship between Freud and his patient, the relationship between Freud and his reader is characterized by combative tensions and suspicions. The repressed sexual dynamics in Freud's dream are especially evident at the moment when "I take her to the window and look down her throat. She shows some recalcitrance (sträuben), like women who wear false teeth. I think to myself, she really doesn't need to [resist]."

5. E.g., Td 125, 133, 137n, 139/ID 137–38, 146, 151n, 153–54. One obviously curtailed feature of Freud's self-analysis is the dimension of his own sexuality. Freud notably omits information necessary to show that the dream of Irma represents the fulfillment of infantile wishes.
Interpreter and Seducer

(Td 127/ID 139). As one reinterpreter of Freud's dream points out, "these phrases, then, are a link between the associations concerning patients who resist 'solutions,' and women (patients or not) who resist sexual advances."6 Freud's actions in his dream are "intrusive" and "phallic";7 this scenario represents one direction of the psychoanalytic cure. Freud views dreams as disguised (verkleidet) fulfillments of repressed wishes, and he wishes to examine and undress his patients, if only to demonstrate the correctness of his theories.

Freud explains that the dream "fulfills several wishes" by transferring the blame for Irma's suffering from him to Otto. He traces the dream to his discomfort over Otto's veiled criticism of his treatment of Irma, and thus the dream appears to avenge itself on the betraying friend, determining that the accuser is himself guilty. As one who administers a dirty injection, Otto becomes guilty of a disguised sexual transgression. Yet Freud's analysis makes light of both the suppressed sexual content and the dream's aggressive treatment of his friends.8 While Freud writes that Otto and Dr. M. are "competitors," he does not dwell on their competitive struggle. From this complex of unexplored meanings, he distills only his conclusion that "the dream is a wish fulfillment." The prototypical dream of wish fulfillment receives only partial analysis, for Freud discloses neither the biographical context nor his concealed wishes.

Recent authors have emphasized the "day's residues" that helped to produce the dream of Irma's injection. In his cautious letter to Fliess of 8 March 1895, Freud does not retell the full story, but he does provide a clearer picture of what he felt obliged to suppress from his published analysis. "Irma" is almost certainly a fictitious name for Emma Eckstein, who was Freud's patient and the victim of malpractice by Fliess in a questionable nose operation Freud advised. Because of the condensations and displacements that characterize dreams, we cannot determine the full cast of characters behind Freud's famous dream text. One author indicates that Fliess is represented by the friend Leopold, while Otto and Dr. M. stand for Oskar Rie and Josef Breuer. This would mean that Fliess was "put in the exalted role of the knowing, understanding, superior friend," and "the blame had to be displaced to Rie (Otto), while M. (Breuer) had to be

ridiculed." One could also argue that Freud played out his negative transfers by explicitly blaming Fliess, in the figure of the negligent Otto. Dr. M. and Leopold might then represent the physicians Gersuny and Rosanes, who took charge after the postoperative care of Emma Eckstein became unaccountably complicated.

A few months before the date Freud gives to his Irma dream, in the letter to Fliess dated 8 March 1895, Freud makes this reference to the disastrous treatment of Emma:

There was still moderate bleeding from the nose and mouth; the fetid odor was very bad. Rosanes cleaned the area surrounding the opening, removed some sticky blood clots, and suddenly pulled at something like a thread, kept on pulling. Before either of us had time to think, at least half a meter of gauze had been removed from the cavity. The next moment came a flood of blood. The patient turned white, her eyes bulged, and she had no pulse. . . .

I do not believe it was the blood that overwhelmed me—at that moment strong emotions were welling up in me. So we had done her an injustice; she was not at all abnormal, rather, a piece of iodoform gauze had gotten torn off as you were removing it and stayed in for fourteen days, preventing healing; at the end it tore off and provoked the bleeding. That this mishap should have happened to you; how you will react to it when you hear about it; what others could make of it; how wrong I was to urge you to operate in a foreign city where you could not follow through on the case; how my intention to do the best for this poor girl was insidiously thwarted and resulted in endanger-

9. Schur, "Some Additional 'Day Residues' of 'The Specimen Dream of Psychoanalysis,'" ed. Loewenstein, p. 70. In the context of Freud's waning friendship with Fliess, Schur argues, Freud still sought to "exculpate Fliess from responsibility for Emma's nearly fatal complications" (ibid.). Max Schur expresses a more complex view in his Freud: Living and Dying (New York: International Universities Press, 1972): "Freud unconsciously knew very well that Fliess was responsible for the critical complications and blamed him for them, so that his trust in Fliess had been deeply shaken. . . . At that time Freud could not afford to abandon his positive relationship which had to be protected by denial and a displacement of the accusation. Torn between needing and blaming Fliess, Freud's actions were highly revealing throughout the period of crisis" (p. 81). See also Schur's "The Background of Freud's 'Disturbance' on the Acropolis," in Freud and His Self-Analysis, ed. Kanzer and Glenn, which refers to Freud's "desperate need to deny his ambivalence towards Fliess" (p. 118). Compare Anzieu, L'auto-analyse de Freud et la découverte de la psychanalyse, vol. 1, pp. 200–204.
Freud would have privately acknowledged that his dreams expose repressed sexual wishes, which he understandably excludes from his published analysis. While he admits elements of sexuality, aggression, and ambition, Freud declines to discuss ways in which the dream responds to a specific event in his recent experience. Current knowledge of the Emma Eckstein fiasco, however, forces us to consider other meanings of the seminal dream. In short, the “Irma dream” returns to the traumatic discovery that Emma’s complaints were the result of Fliess’s professional incompetence. This is, presumably, one meaning of Freud’s dreaming accusation of Otto: “The needle wasn’t even clean.” It was not a wish fulfillment for Freud to blame this mishap on his friend, except to the extent that by transferring blame in this way he satisfies competitive wishes.

The dream of Irma appears to have replayed one of the most problematic case histories in Freud’s career and a decisive moment in his waning friendship with Fliess. Rather than conceive it in accordance with Freudian theory, as the “(disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish” (Td 175/ID 194), we may understand this dream as an attempt to resolve a difficult problem. This means taking the manifest content seriously and recognizing its direct response to recent events in Freud’s life. Freud himself suggested that the dream was a wish fulfillment because it shifted guilt from himself to “Otto,” but his letter of 8 March 1895 makes clear that Emma’s problem had in reality been exacerbated by Fliess. Freud maintained that dreams always express unconscious wishes, and sometimes declined to see the more immediate significance of dream texts. In addition to fulfilling wishes, dreams and their interpretations may revise the life history of the dreamer and aim toward future “solutions” to conflicts.

After discussing his dream of Irma, Freud reviews the path he has traveled: “When one has passed through a narrow gorge and has suddenly arrived at a summit, after which the ways part and the richest prospect opens in different directions, one may linger for a moment and consider

10. CL 116–17; for the German original see BWF 117–18. See also Schur’s earlier publication of this letter in “Some Additional ‘Day Residues’ of The Specimen Dream of Psychoanalysis,” pp. 56–57.

11. In a letter of 8 January 1908, Karl Abraham requests further details concerning the Irma dream; Freud evades his inquiry by responding, in his own words, “hastily, formlessly, impersonally.” See Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham, Briefe 1907–1926, ed. Hilda C. Abraham and Ernst L. Freud (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1965), pp. 32–33.
which way one should turn first” (Td 141/ID 155). In this published statement, Freud omits his unflattering image of the previous authors as a dark forest, referring only to his narrow escape route that leads to the summit. When Freud arrives at the conclusion that “the dream is a wish fulfillment,” it remains to be seen whether his inspiring dream of Irma typifies all dreams, and what new clarity it provides.

In his metaphorical journey, Freud represents the previous authors on dream interpretation as a “dark forest” that easily leads the traveler astray. *The Interpretation of Dreams* elaborately repudiates all past dream theorists, researchers, and interpreters. This insistent gesture eliminates all competitors from the scene and permits Freud to expound his practice of dream interpretation at a somewhat exaggerated distance from other methods. His disavowals conceal other associations, as becomes clear from his additions to later versions of the dream book.

**Against the Past**

Freud’s metaphor of adventure indicates that he abandons the pathways of earlier neurological science. He arrives at a new terrain by means of his detour through an unexpected crevice, the dark tunnel of a mysterious yet subsequently interpretable dream process.12 When Freud awakens and emerges into the light, he proposes to explore the previously obscure cavern of dreams; first, however, Freud dismisses the familiar routes. He asserts that dreams are not, as a forerunner suggests they are, “‘comparable to the irregular sounding of a musical instrument struck by the blow of an external force instead of by the player’s hand.’”13 Freud insists that the dream is “not senseless, not absurd,” but instead “‘a completely valid psychical phenomenon’” (Td 141/ID 155). His problem is to introduce the terms that will enable him to demonstrate this validity. Freud does not represent his discovery as a simple attainment of the truth, but as a dynamic resolve to place dreams “‘in the context of comprehensible waking mental acts.’” Dreams are not merely wish fulfillments; they are expressions of “‘an extremely complex mental activity’” (ibid.). Without as yet naming this activity the “‘dream work,’” Freud raises questions that follow from his hypothesis that dreams have meaning.

The dream work is analogous to Freud’s imaginary journey through a

12. BWF 400/CL 365. In his VEP 106/ILP 88, Freud identifies the dark cavern of sleep with the mother’s womb.

hidden gorge. After Freud arrives at the summit of his metaphorical hill, he examines the distortions of the dream work as he retraces his steps through the tunnel of dreams. This image expresses his general notion of dream interpretation: "In waking interpretation, we follow a path that leads from dream elements back to the dream thoughts" (Td 509/ID 571). It is, however, impossible to simply reverse the path of the dream work. Freud moves in the light of day, peering down at the darker products of mind: "During the day we drive shafts above new thought connections," and these probes "make contact with the intermediate thoughts and with the dream thoughts, now at one point and now at another." As a result of the investigative process, "fresh thought material from the day inserts itself into the interpretive sequence" (ibid.); Freud assures us that these "collaterals" need not disrupt our search for the concealed dream thoughts. If there occur elisions, condensations, displacements, or even "interpolations and additions" (Td 471/ID 527), it remains to be seen whether the dream interpreter can distinguish between dream thoughts and thoughts that arise during interpretation.

The opening chapter of The Interpretation of Dreams reviews "the scientific literature on dreams." For the most part, this literature is irrelevant to Freud's work, since it deals with dreaming and sleeping without regard to questions of interpretation. From the earliest times until Aristotle, diverse authors discussed the causes and characteristics of dreams. Freud's own sympathies evidently lie closest to Aristotle, who (according to Freud) believed that dreams "follow the laws of the human spirit" (Td 30/ID 37). Freud quickly dismisses all prescientific conceptions of dreams, describing them as superstitious projections (Td 32/ID 38). He subsequently turns to nineteenth-century, scientific theories, and rejects them from the outset with the comment that "no foundation has been laid" on which later researchers might build. In short, Freud appears completely at odds with his forerunners.

The second chapter of The Interpretation of Dreams, however, shows Freud to be significantly closer to some of his precursors. After outlining nineteenth-century scientific dream theories, Freud surveys the history of "lay" dream interpretation. Paradoxically, he strives to establish a science of dream interpretation that conforms with some elements of what previously existed on the plane of superstition. Although Freud renounces the earlier methods, then, in some respects he does identify with his ancient precursors Joseph and Artemidorus. 14 Apart from their common interpretive activity, Freud may also have identified with Joseph as a result of their similar position in the family romance. As favored, first sons

14. Compare Td 466n/ID 522n and Td 119n–120n/ID 130n–131n.
of Jacob's second wife, they received special privileges.15

Freud admits that popular opinion anticipated his belief that dreams have meaning (compare UTT 12/OD 15), yet he questions two basic methods traditionally employed to uncover this meaning. Both methods attempt to replace the dream content by a corresponding sense. Symbolic dream interpretation "views the dream content as a whole and tries to replace (ersetzen) this through another, comprehensible and in certain respects analogous content" (Td 117f/ID 129). Freud cites the example of Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream: "Seven fat cows, after which come seven thin cows that devour the others; this is a symbolic substitute (Ersatz) for the prophecy of seven years of famine in the land of Egypt that devour all the abundance created by seven fruitful years" (Td 117–18f/ID 129). Freud objects that Joseph's method depends solely on the interpreter's intuition, and can only develop as an art.

The second popular method of dream interpretation is a process of deciphering (Chiffrierverfahren), which at first sight represents the opposite extreme. Rather than rely on the interpreter's intuition concerning the entire dream, the method of decoding "treats the dream as a kind of secret writing (Geheimschrift), in which every sign will be translated into another sign with a known meaning, according to a fixed key" (Td 118f/ID 130). This conception leads to a mechanical approach that employs a code to decipher individual dream images.

In spite of his criticisms, Freud acknowledges that "lay opinion" provides the closest analogues to his own work on dreams. He favors the related and slightly more sophisticated practices of Artemidorus, who takes the circumstances of the dreamer into account (Td 119f/ID 131). All too quickly, however, Freud tries to dispense with both Joseph and Artemidorus by discounting their "symbolic" and "decoding" methods. Freud suggests a preference for the latter, while striving to keep his distance.

Freud's subsequent additions to this discussion attest to his discomfort in relation to his predecessors. A footnote of 1909 mentions a third form of popular dream interpretation that employs neither symbolism nor decoding: "oriental dream books" perform interpretations based on homonymic wordplay.16 Two years later, Freud adds "the most beautiful" ancient ex-


ample of this kind—from Artemidorus, whose work thus seems to escape the category of interpretation by decoding (Td 120n/ID 131n–132n). In a footnote of 1914, however, Freud insists on the difference between his methods and those of Artemidorus. Basing his remarks on a study by Theodor Gomperz, Freud withdraws his earlier praise. Artemidorus works on the basis of association: “A thing in a dream signifies what it recalls to the mind. Of course, what it recalls to the mind of the dream interpreter!” (Td 119n/ID 130n). Artemidorus’ processes of interpretation betray an inevitable arbitrariness; Freud sets himself apart from Artemidorus by noting that the psychoanalytic use of associations “assigns the work of interpretation to the dreamer” (ibid.). Over the years, Freud’s dream interpretations increasingly rely on familiar symbolic relations, and the claimed distance between his dream book and ancient dream books becomes less tenable. Freud’s later compilation of symbols with standard meanings, especially in chapter 6 of The Interpretation of Dreams, is in some respects comparable to the ancient dream books; Freud dismisses his precursors by understating the similarities between their techniques and his own.

Freud continually looks back over his shoulder, nervously eyeing his forerunners. He escapes from the confines of prior methods by telling another story. During his studies of hysteria with Josef Breuer, Freud writes, he began to treat the dream as a symptom, or at least as a link in the individual’s psychical chain (Td 121/ID 133). His challenge was to expose the underlying links methodically.

Interpretation by Correspondence and Displacement

In order to account for the strange form assumed by dreams that purportedly represent wishes, Freud differentiates between latent thoughts and manifest dream contents. He wonders: “What alteration took place with the dream thoughts, until out of them the manifest dream was formed, as we remember it on awakening?” (Td 141/ID 156). Assuming that the latent contents or dream thoughts are expressed by the manifest dream, Freud examines the developmental relationship between these elements. Freud postulates that dreams represent wish fulfillments, and he retrospectively confirms this postulate with the help of his opposition between the dream thoughts and the manifest dream (see Td 152, 161/ID 168, 179).

Freud achieves his solution to the riddle of dreams through the method of free association. He models this technique after a letter in which

Schiller urges a frustrated writer to free himself from mental obstacles:

The ground for your complaint lies, it seems to me, in the constraint which your understanding imposes on your imagination. . . . It seems bad and disadvantageous for the creative work of the soul, if the understanding inspects the ideas that are streaming in, as it were, at the very gates. Considered in isolation, an idea can be quite inconsiderable and overly adventurous, but perhaps it will, in a certain connection with others that perhaps appear equally tasteless, furnish a very purposive link:—All this the understanding cannot judge, if it does not persevere long enough to view the idea in connection with others. . . . Thence [come] your complaints of unproductivity, because you discard too soon and discriminate too stringently. (Letter of 1 December 1788; cited in Td 123/ID 135)

Freudian psychoanalysis establishes conditions under which every patient may speak and invent freely, following the example of creative writers. Freud himself finds that he can achieve "uncritical self-observation" when he writes down his associations (Td 123/ID 136).

Freud's interpretive method thus calls for a further process of text creation rather than an intuitive guessing of symbols or the passive manipulation of the key to a code. Out of the dream the dreamer must create new links or narratives until a coherent story emerges. For psychoanalysis the meaning of a dream or text is always another text, as reconstructed from associations, except when Freud reverts to the ancient notion that certain symbols are interpretable independently of the dreamer's associations. In a footnote of 1925, Freud asserts that he can interpret dreams without reference to the dreamer's associations "when the dreamer has employed symbolic elements in the dream content" (Td 247n/ID 274n). Freud initially dismisses his precursors by commenting on the "uselessness of both popular practices of interpretation" for a "scientific treatment of the subject" (Td 120/ID 132). His subsequent footnotes show, however, that he cannot so easily supersede the methods of Joseph and Artemidorus, which play some role in his own practices. Interpretive models compete within Freud's works.17

Freud’s dream theories rely on the basic opposition between manifest and latent dream contents, between actual dream images and concealed meanings, explicit and implicit layers, surface and depth structures. To elucidate the distortion of the latent dream wish and dream thoughts, in the manifest dream content, Freud postulates the agency or process of the dream work (Traumarbeit). One-third of The Interpretation of Dreams, all of the wide-ranging sixth chapter, is devoted to this phenomenon. In his effort to facilitate dream interpretation, Freud studies the ways in which dreams are formed. If it is possible to discover the mechanisms of dream distortion, Freud hopes, this discovery should enable him to return from the dream to the repressed wish it obliquely represents, using the materials of the manifest content in relation to the day’s residues (die Tagesreste). Freud’s coinage implicitly belittles these “residues,” which evoke something that is left over from the day and remains unwanted, like dregs at the bottom of a bottle, in mental life. This derogatory terminology of the word


19. Dieter Wyss shrewdly questions Freud’s hermeneutics in his Die tiefenpsychologischen Schulen von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, 3d ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970): “To recognize the latent thoughts in the manifest dream content means to follow the reverse path from the irrational, manifest dream appearance back to the (apparently) original, logical intention. The apparent intelligence, the often admired refinement with which the dream expresses latent dream thoughts, is without question the intelligence of the analyst, who on this reversed path sees his own purposive thinking in the irrational dream products” (p. 372). In English, see Dieter Wyss, Psychoanalytic Schools from the Beginning to the Present, trans. Gerald Onn (New York: Jason Aronson, 1973), p. 501. See also Michel Foucault’s introduction to Ludwig Binswanger’s Le rêve et l’existence, trans. Jacqueline Verdeaux (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1954), especially pp. 24, 37–38; the English translation by Forrest Williams and Jacob Needleman entitled Dream and Existence is contained in a special issue of the Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry 19, no. 1 (1984–85).
Tagesreste accords with Freud’s frequent devaluation of the manifest dream content.

Attributing the distorted relationship between manifest and latent dream contents to operations of the dream work, Freudian theory assumes an essentially bipartite model of interpretation.²⁰ The drawback of this dual framework lies in its tendency to cast the manifest dream as a mere facade that conceals the true dream thoughts (e.g., Td 221, 472/ID 245, 529). Freud is consequently inclined to undervalue the manifest contents, despite the fact that a dream report is the necessary starting point for interpretation.²¹

Freud’s practices conceal subtle tensions between a hermeneutics of correspondence and a method of association or displacement.²² On the basis

²⁰. Compare Georges Politzer, Critique des fondements de la psychologie, 3d ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968): “The analysis comes back to positing, anterior to the dream, a conventional thought expressing the meaning of the dream in giving to the significative intentions their adequate signs.” According to Politzer, this involves postulating a prior “narrative which never occurred” (p. 180).

²¹. For a revaluation of the manifest dream content, see Wilhelm Stekel, Die Sprache des Traumes (Wiesbaden: J. F. Bergmann, 1911): “Freud places the greatest weight on the material which is piled up behind the dream facade. I have been concerned to show that the manifest dream content already discloses to us the most important aspect of the content, of the latent dream thoughts” (p. 14). Compare Wilhelm Stekel, Fortschritte und Technik der Traumdeutung (Vienna: Weidmann, 1935): Freud’s basic mistake was that “he neglected the manifest dream content and overestimated the associations, which were supposed to convey the latent dream thoughts” (p. 9). Another psychoanalytic study that emphasizes the manifest dream is Samuel Lowy’s Psychological and Biological Foundations of Dream-Interpretation (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1942), e.g., pp. 1, 19, 77. Menard Boss, in Der Traum und seine Auslegung (Bern: Hans Huber, 1953), pp. 28–48, reviews theories that dispute Freud’s views of the manifest dream.

²². This analysis focuses on two central, though not all-encompassing, interpretive modes. Correspondence and association, which are perhaps akin to Freudian Verdichtung and Verschiebung, to some extent also parallel Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit and sekundäre Bearbeitung. But this does not mean that only two modes of figuration and two competing models operate in Freud’s work. The opposition has heuristic value here, as does the related distinction between metaphor and metonymy. See Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, Fundamentals of Language, 2d ed. (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), pp. 72–76, 90–96. For a discussion of the unstable interactions between metaphor and metonymy, see Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 12–15.
of the correspondence theory, the interpreter searches for similar dream thoughts that lie behind dream contents in a condensed yet homologous form. Drawing from the associative approach, the analyst uses connections provided by the dreamer, which relate to the dream contents by contiguity, not by resemblance. The two interpretive models stand opposed, yet they also tend to blur into each other.23

The characteristic overdetermination of dream contents inspires but ultimately opposes a simple correspondence theory.24 Overdetermination of dream contents means, first of all, that “each of the elements of the dream content shows itself to be . . . multiply represented in the dream thoughts” (Td 286/ID 318). This must be the case, Freud reasons, in light of the disparity in length between the laconic dream text and the elaborate interpretation. He concludes that the dream results from a condensation of dream thoughts, which involves a relation of similarity and is thus comparable to the poetic figure of metaphor.25 Freud sometimes writes as if the tenor of the metaphorical equation could be definitively adduced from its vehicle, but at other points he observes an incommensurability between the two terms.

The dream work also entails a displacement, a relationship by contiguity. Freud writes that “the individual dream thoughts are represented in the dream by multiple elements” (Td 286/ID 318). Moreover, “the elements in the dream content which stand out as the essential components by

23. Samuel Lowy hints at the essential interdependence of correspondence and association theories in his Psychological and Biological Foundations of Dream-Interpretation: “The dream is not simply a condensed, abbreviated formation, which is essentially identical with the total [sic] of its ‘latent’ content. I should say that the dream and its parts correspond to a multitude of original elements, like two things which belong to each other, yet which are not identical and even not necessarily similar. Dream-interpretation, then, is essentially a conclusion a posteriori. We cannot say definitely that the various elements and relations which we find in the associations, are really contained in the dream image, really make up the ‘content’ of the dream” (p. 195).

24. Johannes Volkelt’s Die Traum-Phantasie (Stuttgart: Meyer and Zeller, 1875) is an unmistakable precursor to the Freudian discussion of Verdichtung (see pp. 24, 87, 135), Verschiebung (see pp. 86, 117–18), and Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit (see p. 31). But in connection with associative dreams, Volkelt observes that “one can no longer speak of such a fixed kernel” of meaning (p. 118).

no means play the same role in the dream thoughts” (Td 305/ID 340). Disparities are even more compelling when the dream contents have been displaced and have received a completely new center of interest.

On one level, Freud adheres to the bipartite model according to which reported dream contents correspond to dream thoughts hidden in the depths of the psyche. On another level, he does not rely on a conjunction of the dream and its meaning, but refers to a textual difference (Textverschiedenheit) (Td 307/ID 343). The latter conception diverges from hermeneutic practices based on the recovery of mental acts that give meaning to texts. Although Freud frequently resorts to dream thoughts revealed by dream contents, insisting on their sexual character in connection with infantile wishes, he is also aware of an alternative paradigm.

“Free” Association

Freud’s interpretations employ a procedure that substitutes a text for a text. Starting from each segment of the dream report, Freud’s self-analysis and psychoanalytic dream analyses generate additional materials. Freud admits to some uncertainty as to whether these associations may be identified with mental concomitants that produce the dream: “In view of the superabundant number of associations which the analysis brings to every single element of the dream content, in some readers the basic doubt will be aroused whether all that occurs to one subsequently in the analysis may be counted among the dream thoughts” (Td 283/ID 314).26 This doubt stands at the crossroad between Freud’s competing correspondence theory and associative approach to meaning. Does the dream analysis directly correspond to the dream thoughts, or does the analysis produce associations that have no equivalent in the dream? The final chapter of The Interpretation of Dreams elaborately rephrases the problem, and rescues the correspondence model from a threat of ruin: interpretation retraces the path of the dream work until by an indirect route it reattains the dream thoughts (Td 509/ID 571). Yet intervening displacements unsettle the security a correspondence theory might promise.

Freud’s method works from individual elements of a dream, noting associations at each point and seeking a return to the dream thoughts behind the dream (Td 504/ID 565). Freud anticipates a criticism: “Something can be associatively linked with every idea; it is only remarkable that one is

supposed to attain precisely the dream thoughts in this aimless and arbitrary flow of thoughts” (ibid.). This critical voice haunts Freud’s conclusions.27

Elaborating on the method of free association in his lectures of 1916, Freud explains that his technique encourages us to “ask the dreamer what his dream signifies” (VEP 116/ILP 100). As in The Interpretation of Dreams, nevertheless, it remains uncertain whether the dreamer’s associations lead back to thoughts that produced the dream; ideally, the work of analysis recapitulates the paths of the dream work, yet there is no guarantee that this is always the case. Freudian interpretation wavers between confident substitutions and doubtful displacements.

In his lectures, Freud argues more forcefully that the dreamer’s associations are not random, but instead strictly determined (VEP 121/ILP 106). This determinate character is in part the consequence of mental “complexes” (VEP 124/ILP 109). Freud takes the example of attempting to remember a forgotten proper name as analogous to the situation of dream interpretation: in the effort to recall a name, one may spontaneously produce a series of substitutions, much as the dream work produces its manifest content, or as the dreamer produces associations retrospectively. Similar to a substitute name, “the dream element is also not the right thing (das Richtige), but only a substitute (Ersatz) for something else, for the authentic thing (das Eigentliche), which I do not know and shall discover through the dream analysis” (VEP 124/ILP 110). In German rhetoric, the eigentliche Bedeutung is also the literal meaning, while figures are uneigentliche Gebrauche. Thus the manifest dream is characteristically linked to “inauthentic” usage, to tropes. Freud concludes that “what is possible in connection with forgetting a name must also be able to succeed in dream interpretation: to start from the substitute (Ersatz) and through connective associations make the elusive genuine thing accessible” (VEP 126/ILP 112). Freud’s analogy takes for granted that the dream is “inauthentic,” a distortion of something else, and that the “authentic” dream content may be known. Whereas a forgotten proper name (e.g., “Monaco”) clearly exists apart from mistaken memories of it, however, there may not be any single “proper meaning” behind the dream report.28

27. In Psychological and Biological Foundations of Dream-Interpretation, Lowy suggests that the dream is essentially inseparable from the free associations it inspires (p. 105n). From a methodological standpoint, there is no firm line between the hypothetical dream in itself and the dream as it is reconstructed by a sequence of mental acts.

Freud insists that the manifest dream is inauthentic, for "the recalled dream is indeed not the authentic thing, but rather a distorted substitute for it" (VEP 129/ILP 114). By a sequence of further substitutions, Freud hopes to arrive at the authentic meaning, the "unconscious of the dream" (ibid.). Yet in setting up this dichotomy, Freud makes an interesting slip of the pen. What was unconscious to the dreamer, he writes, is "concealed, inaccessible, inauthentic" (VEP 128/ILP 113). Freud's editors note that one would expect him to write "authentic" here. A reversal begins to disturb the clearer opposition Freud attempts to establish. The recalled dream itself is inauthentic, he repeatedly argues, and its interpretation returns to the authentic sense. But Freud upholds this bipartite model only with utmost difficulty.

On the basis of resistances that block an understanding of the manifest content, Freud concludes that "something significant must be hidden behind the substitution" (VEP 131/ILP 116). The dream is like a child that refuses to open its hand because something is hidden there (ibid.). How can Freud be so certain that something authentic stands behind the dream? He continues his metaphor by considering children's dreams throughout the entire following chapter. Again, however, his discussion implicitly reverses itself. While typical infantile dreams are supposed to be free of disguise, Freud has just mentioned an instance of childhood dissimulation.

Beyond the manifold deceptions of the insidious dream work lies an imagined realm of innocence and truth: the undisguised dream of wish fulfillment. At decisive moments in both The Interpretation of Dreams (chapter 3) and the Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (lecture 8), Freud resorts to the dreams of children as literal wish fulfillments (Td 145–49/ID 160–64 and VEP 139–47/ILP 126–35). When Freud's daughter or nephew dreams of eating desired foods, the dream thought is, as it were, nakedly exposed. With this as the standard of an authentic dream content, Freud can point to the distortions that complicate the interpretation of all other dream types. The idealized, infantile dream appears as a literal representation. But in practice every dream deviates to some extent from this ideal, since dream images result from figurative distortions by the dream work. If a dream is

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29. Contrast John Brenkman's remarks in "The Other and the One: Psychoanalysis, Reading, The Symposium," in Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982): "Psychoanalytic interpretation does not seek to restore a hidden center of meaning or some original signified but rather reconstitutes the process of the dream's production" (p. 439). Brenkman alludes to Freud's associative approach, recalling the insight that the dream cannot be strictly distinguished from the associations it generates.
analogous to a matrix of tropes, or "inauthentic" expressions, one can hardly expect to translate it into a secure plane of corresponding meanings. This difficulty intensifies Freud's interest in childhood dreams that appear to lack distortion.

The discussion of children’s dreams furthers the myth of childhood as an age of innocence, without deceptions: "These dreams dispense with the dream distortion, and for this reason also they require no work of interpretation" (VEP 141/ILP 128). According to Freud's construct, infantile dreams illustrate a literalism in which "the manifest and the latent dream coincide" (ibid.). At this point, Freud wavers on the subject of the dream work; if some dreams can exist without it, "therefore the dream distortion does not form a part of the essence of the dream." Freud immediately withdraws this surprising revelation as soon as he offers it, for he grants that even in the dreams of children we perceive "a small piece of dream distortion, a certain difference between the manifest dream content and the latent dream thoughts" (ibid.). Freud hopes to preserve both his theory of dream distortion and the reassuring recourse to relatively straightforward dreams of children.

There is no absolute equivalence between a wish and a dream, except when, if ever, the wish is identical to the manifest content. Thus the literalist approach to childhood and erotic dreams as wish fulfillments is untenable. The dream work assures that dreams are always characterized by figuration, and never correspond exactly to repressed wishes. The final agency of overdetermination and ambiguity, secondary revision, is especially elusive.

Revisions of Secondary Revision

In what sense is "secondary revision" (or elaboration) secondary? Freud's accounts leave obscure the processes of revision implied by sekundäre Bearbeitung. Its name suggests a verbal parallel to the other three components of the dream work ("Traumarbeit"), but it never fits easily into the Freudian schema. Like an unacceptable dream thought that opposes rational ideas, secondary revision challenges Freud's emerging theories of dream interpretation.

30. Responding to the work of Peter Rosegger, in 1911 Freud adds a discussion of dreams that may not qualify as wish fulfillments. Rosegger suffered from recurring traumatic dreams of failure, and Freud admits to having experienced analogous dreams (Td 456-58/ID 511-13). But in a footnote of 1930, Freud corrects himself by observing that dreams of punishment (Strafträume) may be understood as wish fulfillments of the Über-Ich (Td 459n/ID 514n).
Secondary revision names a mental agency or process that modifies the dream contents formed by condensation, displacement, and considerations of representability. From a developmental standpoint, this fourth operation appears secondary in that it follows the other three components of the dream work. Freud defends against the associated uncertainties, however, by asserting that the fourth component of the dream work seldom rises to new creations (Td 471/ID 528). Secondary revision does not show itself in the generation of materials, Freud says, but in an ordering tendency: "Its influence expresses itself," Freud writes, "like that of the others, primarily in the preferences and selections from the already-formed psychical materials in the dream thoughts" (Td 472/ID 529). The dream is a conglomerate held together by the ordering work of secondary revision (Td 407, 434/ID 455, 486); dream interpretation severs the pieces that have been so artfully joined.

The relationship between the initial three components of the dream work and the fourth is analogous to the relationship between poets and a philosopher. Freud comments that, like Heinrich Heine's comic professor who "patches the gaps in the cosmos," secondary revision takes away the appearance of absurdity and chaos that would otherwise typify the world of dreams. As a result of this process, certain dreams appear to have "already been interpreted once, before we subject them to waking interpretation" (Td 472/ID 528). The work of secondary revision is thus variable, evident to different degrees in different dreams.

Freud compares the operations of secondary revision to the fantasy work of daydreams. This is a potentially radical turn because it threatens the strict division between waking and sleeping dream processes. Freud has, in fact, already referred to secondary revision as a feature of dream formation that "cannot be distinguished from our waking thinking" (Td 471/ID 527). Once he grants this element of the dream work, he can hardly maintain the dream report and analysis at a level entirely distinct from the dream.33


32. "Die Heimkehr," LVIII. Freud alludes to this phrase in Td 471n/ID 528n, and quotes it in VEP 588/NIL 141.

33. In this context, Freud symptomatically introduces a rare dream specimen for which he does not possess careful notes; he seems to disturb the unquestioned hegemony of the dream report (Td 475/ID 532). Throughout, the italicized (or widely spaced) dream texts have the aura of factual evidence, unmodified in relation to the
Despite his explanation of secondary revision in connection with day-dreams, Freud strives to show its inner relationship to the other aspects of the dream work. He casts aside the previous notion that secondary revision retrospectively modifies the results of condensation, displacement, and considerations of representability. In so doing, he makes secondary revision appear equally primary in the dream work, writing that this process operates simultaneously with the others (Td 479/ID 537). Freud resists his own suggestion that secondary revision is a later moment in dream production, and proposes that it may be the fourth component of a contemporaneous order; he compares it to the ways in which our waking thoughts process perceptual impressions. But this establishment of order is obviously distinct from the distorting processes that generate dreams. The situation of secondary revision in Freud’s theory of dreams remains enigmatic, because it appears to both accompany and follow the other aspects of the dream work.

Freud’s discussions of secondary revision do not resolve its equivocations; this act in the drama of the dream work eludes stable treatment. Freud concludes his chapter on the dream work by resorting again to a bipartite model, according to which “the mental work in the formation of a dream is divided into two accomplishments: the production of the dream thoughts and their transformation into the dream content” (Td 486/ID 544). In one sense, unconscious thoughts are the essential motives for dreams, yet in another sense the transforming dream work is even more characteristic of dream life (Td 486/ID 544–45). On Dreams maintains that secondary revision operates “retrospectively (nachträglich) on the already formed dream content” (UTT 36/OD 73). Specifically, “its accomplishment consists in ordering the components of the dream in such a way that they approximately join together in a continuity, in a dream composition” (UTT 36/OD 73–74). Freud asserts in general that “the dream work is not creative” (UTT 37/OD 76); it only modifies the given materials as does a writer or editor working from a rough draft.

Freud refuses to identify secondary revision with the literary processes of revision its name evokes. His later writings on dream interpretation consistently reject every step in this direction.34 At the center of the

argument at hand. Now this convention suddenly fails, in the midst of a discussion that makes such a view appear problematic. If a dream memory is indistinguishable from retrospective contributions, then the dream report cannot claim a pristine, privileged status.

34. In a letter, Freud criticizes Karl Abraham's description of secondary revision, which is “too limited to its last part, distortion while narrating, whereas its essential matter is the false centering of the entire content.” See Freud and Abraham, Briefe 1907–1926, p. 56.
resulting blind spot is the patient's dream report, the status of which Freud seldom questions. What differentiates a dream text from a novelist's fiction? Only in one extended discussion of the forgetting of dreams does Freud grant the textual problematics involved in dream interpretation. He admits a possible objection: "We have no guarantee that we know the dream as it actually occurred" (Td 491/ID 550). Apart from the familiar difficulties encountered in remembering dreams, Freud admits that "our memory does not only reproduce the dream fragmentarily, but even untruthly" (ibid.).

Freud shifts his sights when he chooses to associate secondary revision with the process of retelling a dream: "It is correct that we distort the dream in trying to reproduce it; here we again find that we have designated as the secondary (and often misleading) revision of the dream through the agency (Instanz) of normal thinking" (Td 493/ID 552). Where previous authors have observed an arbitrary "modification of the dream in being recalled and conceived in words," Freud finds regular and significant patterns. If the dream report is not directly valid as a transcript of the dream, its distortions are themselves significant. Since Freud assumes that there are no accidents in mental events, he willingly counts the patient's dream report as a further, analyzable aspect of the dream work.

Freud sometimes asks patients to recount their dreams a second time and determines key moments by observing the modified passages, where censorship has continued its work (Td 493/ID 553). The manifest dream is like a dictatorship from which previously deposed rulers (the dream thoughts) have been banished.35 Rather than strive for an ideal, adequate account, Freud accepts that the report is inevitably distorted and assumes the task of learning the codes necessary in order to make sense of indirect disclosures. Thus Freud subsequently discourages his followers from asking patients to write down dreams immediately after awakening: it is not necessary to exaggerate efforts to arrive at a "faithful preservation of the dream text" (SA Supp. 155/TT 102). The mind follows creative paths of distortion, in any event, and the problem is to recognize these paths, not to prevent or correct them.36


36. Freud later expresses contradictory opinions on secondary revision, as when he questions whether it is part of the "authentic" dream work. "A Dream Which Bore Testimony" treats secondary revision as an element of the dream work, but Freud
Freud’s Monopoly and the Dream Facade

On one occasion, Freud referred to another author’s work as a “secondary revision” of his own. Notoriously unreceptive to the revisions proposed by competing psychoanalytic theorists, however, he was particularly unimpressed by alternative dream theories. Not only his ancient precursors were dismissed after receiving cursory treatment. In a passage that offended his contemporaries, Freud complained that contributions to the study of dreams had diminished of late: “The analysts act as if they had nothing more to say about dreams, as if the theory of dreams were closed” (VEP 452/NIL 8). After his own theoretical framework had become more rigid, Freud may have unwittingly projected his wish to have the last word. In spite of this wish, authors such as Wilhelm Stekel, Alfred Adler, Alphonse Maeder, Herbert Silberer, Ludwig Binswanger, and Carl Gustav Jung suggested advances during his lifetime. Freud rejected all but the most minor adjustments that one might also consider it separately: “Then one would have to say: the dream in its psychoanalytic sense includes the authentic (eigentliche) dream work and the secondary revision of its product” (UTT 82/TT 201). The Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis carefully limit the range of secondary revision (VEP 188/ILP 182). One of Freud’s encyclopedia articles comments that reordering by secondary revision “properly speaking (eigentlich) does not belong to the dream work” (GW 13, 217/SE 18, 241). Totem and Taboo suggests that secondary revision creates new meanings, which cannot be identified with those of the dream thoughts (SA 9, 382–83/SE 13, 94–95).


ments of his hypotheses, which had gradually attained the status of doctrines. As symbolism took on an increasingly important role in his theories, Freud only repudiated the related work of Stekel and Jung (Td 551n/ID 618n).

Freud was particularly uncomfortable with the view that a dream is open to distinct levels of interpretation; he often mentions the work of Silberer and rejects his "anagogic" dream interpretation. According to Freud’s paraphrase, Silberer theorizes that "every dream allows two interpretations . . . the so-called psychoanalytic, and another, the so-called anagogic, which turns away from the drive stimuli and aims toward a representation of the higher psychical accomplishments" (VEP 239/ILP 237). Freud admits that some dreams may signify in this dual way, but "most dreams require no over-interpretation (Überdeutung) and are in particular not susceptible of an anagogic interpretation" (Td 501–2/ID 562). The anagogic level, according to Freud, is only an abstract thought that conceals aspects of the repressed instinctual life. He comments cynically that the opposition "is not always that of high anagogic and common analytic, but rather that of repulsive and decent or indifferent" (UTT 108/SP 84). Freud argues that the supposedly higher dream content only obscures its connection to repressed unconscious wishes. When Adler and Maeder question this premise, he counters by observing that his critics ignore the difference between manifest and latent contents.

Although later editions of The Interpretation of Dreams emphasize recurring symbols, Freud’s interpretive approach is fundamentally at odds with an allegorical method. Individual images in dreams may have predictable meanings, but entire dreams generally do not fall into an allegorical pattern. The method of free association, in particular, opposes efforts to discern a coherent allegory behind the manifest dream. By association,
each dream element gives rise to additional narratives; the analyst then re­
traces the distortions enacted by the dream work in order to approximate
the repressed dream thoughts. Freud’s associative model disturbs the corre­
spendence model that seeks a single wish beyond diverse manifest contents.
Free association is a process of intertextual substitution and displacement:
rather than replace each symbol by its meaning, Freud encourages the pa­
tient to transform the dream text into new texts.

Freud does recognize different kinds of dreams when he distinguishes
between those that are “from above (von oben)” and those “from below
(von unten)”: “Dreams from below are those that are aroused through the
strength of an unconscious (repressed) wish. . . . Dreams from above are
comparable to daily thoughts or daily intentions, which during the night
have succeeded in being strengthened by the repressed material which is
debarred from the ego” (SA Supp. 261/TT 207–8). Freud continues this
line of thought in discussing the well-known dreams of Descartes.40 He is
careful to observe that “above” and “below” refer to the surface and depth
of consciousness, not to extramundane and mundane influences. Neverthe­
less, like Silberer, Freud recognizes disparate senses of Descartes’ dreams.
On the one hand, the dreams represent a conflict between metaphysical
good and evil, while an associated feeling of sin hints at repressed sexual
ideas. In essence, then, Freud only repeats his familiar tactic of demystifi­
cation. The dream is supposed to have some kind of exalted, rational mean­
ing, which Freud traces to unconscious wishes.

Several post-Freudian authors concentrate on dream interpretation
“from above” in connection with experiential conflicts.41 Freud’s followers


41. Stekel, Jung, and Adler have been followed more recently by Thomas French
and the cognitive therapists. French argues that dreams “have sense and meaning,
similar to and continuous with the wishes and thoughts of waking life,” and con­
cludes that the dream work, “like the thought processes directing our ordinary wak­
ing activity, is dominated by the need to find a solution for a problem.” See
Thomas French, The Integration of Behavior (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1952), vol. 1, chapter 16 on “Dreams and Rational Behavior,” pp. 69–75. See also
French’s earlier “Insight and Distortion in Dreams,” International Journal of
Psycho-Analysis 20 (1939): “We have interested ourselves not so much in the trans­
f ormations undergone by the latent dream thoughts, but rather with the ego’s dy­
namic problem of reconciling conflicting wishes. We have been interested in the
dream work not as a distorted intellectual process, as a peculiar mode of thinking,
but rather as an attempt by the ego to solve a practical problem” (p. 292). The
fullest discussion of dreams by Thomas French is contained in his The Integration of
Beck, “Cognitive Patterns in Dreams and Daydreams,” in Dream Dynamics, Sci-
differ markedly, but many believe that he underestimates the importance of the manifest dream content. Their revaluation of manifest elements is sometimes linked to pragmatic concerns over the place of dream analysis during treatment. To avoid the dangers of suggestion and focus attention on the dream as a symptom of the past, Freud tries to separate the interpretation from its employment in the cure. When the manifest content receives new recognition, this facilitates wide-ranging dream interpretations in terms of future prospects, fears, ambitions, impending choices. The dream report commands greater respect when it is not viewed merely as a shell that conceals repressed wishes, but is perceived as part of a narrative process that may influence future life decisions. One should not blindly follow the actions suggested by a dream, of course, accepting its surface as advice "from above." Within the analysis, a dreamer must confront and revise the mysterious dream narratives concerning past, present, and future. Dreaming is a universal phenomenon of fiction making, a nightly experience during which every individual directs a play of illusions. To the extent that we recall and interpret our dreams, we are literary interpreters of our own texts or life stories.

Freud describes the relationship between the dream and its meaning by analogy to a facade and the church behind it. This architectural comparison is as complex as the phenomenon it metaphorically describes. Freud refers to particular Italian facades that were added in a later style


42. See Wolfram Luders, "Traum und Selbst," Psyche 36 (September 1982): "Dream interpretation . . . opens up for the dreamer access to his real self, confronts him with the psychic frame of mind which the dream interpreted" (p. 826-27). Luders summarizes: "Creative capacity is the true definition of the self. If dreams are interpreted accordingly, the dreamer experiences his potential and his strategies for dealing with the subjective and objective reality. Interpretations of the self facet [sic] confront the patient with his own way of producing and reproducing his self" (p. 829).

43. Jung's "Die praktische Verwendbarkeit der Traumanalyse," in Wirklichkeit der Seele, rejects notions of the dream as "a mere facade, which conceals the actual meaning. For most houses, the so-called facade is . . . by no means a fraud or a deceptive distortion, but rather corresponds to the interior of the house. . . . Thus also is the manifest dream image the dream itself, and contains its complete sense. . . . We are dealing with something like an incomprehensible text, which has absolutely no facade, but which simply cannot be read by us. Then we do not need to interpret behind it, but must rather learn to read it" (p. 63).
than the rest of the construction. The dream fantasy is "like the facade of Italian churches, placed in front without any organic connection to the building behind it" (Td 221/ID 245). A basic difference, Freud admits, is that the dream is chaotic and full of gaps. Modifying his architectural metaphor, Freud writes that dreams stand to childhood memories "approximately in the same relation as some baroque palaces in Rome to the ancient ruins, whose slabs and columns have provided the material for the construction in modern forms" (Td 473/ID 530). Dreams, like these baroque edifices, employ spoils from an earlier period. In the construction of dreams as of some buildings, moreover, there is a temporal gap between work on the supports and on the facade. Even if the manifest content appears well ordered, "this has arisen through the dream distortion and can have as little organic connection to the inner content of the dream as does the facade of an Italian church to its structure and plan" (VEP 181/ILP 181). By alluding to the temporal gap between stages of an architectural construction, Freud reinforces his conception of dreams as combinations of childhood materials and recent events.

The architectural analogy is itself like a dream image that requires interpretation. Whereas some Italian churches harmonize external and internal forms, others show stylistic incoherence. Both the main body and the facade of a church are artistic creations; the dream work is comparable to an architect who retains a previous construction while imposing a new style. (For example, Leon Battista Alberti massively transformed the facade of the Church of S. Maria Novella in Florence, reconciling Gothic and Renaissance motifs. The dream work, like a skillful architect, manages to conceal discrepancies.) Hence Freud sometimes indicates that "the process of the dream work is the essential thing about the dream" (VEP 452/NIL 8); one key to the dream is its work of revision, similar to the advance by which a later architect incorporates and supersedes an earlier design. The dream is a form produced by the dream work from latent materials (VEP 189/ILP 183). In a footnote of 1925, Freud even suggests that not what stands behind a dream, but the way it conceals, is essential: "The dream is at bottom nothing but the particular form of our thinking, which is made possible by the conditions of the sleeping state. It is the dream work that produces this form, and it is the only essential thing about the dream, the explanation of its peculiarity" (Td 486n/ID 545n). Similarly, one might say that an architect's achievement lies in his subtle combination of available materials in accordance with current styles. The dream work, like an artist, reworks perceptions or concepts into a representing form. A problem with this analogy stems from the Freudian presupposition that the dream work is common to all people, regardless of cultural and historical determinants, whereas artistic styles obviously evolve. In either case, Freud confronts difficulties. If the functioning of the dream work changes at different times
and in different cultures, then he loses the supposedly immutable, essential characteristic of dreaming. If the dream work remains constant, it seems to transcend the individual, psychological level Freud assumes for the purpose of his scientific research.

Freud hesitates between a formal approach to the dream work and a substantial approach to contents of the dream thoughts. On one level, he adheres to the bipartite model according to which reported dream contents correspond to dream thoughts hidden in the depths of the psyche. On another level, Freud does not presuppose a conjunction of the dream and its meaning, but notes a textual difference (Textverschiedenheit) (Td 307/ID 343). The latter conception diverges decisively from hermeneutic theories based on recovery of mental acts behind a dream or text. Although Freud frequently returns to the dream thoughts revealed by dream contents, insisting on their sexual character in connection with infantile wishes, his works also hint at an alternative paradigm. Some authors note that every patient's report of a dream is linked to strategic considerations in the analysis.45

44. Sarah Kofman, in L'enfance de l'art: Une interprétation de l'esthétique freudienne (Paris: Payot, 1970), remarks that the architectural analogy "must prevent one from interpreting dreams and art as translations of memories or fantasies: a new structure which has its own laws builds itself up on an ancient one, without ever substituting itself totally for it" (p. 52).

45. See Sandor Ferenczi, Bausteine zur Psychoanalyse, 2d ed. (Bern: Hans Huber, 1964), vol. 3, pp. 47, 53, 218–19; Otto Isakower, "Spoken Words in Dreams," The Psychoanalytic Quarterly 23 (1954), 1–6; Charlotte Balkanyi, "On Verbalization," International Journal of Psycho-Analysis 45 (1965), 64–79; and Alan Roland, "The Context and Unique Function of Dreams in Psychoanalytic Therapy: Clinical Approach," International Journal of Psycho-Analysis 52 (1971), 431–39. Compare Frederic Weiss, "Meaning and Dream Interpretation," in Freud, ed. Wollheim: "But if, as I have argued, the point of dream interpretation is to discover something that the subject means, . . . then whether or not the meaning-for him which is established through his 'associations' is the meaning-for him that is the meaning-of his report is a question that is totally inconsequential in psychoanalysis. The dream is a matter of no importance: the analyst need not even be concerned with any meaning it may have in the way that he is concerned with the meaning-of, or the non-meaning-of, other sorts of objects to which the subject may give a meaning-for himself" (p. 68). Weiss concludes that Freud illegitimately claims "to be establishing a meaning, which can tell him something about a patient, dependent on the equivalence of the meaning established through 'associations' with the meaning-of the 'manifest dream'; and he legislates the legitimacy of this equation by taking away the role of 'associations,' giving it to 'latent dream thoughts,' and from them reconferring it on the 'associations.' He is having his cake and eating it too" (p. 69).
Occupation (Besetzung) and Resistance (Widerstand)

Once Freud questions whether the interpreter can provide a neutral statement of a dream's meaning, he implicitly acknowledges the hazards of interpretive manipulation. Because the dream report invariably distorts and revises, Freud can hardly maintain his bipartite model. Even before interpretation begins, the dream report already modifies the dream.

The analogy between dreams and (censored) texts encourages an application of Freud's methods of dream interpretation to his own writings. His bipartite model of meaning conceives the manifest contents as an outer layer that conceals the latent contents; Freud's psychoanalytic approach implies, at the same time, that the dream work is itself essential. For a literary analysis of Freud, this would mean privileging the modes of figuration and conceiving Freud's texts neither as a set of explicit propositions (for example, "The dream is a wish fulfillment") nor as a complex of hidden thoughts (the personal ambition and sexual dynamics revealed by his self-analysis), but as figures, examples, the turns and detours in Freud's particular rhetoric of war and love.

In many respects, the talking cure resembles a battle and a seduction. Freud encourages the transference neurosis while concealing his own emotions. By presenting the mask of a blank screen, he allows full play to the man or woman who mis-takes him for another; by avoiding any concession to the countertransference, Freud assures that he will emerge from the emotional drama unscathed. Freud is thus a seducer in the tradition of Don Juan, who characteristically dominates the passions of others without allowing his own passions to becomed enslaved. His seductions entail a lack of mutual feeling, in which misguided men and women perceive a nonexistent mutuality. In order to rechannel the patient's (impatient) passion, Freud exploits the authority of the analyst. If the frequency of the sessions and the intimacy of their dialogue is not sufficient to assure that the analysand will fall in love with the analyst, Freud discourages the formation of other emotional bonds during analysis.

46. A striking post-Freudian illustration that psychoanalysis may resemble a seduction is contained in Emil A. Gutheil, The Handbook of Dream Analysis (New York: Liveright, 1951). Gutheil takes the example of a frigid woman and shows how he undermines her "unconscious hypocrisy" (pp. 49–54). See also Gutheil, The Language of the Dream, pp. 108–9, 162–65.

Figures of war predominate at certain stages in Freud’s discussion of psychoanalysis and dream interpretation. According to one early assertion, psychological normalcy may be determined by the degree of suppression (Unterdriickung) of the unconscious by the preconscious; the unconscious must be subjugated to the dominion (Herrschaft) of the conscious and preconscious mind (Td 553/ID 620). Freud’s language introjects a metaphysical battle between the forces of light and darkness, good and evil, heaven and hell. A skeptical age transforms the opposition between life and death—or the worldly and the otherworldly—into that of waking and sleeping. The divine and daemonic mechanisms are within us. “Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo”: Freud cites Virgil’s Aeneid (VII, 312) on the title page of The Interpretation of Dreams. “If I cannot bend the powers above, I will move those of the underworld.” He later attributes this drive to the repressed impulses. But Freud ultimately proposes to mobilize and conquer the unconscious powers by delivering them to the rational control of the higher powers, the I.

Another essentially military metaphor is Besetzung, typically translated as “cathexis” but more aptly translated as occupation, deployment, or investment. This is one of the key metaphors that date from Freud’s Project of 1895, although the range of this term shifts in accordance with other developments in psychoanalytic terminology. The early passages refer to “cathected neurons (besetzte Neurone)” (AP 382, 408/OP 358, 385, passim); assuming an energetics of the psyche, Freud accounts for alterations


51. Besetzung, if rendered as “cathexis,” loses the relevant associations, while French investissement captures its economic range of meaning. Freud does occasionally employ economic metaphors. He writes, for example, that every entrepreneur needs a capitalist to back his venture; in the same way, the waking thought combines forces with an unconscious wish in creating the dream (Td 534–45/ID 599–600 and VEP 229/ILP 226). Capital is analogous to libidinal energy.
in quantity by writing of full and empty neurons. After he has explained general psychological events in terms of neural energy transfers, Freud can account for dreams in relation to the emotional investment or wish fulfillment they represent. This terminology continues to operate in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, when Freud discusses the energy transfers and deployments associated with regression and wish fulfillment (*Td* 519, 523, 189–90/*ID* 582, 587, 209–10).

The patient’s *Besetzungen* ("cathexes")—charged with love and hate, eros and thanatos, positive and negative transferences—suggest an economic model, but Freud’s heart is not merely a neutral cipher on which the patient places a wager. His deceiving heart cannot be conquered. *Besetzen* means to lay siege, to deploy one’s psychical forces around another, perhaps even to cut off supplies and force a surrender. A reversal occurs: at first, the patient’s *Besetzungen* resemble a military encirclement of the analyst. But Freud slips out of the trap, demonstrating that the campaign was really a battle within the psyche, between the patient’s present desires and past affects. The theory of transference insists that all emotional investments in the analyst are irreal, displaced from prior emotions. The patient’s laying siege around the analyst turns into an encirclement of the patient by the past. Freudian *Besetzung* implies a military campaign in which the patient is always conquered, occupied (*besetzt*) by the transference neurosis, in a kind of demonic possession or passion play. To become emotionally attached to a person or thing is, in Freud’s implicit rhetoric, to engage in strategic warfare. The psychoanalytic patient’s surrender is hastened by the imposed condition of abstinence during cure. Deployment and the overcoming of resistance are central to the Freudian method of treatment; the cure mimics a battle of the sexes.

*Besetzung* is further related to a matrix of terms that Freud does not explicitly consider. The root verb is *setzen*, to set or posit; emotional life, Freud’s choice of words implies, is a kind of self-positing. An *Einsatz* is a wager or bet; we place ourselves on the line when we invest in people and objects. The root noun is *Satz*, a sentence (in grammar) or movement (in music); our psychical energy plays itself out by transferring earlier commitments to new positions. The *Satz* does not merely rule over the *Setzungen* by which we posit our work and our passion. To the extent that love repeats previous patterns of emotion, it is a carryover (*Übertragung*) or repetition (*Wiederholung*) that brings back the past in order that we may relive it. The error behind every transference lies in the fiction of replacement, when we act as if another figure could stand in the place once held by the original. The dream itself is an *Ersatz* for hidden thought processes (*Td* 117/*ID* 129). But *Ersatz* is always a lie that ultimately betrays its counterfeit nature; and the other resists our transferences. *Besetzung* also names the cast of characters in a dramatic production. Wearing a mask of impassive, free-floating
attention and sitting beyond the patient's range of vision like a stage director who observes and intervenes in a rehearsal, Freud oversees the play of passions during which the patient remembers, repeats, and (perhaps) works through former emotional commitments. These linguistic resonances lead toward a conception of love and hate as translations (Übersetzungen), positive and negative transferences or carryovers (Übertragungen) of words and affects. Beyond conscious control, our Besetzungen speak a language of desire inside us, or in our relations with others.

The most revelatory essay in this metaphorical field is "On the Dynamics of the Transference," which employs the terms Besetzung and Libidobesetzung. Freud argues that transference, when it arises during psychoanalysis, can be enlisted in the service of treatment. He opens by observing that every human being develops a particular cliché in the experience of love. Freud could have called it simply a repetition, but he chooses to frame this peculiarity in the linguistic terms of "a cliché (or even several), which in the course of life is regularly repeated, newly printed out (abgedruckt)" (SA Supp. 159/TT 106). Life follows the literary patterns of a printed and reprinted cliché. Childhood relationships are the prototypes, and adults—like belated authors in literary tradition—are exposed to the danger of simply reproducing their exemplars.52

Freud's novel method of cure allows the patient to transfer his or her love cliché onto the analyst within the confines of the analytic session. This transference is immediately associated with resistance to the treatment (SA Supp. 160/TT 107), and so necessitates a shift in the metaphoric texture, from the image of energy transfer to that of libidinal occupation or deployment (Libidobesetzung). Initially, when the patient transfers emotions or linguistic clichés onto the analyst, Freud becomes the object of unexpectedly intense emotional attachments. He strives to remain a blank screen on which the patient's past is projected and analyzed (SA Supp. 178/TT 124), but countertransference threatens to destroy the illusion of neutrality. The cure searches for blocked libido, and in so doing engages in a mutual struggle. The deployed forces of both patient and analyst maneuver to attain their ends: "Where the analytic research comes upon the withdrawn libido in one of its hiding places, a battle must break out" (SA Supp. 162/TT 108). This battle is highly sexualized, both in its origins and in the metaphors Freud uses to describe it.

52. Cultural traditions similarly recapitulate the achievements of preceding ages. For example, the Five Books of Moses might be construed as the collective childhood of the Jews; rabbinic commentators have often interpreted subsequent events in terms of the earlier narratives.
The scenario is essentially one in which a man struggles to overcome a woman's resistance to his sexual advances. The scene of Besetzung thus reverses, for the patient's initial investment in the noncommitted analyst has become a full-fledged war. Freud elaborates the metaphors of war at the close of his essay: "This battle (Kampf) between doctor and patient, between intellect and the life of the drives (Triebleben), between recognition and the desire to act (Agierenwollen), plays itself out almost exclusively in connection with the phenomenon of transference" (SA Supp. 167/TT 114). Noting the great difficulties entailed, Freud adds that nevertheless "on this field the victory must be won" (ibid.).

Freud's great initial discovery, which shocked his collaborator and senior colleague Josef Breuer, concerned the sexual etiology of hysteria. Freud explained neuroses as the consequence of sexual disturbances. If health resembles a freely flowing hydraulic system, illness appears to result from dammed energies. In the complex drama now called psychoanalysis, a neurotic returns to the points of resistance and blockage in order to overcome these obstacles to health.

The libido cannot be freed unless it is first engaged. Hence, after Freud discovers the phenomenon of transference, he enlists its aid in the treatment. From one point of view, therapy begins as does a gambling session in which the house calls to the patron: "Place your bets!" And the patient places more than a monetary fee on Freud's desk. The serious wager is emotional: the patient makes a bid for love; desire errs. To lose, in this context, is to facilitate a discovery of the mechanisms of erotic error. Pokerfaced, Freud insists that he is merely a blank screen or mirror, the empty illusion onto which the neurotic projects desire, and he proceeds to show that the patient has mistaken the object of love. In Freud's office, desire comes to learn the unreality of its objects; the repetition of emotions is replaced by analytic working through. Place your bets! Not with any prospect of winning the game, but only to discover that your strategies are insufficient and that the house always wins. Accumulating capital throughout the twentieth century, the house that Freud built has become an increasingly potent institution.

At the start of a psychoanalytic treatment, Freud seems to say: invest in me, bet on me, occupy me, bring your abandoned dreams or hidden

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53. The hour begins. A young woman enters Freud's office for the first time. "Bitte setzen Sie sich," Freud says. Please be seated, posit yourself, declare your place. Why am I here? the patient wonders. What does he expect me to do?

In fact, the situation is even worse for the neurotic who is nowhere at home. "Bitte legen Sie sich hin," Freud says. Please lie down. What is he going to do to me? The analysis centers around the overcoming of resistances.
wishes, and throw your past loves into the cure. The scene of battle is full of surprises, however, for Freud feigns a weak position in order to provoke an effort at conquest. From a position of illusory weakness, Freud turns the tide of the battle, craftily redirecting the patient's deployments back toward their source. After Freud conquers the patient's heart, he points the subdued psyche to the hidden cause of its ignominious defeat. The patient is necessarily the loser—unless a victory over the past ensues.

The repressed paradigm is defeat at the hands of parental figures. Suddenly Freud urges a revolutionary alliance, a joint overthrow of the mother country (or Vaterland). Psychoanalysis makes forgotten loves actual, "for ultimately no one can be slain in absentia or in effigy" (SA Supp. 168/TT 115). This concluding metaphor oddly typifies psychoanalytic treatment, because the distinction between real and imaginary slaughter does not obviously correspond to the difference between repeating and working through. 54 Analysis does, nevertheless, attempt to "slay" parental figures in their absence. Freud suggests that the transference is necessary in order to reawaken slumbering affects that may then be re-educated. Continuing the prior images, a part of the patient appears to capitulate; the working through of repressed libido is figured as a murder. At best, a memory trace of the parental cliché has been destroyed, freeing the repressed energies for new investment. But if the cure appropriates and destroys the patient's love cliché, how can this mangled narrative be replaced? Like a totalitarian regime, psychoanalysis succeeds when it rewrites the history of its subjects, and when the conqueror convinces the conquered that figurative seduction is beneficial.

Out of the metaphorical battles between Freud and his patients arise questions concerning the relationship between psychoanalysis and power. Despite his efforts to maintain scientific neutrality, Freud's methods evidently involve him in rather irregular maneuvers. The founder of psychoanalysis not only engaged in symbolic battles with his patients; he also fought endlessly against his rebellious disciples, and in so doing he expressed his ambition to remain the absolute father of his figurative children.

Freud most explicitly discusses power and ambition when he interprets a minimal dream of "R." that also raises issues concerning the Jewish condition. His preparatory account refers to Jewish doctors in Vienna who have been denied the title of Professor because of "denominational considerations" (Td 154/ID 170). Prior to the dream, Freud writes, he was nominated for this title, but the experience of his senior colleagues led him to fear the worst. Freud observes somewhat irrelevantly that he is, as far as he

knows, "not ambitious" (Td 153/ID 170). Yet his interpretation of the dream of R. centers around a mixture of positive and negative feelings, tenderness and hostility, toward this colleague. By distortion into its opposite, the latent hostility is transformed into manifest tenderness.

Freud explains this dream distortion by analogy with the social situation of two people in which "the first possesses a certain power, and the second must show respect because of the power" (Td 158/ID 175). He observes that this condition is rather the rule than the exception: "The politeness which I exercise every day is in large part such a dissimulation; when I interpret my dreams for the reader, I am obliged to make such distortions" (ibid.). Ambition and hostility seethe beneath the surface of Freud's scientific persona; Freud conceives dream distortions on the model of social pretenses. Freud also compares the dream work to the activity of a political writer, who "has to tell unpleasant truths to those in power," and disguises his opinions to escape censorship (Td 158/ID 175). Freud suggests that every individual psyche operates as does a political regime. Long before writing his metapsychological essays on the tripartite psyche, Freud postulates the efficacy of distinct mental powers: "The first forms the wish that is expressed in the dream, while the second exercises censorship on the dream wish and through this censorship forces a distortion of its expression" (Td 160/ID 177). The self internalizes social hierarchies that assure a disparity between its deepest intentions and manifest expressions.

Freud relates a revealing episode of humiliation at a train station. That Freud was sensitive to such experiences is evident from his memory of an affront to his father—as a Jew (Td 208/ID 230). A certain Count Thun haughtily passes him on the platform while traveling to see the kaiser. Freud denies that he envies the count, for he is on vacation and pleasantly conceives himself to be the real Count Nichtsthun ("Do-Nothing"). Yet Freud is preoccupied by the evident social hierarchies. Full of "revolutionary thoughts" that oppose social divisions (Td 218/ID 242), Freud resolves to protest any signs of favoritism. In fact, a certain government official does claim a half-price, first-class seat, and Freud receives an inferior compartment without a lavatory. Freud's uneasy reactions, and the dreams that


result, show the significance of the issues involved in this experience. Social hierarchy has found its way into the recesses of the psyche, and this anecdote might be read as an allegory of tensions within Freud the individual.  

Freud the interpreter cannot be entirely separated from Freud the seducer. Janus-faced, he looks back in time with a pretense to uncovering past causes that explain the meaning of dreams; through transferences and free associations, he simultaneously engages the dreamer's imagination in ways that project toward future possibilities. Provoked by Freud, the dreamer invents variations on the dream text. The transference ensures that, to some extent, Freud's interpretation of these inventions will be realized or enacted.

The recognition that Freud sometimes employed self-fulfilling prophecies does not disqualify his results. Medical standards forced him to de-emphasize this aspect of the analysis, at least in his public statements; he knew that transference was the strongest "weapon" of cure, and had good reason to exploit the power of his interpretive influence. At the same time—to meet the expectations of scientific method—he dissimulated this influence. His ancient precursors provided the prophetic model he felt obliged to reject, since he was closer to them in practice, if not in theory, than he could admit.

Freud uncovers the psychological and rhetorical mechanisms that facilitate thematic awareness. Neither themes nor figures, taken alone, constitute his texts; meaning arises out of the interaction between manifest and latent elements. Freud's discussions themselves show distortions analogous to those of the dream work: his examples, allusions, reversals, qualifications, denials, censorships, revisions, metaphors, and analogies all resemble the processes he discusses. This recognition does not justify a moralistic critique. Freud's diction is unusual only in its eloquence; as with all authors, the rhetoric of his manifest contents appears to distort and recast elusive, "authentic" meanings. Authenticity and literal meaning are retrospective illusions fostered by an awareness of tropes and transferences.

Psychoanalysts have pragmatic reasons for borrowing and systematizing certain Freudian concepts while revising and rejecting others, but Freud discouraged his followers from conceiving psychoanalysis as a system.  

57. For detailed discussions of Freud's Count Thun dream, see Grinstein, *On Sigmund Freud's Dreams*, chapters 4 and 5, and Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, pp. 193–97. Schorske also sketches the political background, including the Dreyfus affair and the rise of Karl Lueger (p. 185).

literary approach takes Freud at his word, or takes seriously the ways in which his words signify, by considering the varied forms of his theories, figures, disavowals, and concealed polemics. According to Freud, the tensions expressed by symptoms, slips of the pen or tongue, and transferences characterize everyday life. To read Freud as Freud read is to observe the distortions or disfigurements that are essential to expression and to discern the movement of texts rather than the congealed meanings they seem to produce. This undertaking runs counter to the forms of psychoanalytic practice that demand routines and standardization: while Freud strives to develop scientific techniques, he also associates dream interpretation with the unpredictable methods of art criticism.

The Interpretation of Dreams is at once a treatise, an episodic novel, and a collection of case studies in which theories, confessions, and fantasies compete. Applied to his own texts, Freud’s methods of dream interpretation reveal a system in flux, distorted by condensations, displacements, graphic illustrations, and revisions. Freud searches for concealed wishes, and his own writings acknowledge moments of censorship that veil hidden meanings. As the manifest content of a dream is no random husk behind which the kernel of meaning may be found, however, so Freud’s particular dream examples, and the poetic structures of his work, are significant.

Freud’s psychological theories are inseparable from the verbal texture of his essays. Recent studies observe some flagrant distortions that have resulted from translation of Freud into English. Yet the present goal is not prescriptive, because no fully adequate translation of Freud into another language is possible. Freud himself anticipated the difficulties that would beset the translator of The Interpretation of Dreams (Td 120n/ID 132n). Rather than work toward a better English version of Freud’s texts, we may modestly observe linguistic pathways through which his texts operate. The metaphorical range of Freud’s ideas cannot be controlled or reduced to a univocal system; at best, the interpreter attends to meaning on multiple registers.

Critics of Freud have repeatedly questioned the scientific status of psychoanalysis. They argue that Freud fails to impose the highest experi-

59. At some points Freud admits the necessity of dissimulation by everyday censorship (e.g., Td 158/ID 175). At other times, however, Freud indicates that science need not dress up its results in any special form; the conclusions themselves should be sufficient (VEP 118/ILP 102). For evidence of Freud’s careful editing of his dream book, see BWF/CL, letters of 9 June 1898, 20 June 1898, and 7 August 1901.

60. See, for example, Bettelheim, Freud and Man’s Soul, pp. 49–108.

mental standards upon his nascent science; some current researchers seek to show that psychoanalytic ideas may be verified or falsified, at the same time that other authors emphasize the necessarily speculative, unprovable character of psychoanalytic theory. If we accept the inevitability of figuration, however, there is less reason to be dissatisfied with Freud’s procedures. Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* is consequently more a book about interpretation than it is about dreams. According to his theories, repression and the concomitant disguise necessitate interpretations that return to the hidden form of the distorted dream contents.

The interpreter of Freud’s text can hardly extract fixed theses: as the dream work is essential to the dream, rhetorical devices are essential to the dream book. *The Interpretation of Dreams* tells elaborate stories toward an autobiography of its author, in which the demands of scientist and novelist contend. Beyond conscious control, rhetoric governs the psyche and its textual presentation. The operations of the distorting dream work are analogous to figures of speech. What lies beyond, in the textual unconscious? In a footnote, Freud cites James Sully’s image of the dream as a palimpsest that “discloses beneath its worthless surface-characters traces of an old and precious communication” (*Td* 152n/ID 169n; quoted in English and italicized by Freud). Freud’s own writings on dreams are palimpsests over ancient sources.