FREUD: DEMYSTIFICATION AND DENIAL

Freud’s dream book and essays reveal his discomfort with regard to prophetic views of dreams. Freud separates himself as much as possible from biblical and rabbinic practices of dream interpretation, at the same time repressing the Hebrew he learned as a child. Nevertheless, the repressed returns in dreams and interpretations that raise “the Jewish question”—despite Freud’s conscious and unconscious efforts to displace this question by other concerns.\(^1\)

At the start of The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud dissociates himself from ancient traditions of dream interpretation as divination (Mantik). Classical authors held that “dreams stood in relation to the world of superhuman beings in which they believed, and brought revelations from gods and daemons.”\(^2\) According to Freud, whereas the ancients commonly assumed that dreams were divinely inspired, Aristotle reconceived them as products of the dreaming psyche. Freud observes that these are “the two opposing streams which we will discern at every period in the evaluation of dream life” (Td 31/ID 37).

Freud overstates his preference for the tradition begun by Aristotle, and disregards the messages of ancient Judaic dream interpretation. Exag-

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1. In 1914, Freud belatedly adds two footnotes to The Interpretation of Dreams that associate his work with Judaic traditions. He cites Isaiah 29:8 and a Jewish proverb (Td 143n, 150n/SE 158n, 165n), acknowledging that they anticipate his solution to the riddle of dreams as wish fulfillments.

gerating the opposition between transcendent and immanent conceptions, he apparently rejects interpretations based on anything beyond the mind of the dreamer. He cannot strictly uphold this orientation, however, because the unconscious transcends individual awareness; free association receives almost oracular communications from beyond mundane consciousness. In a different way, one rabbinic perspective exceeds the boundaries of psychology by framing the meaning of dreams within the words of Torah—since the Bible provides the materials of both divine references and psychological associations. Freud can only deny this joint significance in a society that no longer lives and dreams Scripture. The breakdown of religious life liberates consciousness from the rhetoric of revelation and threatens interpretive confidence.

Language itself, so central to dream texts and interpretations, both transcends individual consciousness and finds immanent expression. Freud conceives formal structures and puns as preconditions of mental events, much as rabbinic authors assume that scriptural sources predetermine meaning. Linguistic observations, gradually systematized into a chapter on symbols (Td 345–94/ID 385–439), inspire the new Freudian Bible. Unlike the first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, later editions decode dozens of relatively unchanging dream contents, dispensing with the method of free association in dealing with familiar symbols. To the extent that such symbols are shared by many minds, regardless of cultural differences, C. G. Jung’s theory of archetypes is a logical consequence. But despite his discussions of symbols and universal claims for the agency of the dream work, Freud is skeptical of meanings beyond those framed by an individual consciousness.

Freud’s insistence on the immanence of mental phenomena is evident in his discussions of prophetic and telepathic dreams. He repeatedly argues that presumably prophetic dreams can be explained psychologically, and that telepathy may be understood more plausibly as thought transference. Freud plays his role of demystifier, arguing that mundane causes account for the illusion of prophetic effects. Freud’s revelations serve to conceal his own steps in the direction of prophecy and his modified ideas of transference.

Although Freud distances himself from prophetic traditions, *The Interpretation of Dreams* contains hints of prophecy. To account for the ambition his dreams express, for example, Freud recalls a story he often heard as a child. At his birth, an old peasant woman prophesied that his mother had given the world a great man (Td 204/ID 225). This prophecy seems to have haunted Freud’s imagination and influenced the course of his life. In a requisite gesture of modesty, Freud shrugs off the memory by observing that “such prophecies must occur very frequently” (ibid.). The old woman’s anticipatory narrative has nevertheless penetrated Freud’s self-interpretation, counterbalanced by harsh words of his father. Freud recalls that in chastising him, his father once proclaimed, “Nothing will come of the boy” (Td 225/ID 250). Like the peasant woman’s pronouncement, these
words insinuate themselves into Freud's imagination, for "references to this scene always recur in my dreams and are regularly connected with an enumeration of my achievements and successes, as if I wished to say: You see, I have come to something" (ibid.). Through his ambition, Freud responded to contradictory predictions about his future.

Freud's autobiographical examples suggest an altered meaning of prophecy, in the light of psychoanalysis: a narrative proves to be prophetic if it guides the course of further narratives. Freud, for instance, retells his life story in relation to opposing narratives of greatness and insignificance. From a skeptical standpoint, prophetic utterances appear to contain no intrinsic truth, yet as narratives they may impose themselves and become self-fulfilling. Scientists attempt to explain such self-fulfilling prophecies in terms of suggestion; after a prophetic narrative is fulfilled, however, there is no way to differentiate between the appearance of prediction and the effects of suggestion.

Dreams and their interpretations may also enter a cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy. In Freud's terminology, this is linked to the problems of psychoanalytic transference and suggestion. Freudian dream interpretation cannot entirely renounce the prophetic mode, which may include provocative utterances that influence future events. No dream in itself, but only an interpretation that has consequences for the dreamer's future, is prophetic.

**Dreams of Prophecy and Telepathy**

There are several major and minor essays by Freud on dreams, telepathy, and the occult. He confronts "the occult significance of dreams" repeat-
FREUD'S DREAM OF INTERPRETATION

dedly, during a period of over twenty-five years; his sporadic publications on this subject indicate his interest and his ambivalence. Rather than paraphrase Freud's arguments, which reinterpret parapsychological reports, the present discussion delineates textual strategies by which Freud undermines the supposed prophetic significance of dreams. In order to deny that dreams can function prophetically, Freud strives to show that psychology can explain their supposedly prophetic contents. Granting that dreams have meaning, Freud limits this meaning to the psyche of the dreamer.

Prophetic and telepathic dreams pose a special threat to Freud, because their existence would oppose the claim that dreams are a determinate result of psychological processes, like symptoms. Parapsychological dreams point beyond the chain of an individual's mental acts. Whereas Freud's own writings hint that impersonal powers influence psychology, he conceives the dream work as an independent mental activity that operates in the mind of each dreamer. In a sense that Freud does not fully accept, the dream work suggests a force that transcends the mental life of the dreamer.

Freud recounts the dream of a father whose child has died. The body
of the child is being watched by an old man in an adjoining room when the father dreams that his child approaches him and says, "Father, don't you see that I am burning?" (Td 488/ID 547–48). On awakening from this dream, the father notices an actual glare and discovers that the old man has fallen asleep and that a candle has in fact ignited the dead child's clothing. Freud readily accepts the rational explanation that this dream was aroused in the sleeping man by his perception of bright light.

At first, the dream of the burning child does not seem to require interpretation (Td 489/ID 549). Like some dreams provoked by bodily stimuli, this dream appears to represent the actual situation literally. But Freud observes that this dream transforms reality; fulfilling the father's wish, it brings the child back to life imaginatively and does not literally depict the fire. Though the material source of a dream is clear, its processes of transformation remain complex. By focusing attention on this complexity, Freud disarms any efforts to evaluate the dream's possible telepathic significance.

In "A Fulfilled Dream Premonition," dated 1899 yet published posthumously, Freud's dismissal of prophetic claims requires a more involved strategy. The dream is simple enough: a "Mrs. B." dreams of meeting "Dr. K." on a certain street in Vienna. The next morning she does in fact meet the doctor there. Freud contradicts any parapsychological interpretation of this dream by showing its relationship to a determinate sequence of mental events.

Freud casts doubt on whether the dream actually occurred, and reverses the sequence that his patient has narrated to him. He postulates that on encountering the doctor one morning, prior wishes evoke in Mrs. B. a kind of déjà vu experience. Freud's hypothesis allows him to turn to repressed wishes that might have caused the retrospective fantasy of a dream. This unpublished manuscript narrates the woman's life history, including details that Freud omitted in the discussion he later published.

There are two Dr. K.s in Mrs. B.'s past: the helpful house doctor and a passionate lawyer who "for the first and only time set passion aflame in her" (UTT 7/ID 662). But "scruples of her education and way of thinking
spoiled the surrender for the woman (Bedenken ihrer Erziehung und Denkungsart verdarben der Frau... die Hingebung).” On one occasion, as she knelt in longing for her friend, the passionate Dr. K. arrived unexpectedly to visit her. Freud views the event as a relatively commonplace coincidence, and interprets the imagined dream as a repetition of this wish-fulfilling experience. An earlier meeting is the “authentic content” of a later fantasy (UTT 8/ID 663).

Freud’s story has an odd tonality and is punctuated by surprising observations. He writes, for example, that the woman’s happiness was ruined by moral scruples, and notes that the dynamics of the love relation subsequently shift: the lawyer “is not so pressing as he once was.” Freud supposes that the woman achieves an imaginative substitute by indirectly dreaming of their earlier rendezvous. This dream is, then, “a part of the belated punishment which falls to the woman in consequence of her cruelty in youthful years” (ibid.) The wish-fulfilling function is combined with a self-chastisement. As a result of supposedly frequent dreams of this kind, the encounter with another Dr. K. awakens a sense of having dreamed the meeting. The dream has not acted prophetically, Freud concludes; in a mechanism of self-punishment, it has been retrospectively invented by association with the real encounter. Freud reverses the causal sequence, generalizing that only “retrospective dream creation establishes the illusion of prophetic dreams” (UTT 9/ID 664). What might have been viewed as evidence of a supernatural bond between dreams and worldly events, Freud explains as the product of an individual’s emotional history.

“Psychoanalysis and Telepathy,” written in 1921, was not published during Freud’s lifetime. Freud admits his anxieties in dealing with his topic, saying that he discusses it “under the greatest resistance” (GW 17, 41/SE 18, 190); his cautious relationship to occultism screens his deep ambivalence toward Jewish mystical traditions. The essay opens with a defensive gesture, in which Freud dissociates psychoanalysis from occult studies. Embattled, Freud compares the precarious position of psychoanalysis to the situation of war refugees who were caught between two opposing nations and treated as enemies by both (GW 17, 31/SE 18, 180). Freud perceives psychoanalysis as standing in danger of being rejected by both the scientific and the superstitious. After noting superficial resemblances between psychoanalysis and occultism, then, Freud attacks occultists by observing their lack of true “desire for knowledge (Wissbegierde).” He writes that they are already convinced of what they should impartially examine, and merely seek to confirm their beliefs. Studies of the occult consequently signify a “danger (eine Gefahr)” to psychoanalysis. This danger from the occultists reflects the age-old hostility between science and religion: “The faith, which they themselves first manifest and then wish to impose on others, is the old religious faith, which in the course of human development was re-
Demystification and Denial

peled by science, or another, which stands even nearer to the obsolete convictions of primitive peoples'" (GW 17, 29/SE 18, 178). Freud's critique of occultism conforms to his explicit rejection of all religious faiths. Under cover of this general opposition to belief, Freud keeps his distance from biblical and Talmudic precursors.

Freud separates the spheres of analytic and occult research, as he later dissociates prophecy and telepathy from dreams. He insists that the psychoanalyst must concentrate on "the unconscious element of mental life" (ibid.); turning attention to occult phenomena, Freud writes, is likely to confirm their existence. In each of his confrontations with purportedly occult occurrences, Freud tries to show that psychoanalysis can explain these events by using its own terminology. Throughout, Freud admits, "my personal attitude toward this material remains unwilling, ambivalent" (GW 17, 31/SE 18, 181). Freud's affective condition is in some ways more significant than his theoretical observations, and partially accounts for the fact that he never published this essay.

Freud recasts the occult in psychoanalytic vocabulary and reinterprets its meaning. He refers to telepathy as "thought transference," which recalls psychoanalytic transference, and he discusses prophecy in relation to wishes. In some cases, Freud grants the possibility that thoughts may be "transferred" between individuals "by an unfamiliar path, excluding the means of communication that are familiar to us" (GW 17, 35/SE 18, 184). He further associates prophecy with wishes, remarking in one instance that "the content of the prophecy coincides with a wish fulfillment" (GW 17, 35/SE 18, 185); the "wonder worker" reveals a person's future by revealing an "intimate wish" (GW 17, 42/SE 18, 192). In this case, Freud nevertheless admits that interpretation may have been influential, and may even have "created the occult fact" (GW 17, 40/SE 17, 189). He approaches the recognition that interpretations, not dreams in themselves or even dream reports, have powers sometimes viewed as prophetic. Analysis of a dream may generate the subsequent illusion of prophetic effects.

In the midst of this essay, Freud alludes to a passage in his Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious. Laconically citing the Yiddish-German phrase, "look [or view] of the Rebbe (Kück des Rebben)," in which Kück is Yiddish and Rebbe refers to a Chassidic leader, Freud recalls a joke at the expense of the Chassidim. He earlier attacks the religious thoughts that are concealed behind occult research; this later reference significantly alludes to

10. Compare Freud's comments in the New Introductory Lectures, where he suspects "that the occult interest is really a religious one, that one of the secret motives of the occult movement is to come to the assistance of religion, which is threatened by the progress of scientific thought" (SA 1, 475/NIL 31).
Jewish superstitions in Eastern Europe. Freud’s *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* tells the joke after apologizing for its language, "which I cannot fully divest of the jargon [Yiddish] (die ich des Jargons nicht völlig entkleiden mag)." Freud translates from an unspecified written or oral Yiddish source, which he has largely but not entirely divested of its original language:

In the Cracow synagogue sits the great Rabbi N. and prays with his students. Suddenly he utters a cry, and—questioned by the concerned students—says: ‘‘Just now the great Rabbi L. in Lemberg has died.’’ The congregation mourns the deceased. In the course of the subsequent days, those arriving from Lemberg are asked how the Rabbi died, what was wrong with him; but they know nothing of it, they left him in the best state of health. It finally becomes entirely certain that Rabbi L. in Lemberg did not die during the hour in which Rabbi N. telepathically sensed his death, because he is still alive. A foreigner takes the opportunity to tease a student of the Rabbi of Cracow with this situation: ‘‘It really was a great disgrace for your Rabbi, when he saw Rabbi L. in Lemberg die. The man is still alive.’’ ‘‘It doesn’t matter,’’ the student answers, ‘‘the view [Kuck] from Cracow to Lemberg was great, anyhow.’’ (SA 4, 62/SE 8, 63)

In the book on jokes, Freud categorizes this story as an example of humor based on illogic, involving ‘‘deviations from normal thinking’’ (SA 4, 59/SE 8, 60). The joke satirizes Chassidic followers whose admiration for their Rebbe leads them to suspend the rules of sound judgment. This accounts for Freud’s reference to the story in his essay on ‘‘Psychoanalysis and Telepathy,’’ in which he himself plays the role of the outsider who remarks on a superstitious error; Freud dismisses his contemporary occultists with as much animosity as does the mocker of a Chassidic Rebbe. His passing allusion in this posthumously published essay provides a clue to Freud’s distaste for occult research: it savors of Eastern Europe and recalls the Yiddish world of the Chassidim.

‘‘Dreams and Telepathy,’’ which Freud wrote in 1922, is both his most detailed discussion of parapsychology in dreams and a veiled polemic.

11. SA 4, 62/SE 8, 63. Compare Karl Abraham’s observation in a letter to Freud of 11 May 1908: ‘‘The Talmudic way of thinking cannot have suddenly disappeared from us. A few days ago I was captivated in a peculiar way by a short paragraph in *Jokes*. As I considered it more closely, I found that—in the technique of setting in opposition and in its entire construction—it was thoroughly Talmudic.’’ See Sigmund Freud and Karl Abraham, *Briefe 1907–1926*, ed. Hilda C. Abraham and Ernst L. Freud (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1965), pp. 48–9.
The connection between telepathy and dreams can be neither proved nor disproved, he observes: individual examples cannot prove a telepathic component, nor can counterexamples disprove it. Freud turns attention away from the question of whether dreams and telepathy are linked; rather than consider this question on its own terms, Freud introduces a psychoanalytic explanation. Although he claims to have no set views on the question, Freud is evidently suspicious of telepathic claims.

Freud immediately warns us that his title may awaken false expectations—like a false prophetic claim. He hastens to counter these expectations, as he will contradict superstitious notions of prophecy. Instead of discussing the connection between dreams and telepathy, Freud will show that “the two have little to do with each other” (UTT 91/SP 63). He denies ever having had a telepathic dream, and argues that even if telepathic dreams did occur, “there would be no need to alter anything in our conception of dreams” (ibid.). Two potentially telepathic experiences, in which Freud dreamt of the death of a son and of a sister-in-law, prove to be “purely subjective anticipations” (UTT 91–92/SP 64).

In disclaiming knowledge about telepathic dreams, Freud betrays a peculiar relationship to his topic. A recent, potentially prophetic dream provoked “a period of painful waiting” to hear whether his dream would be fulfilled. His uncomfortable experience occurred, Freud believes, “immediately before I resolved to compose this small communication” (UTT 92/SP 64). Freud’s ill ease at the prospect of having a telepathic dream influences his decision to write an essay about the nonexistence of such dreams. Although Freud expresses his lack of experience with telepathic dreams, his text conceals a fear that he may have them. He would rather acknowledge indiscreet wishes in himself and others than grant the possibility of supernatural dreams that are not determined by unconscious forces.

Since Freud denies having encountered telepathic dreams in his own experience or in that of his patients, he bases his analysis on the reports of two correspondents. Freud consequently dispenses with broader case histories and relies on the evidence contained in their brief texts. His work is analogous to that of a literary critic, and one of his informants appropriately offers his sample to Freud in case he should wish to “make literary use of it” (UTT 93/SP 66).

In the first purportedly telepathic dream, a correspondent writes, “my wife has given birth to twins” (UTT 93–94/SP 66). Freud points out that this event does not literally come true; the same night, the dreamer’s daughter gives birth to twins, one month before her anticipated delivery. Freud diverts attention from the question of whether the dream is telepathic by asking the dreamer for associations and related information. The response disappoints Freud, who fears that his audience, like the dreamer, will be primarily interested in the possible occult implications.
Freud maneuvers for a stronger position on the issue of telepathy in dreams. He tests several postures before choosing the one he considers most effective: "I will not take the standpoint that I am nothing but a psychoanalyst, and that the questions of occultism do not concern me; you would only judge that to be an evasion of the problem" (UTT 97/SP 70–71). Freud anticipates the reactions of his audience, as he does when his lectures pause to acknowledge possible objections. Aware of critical voices, he writes: "I maintain that it would be a great pleasure to me, if through faultless observations I could convince myself and others of the existence of telepathic occurrences" (ibid.). But data are lacking, and Freud doubts whether adequate proof can ever be secured. A "disturbing occult interest" obstructs any clear-headed inquiry. Freud expresses his dissatisfaction over the ways in which neurotics deceive him by omissions, suppressions, displacements; he trusts that his audience will understand him, "if under the present conditions, I refuse to judge whether the dream that has been communicated to us corresponds to a telepathic fact or an accidental coincidence" (UTT 98/SP 71–72). The background material provided by the dreamer is insufficient.12

Like an astute literary critic, Freud finds one point in the dreamer's account that rewards close scrutiny. The dreamer's warm relationship to his daughter and an inadvertent insult against her husband convince Freud that an unconscious wish stands behind the dream: the dreamer would like his daughter to be his second wife. The dream work masks the repressed wish, so that in the dream his wife rather than his daughter gives birth.

Two conceptions of the dream stand side by side: "According to the first the dream is the reaction to a telepathic message: Your daughter is now bringing twins into the world. According to the second, the dream is based on an unconscious process of thought" (UTT 99/SP 73). The latter possibility accounts for the dream through a combination of preconscious dream thoughts and unconscious wishes. A blind spot in Freud's analysis arises from his assumption that dream prophecy must inhere in the dream itself, since the power of dreams may in fact result from the interpretation they receive. Freud subsequently asserts that telepathy has nothing to do with dreams. Instead, "the essence of the dream consists in the peculiar process of the dream work, which transports preconscious thoughts (day's residues), with the help of an unconscious wish stimulus, to the manifest dream content" (UTT 100/SP 74). Once again, Freud dispels presumed prophetic contents by turning to the unconscious processes that give rise to dreams. If

he were seriously concerned to explore prophetic meanings, he would have to look forward to future consequences; yet as Freud interprets dreams, they are characterized by the mechanisms of the dream work.

Freud essentially excludes prophecy from the realm of dreams by positing that "a dream without condensation, distortion, dramatization, above all without wish fulfillment, does not deserve this name" (UTT 101/SP 75). In other writings Freud refers to infantile dreams as undisguised wish fulfillments, but here he insists that distortion characterizes all dream phenomena. As expressions of the dream work, Freud writes, dreams come "from within" the dreamer; telepathic dreams would involve passive receptivity to something external (ibid.). The dream work and symbolism extend beyond the psyche of any individual, however, and in a sense they do represent external phenomena. Discounting such reflections, Freud conceives the dream work in relation to preconscious and unconscious thoughts, the psychological activity of an individual. Telepathy and prophecy threaten Freudian theory to the extent that they transcend the presupposed autonomy of mind. Moreover, recognition of the prophetic power of dream interpretation would challenge Freud to acknowledge that—through his own cultivation of the transference relationship—he achieves suggestive results that resemble fulfilled prophecies.

Freud's second example of a supposedly telepathic dream has little to do with prophecy. Freud apparently prefers not to confront his topic directly, and does not concern himself with the dreams afforded by publications of the English and American Societies for Psychical Research. He assures us that he is a member of these associations, and objects that they do not attempt to evaluate dreams psychoanalytically (UTT 93/SP 65–66). Although he denies having polemical intentions, Freud struggles to dispense with all reports of dream phenomena that might endanger his theories. The second dream suits him perfectly, because he can account for it in terms of sexual symbols and complexes (UTT 103–6/SP 78–82). Freud's model remains intact at the close of his essay: latent dream thoughts, together with an unconscious wish, produce the dream. Freud concludes that "if the telepathic phenomenon is only an accomplishment of the unconscious, then no new problem lies before us" (UTT 111/SP 88). Even if telepathic dreams existed, Freud indicates, they would have to follow the mechanisms of the dream work.

 Whereas in "Dreams and Telepathy" Freud strives to appear unbiased, in "The Occult Significance of Dreams" (1925) he freely expresses his biases. He expects that eventually "the specter of prophetic dreams (prophetische Wahrträume) will resolve itself into a nothing" (GW 1, 570/TT 228), betraying its illusory status. Despite Freud's gestures toward impartiality, then, "Dreams and Telepathy" conceals a hidden agenda; in
"The Occult Significance of Dreams" he is explicitly critical and nevertheless ascribes greater validity to telepathic claims. Freud does not recognize the connection between dreams and telepathy, but he does admit that a kind of thought transference (Gedankenübertragung) may account for certain kinds of prophetic dream interpretation: in one particular situation that he observes, "a strong wish of the questioner... made itself known to the fortune-teller through direct transference" (GW 1, 572/TT 230).13

Freud introduces a nontechnical version of "transference" (Übertragung), which strictly speaking names emotional carryovers to the psychoanalyst. In more general terms, transference refers to the processes by which feelings toward and perceptions of one person are displaced onto another. According to the familiar Freudian explanation, this transfer is a mental process in the emotional life of an individual. In the context of Freud's examination of telepathic dreams, however, transference indicates an occurrence between two minds, a carryover of a wish to another's consciousness.14 Furthermore, the word Übertragung suggests the process of translation that Freud associates with dream interpretation.

The two kinds of transference are not necessarily distinct, if the transferring psyche is not autonomous in expressing its wish. This extraordinary form of communication by thought transference may have serious implications for psychoanalysis, and specifically for dream interpretation. Unless the interpreter can "telepathically" guess a dreamer's concealed wishes, the most convincing interpretations are likely to proceed by transferential suggestion.15

The Prophetic Interpreter

Freud uneasily moves toward and yet evades the recognition that prophecy is not an issue for dreams in themselves, but only for dream interpretation. Prophetic dreams depend on an interpretation that gives sense to otherwise


14. Freud also discusses thought transfer in the *New Introductory Lectures*, lecture 30. In a letter of 7 August 1901, he cites a relevant, critical remark which Fliess directed at his work *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*: "The thought-reader reads into the other only his own thoughts" (APIOP letter 145).

15. Jan Ehrenwald observes that, had Freud taken telepathic claims seriously, he would have had to extend his theoretical framework beyond the model of transference and countertransference. See "Presumptively Telepathic Incidents during Analysis," *Psychiatric Quarterly* 24 (1950), 742.
ambiguous images. When he rejects prophetic dreams, Freud shows far less
 tolerance than he does in connection with telepathic claims. Freud's own
 unconscious mechanism of denial (Verneinung) is at work: by disputing that
 there are prophetic dreams, he admits to suspicions that certain kinds of
 prophecy do occur with respect to dreams. The hasty denial of connections
 between dreams and prophecy is symptomatic of an avoidance.

Freud for the most part chooses to overlook his own prophetic pow-
ers, otherwise known as the powers of "suggestion." 16 Disavowing one di-
mension of psychoanalytic technique, he declines to take full responsibility
 for the influence of his interpretations on patients' lives. With the neurotic
 transference securely redirected toward cure, Freud neglects its role in the
 handling of dreams and ascribes an almost exclusively cognitive function to
 dream interpretation. Nevertheless, Freud cannot entirely subordinate his
 interpretations to the goal of increasing a patient's recognition of repressed
 material: analyses of symbols and associations often imply evaluations and
 anticipations of future prospects.

Freud briefly confronts the hazards of influence and suggestion in his
 "Remarks on the Theory and Practice of Dream Interpretation." He notes
 that "the analyst will perhaps be frightened at first, when he is warned of
 this possibility," and he counters that the influencing of a patient's dreams
 is no worse than "guiding his conscious thoughts" (SA Supp. 263/TT 210).  
Freud's readiness to accept responsibility for such direct guidance is itself
 somewhat surprising. He observes that daily experiences including the psy-
 choanalytic encounter are incorporated into the latent dream thoughts,
 while "one never gains influence over the mechanism of the dream forma-
 tion, over the authentic dream work" (SA Supp. 264/TT 211). Here as else-
 where, Freud limits his consideration of suggestion to the role played by the
 analyst in the production of dreams (compare VEP 239–40/ILP 237–38).

16. Some authors have revised the Freudian notions of interpretation by emphasiz-
ing the necessity of an active procedure that results in practical advice. See, for
 instance, Ernst Konrad Specht, "Der wissenschaftstheoretische Status der Psycho-
Specht proposes that we "conceive dream interpretations as recommendative inter-
 pretations and not as descriptive propositions. With the interpretation of a dream the
 interpreter would thus not establish any provable hypothesis, but rather make a sug-
 gestion to the dreamer" (p. 783). In summary, Specht writes that "the method of
 interpreting dreams developed by Freud does not fit into the framework of explana-
 tion and prediction which theorists of science have derived from the example of the
 natural sciences. The method is not arbitrary, however. Its criterion of validity is
 internal, namely in the structure of dream narration. Like literary fiction, the dream
 product goes beyond the conscious intentions of the author. The optimal interpreta-
 tion therefore refers to the potential meaning of the text" (p. 785).
The unexpressed risk is also a therapeutic requirement: that dream interpretation shall influence the life of the dreamer. Freud's concern with the theory of the dream work distracts attention from the pragmatic consequences of interpretation.

Familiar problems of psychoanalytic suggestion arise in connection with transference, for the employment of transference in treatment superficially resembles hypnotic suggestion (VEP 429/ILP 446). Freud anticipates the objection: "Are you not able to force what you wish and what seems correct to you on the patient?" To some critics, psychoanalysis appears like hypnosis, in which a doctor suggests, "Nothing is wrong with you, it's just nerves, so I can sweep away your complaints with a few words and in a few minutes" (VEP 433/ILP 450). In connection with his most central insights, Freud strives to effect the patient's recognition of complexes, instead of directly seeking to influence symptoms or general behavior. Dream interpretation does not necessarily afford insight into the past, however, and knowledge of the past cannot always be distinguished from influence over the present and future. 17

Freud concludes his late discussion of psychical topography with the provocative and prophetic slogan: "Where it [id, Es] was, I [ego, Ich] shall be" (VEP 516/ILP 71). 18 Freud's dynamic figuration likens the psychoanalytic cure to a territorial conquest, a reclaiming of unusable land, comparable to a "cultural work, like the drying up of the Zuider Zee" (ibid.). An inaccessible, murky realm shall become inhabitable; blocked libido will again stand at the disposition of the ego (compare VEP 439/ILP 457).

Freud's motto takes on new meanings in connection with dream interpretation, for example: Where the primitive language of dreams was, there the rational language of analysis shall be. Dream interpretation reclaims a dark code through a kind of translation into the familiar modes of expression. But analysis works from the dreamer's report, never directly from dream experience; the rational translation amounts to the analyst's interpretation. Freud's motto thus intimates a further transformation: Where the patient's dream text was, there the analyst's dream interpretation shall be. Associations and symbols allow Freud to displace the dream text by his own revision.

17. Compare Jacques Derrida, La carte postale de Socrate à Freud et au-delà (Paris: Flammarion, 1980), which refers to the "failure of a purely interpretive psychoanalysis" (p. 360). As a result of the transference, with its therapeutic effects, interpretation can never merely further the patient's intellectual awareness.

Psychoanalysis claims to work in the service of greater awareness and more thorough knowledge of the mind. Freud’s image suggests that this is a cultural task like the recovery of bad land. Do dreams indeed constitute a primitive realm of expression that must be dried out and given a useful function? Freud excludes alternative forms of interpretation of the dream language on its own terms.

In one of his more elaborate interpretations, Freud considers a woman’s dream that she is at a theater with her husband. A series of associations leads Freud to translate the latent dream thought: “It was really nonsense on my part, that I hurried so much to be married!” (VEP 137/ILP 124). Freud assumes that this dream thought stands behind the dream as its meaning; it may also follow and modify the dream. In any case, the interpretation will influence the patient’s future behavior, and perhaps confirm itself accordingly. The woman may oppose Freud’s revelation, but to the extent that the psychoanalytic transference guides her thoughts, his statement may challenge or undermine the woman’s marriage. Freud cannot so readily isolate future actions and events from the meaning he finds in dreams.

Languages of Dreams

Freud frequently compares the dream work, which governs the relationship between latent and manifest contents, to a process of translation. Both the dream work and the analytic work resemble translation, and are characterized by the multivalent word Obertragung. Dream images are like primitive hieroglyphics that ambiguously translate dream thoughts; the work of interpretation attempts to return from the pictorial language of dreams to ordinary waking expressions. This indicates that everyday language is the more genuine, while the dream language has been distorted by the dream work.

Freud’s vacillation between interpretation by correspondence and displacement reappears in his conception of the dream work and its deciphering as analogous to translation. This analogy combines aspects of the correspondence theory (when a word appears to have an equivalent in another language) with the association or displacement theory (when a word appears to play approximately the same role as a word in a different linguistic network). Freud often refers to the central metaphor, without dis-

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20. See chapter I, above, section on “Interpretation by Correspondence and Displacement.”
tinguishing between different practices of translation: "Dream thoughts and dream content stand before us like two representations of the same content in two different languages; or, better stated, the dream content appears to us as a translation of the dream thoughts into another mode of expression" (Td 280/ID 311–12). At first, Freud suggests a simplistic model of agreement between "two representations of the same content." His modified formulation points to a translation in which the outcome is "another mode of expression." The meaning and the expression are not necessarily identical. In theory, Freud's methods of dream interpretation claim scientific rigor on the basis of a presumed correspondence, yet his practices acknowledge that displacements instead of one-to-one relationships characterize dreams and interpretations. Rather than conceive dream images merely as corresponding to repressed wishes, Freud observes a difference between expressive modes: like a picture puzzle, the dream employs a pictographic script to express dream thoughts.21

The model of translation does not necessarily imply that the meaning of a dream is simply contained in the dream thoughts that have produced it. While secondary revision may radically distance the dream report from its hypothetical source, the process of distortion is itself significant. The ways in which a dream is reported are also as decisive to its meaning as is the dream work. The dreamer becomes a narrator in the act of recalling a dream; the method of free association requires that the patient generate waking narratives. Dream interpretation begins when the patient relates a dream text followed by a series of associated memories and thoughts. Relying on his bipartite model, Freud searches for dream thoughts beyond the manifest content, although the secondary revision and the associations challenge the implicit dual conception.

In Freud’s alternative model of interpretive translation, then, tensions persist between correspondence and association (or displacement) theories of meaning. The essential structure is not that of a text as projection of a psychological act; one text is a clue to another. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud conceives the dream content as “a pictographic script, the signs of which are to be individually translated into the language of the dream thoughts” (*Td* 280/ID 312). This analogy points toward a hermeneutics of radical textualism: the text does not stand for a thought behind it, but displaces the assumed original and undergoes renewed displacements at every turn, in every new context.

A quarter of a century after writing *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in “Remarks on the Theory and Practice of Dream Interpretation,” Freud returns to the figure of translation. He attempts to bypass the difficulties contained in the metaphor of translation by dividing dream interpretation into “two phases, the translation and the evaluation or utilization of the same” (*SA Supp*. 261/TT 208). Freud provides the example of reading Livy: “First one wants to know what Livy narrates in this chapter, and only then does the discussion begin as to whether what one has read is an historical account, a legend, or a digression by the author” (*SA Supp*. 262/TT 208). The analogy is not entirely convincing. Freud ignores any incommensurabilities that may obstruct efforts to translate Livy from Latin into German; a literal translation seems to him possible without the slightest difficulty. Only critical evaluation of the translated text poses serious problems, which in the case of dreams Freud resolves by referring to childhood etiology. Freud shies away from accepting the consequences of his metaphor when he makes translation appear unproblematic, in order to reassure us that dream interpretation is also straightforward. Yet the “evaluation” of the translation cannot be so unequivocally separated from the procedures of translation. Freud does not fully acknowledge that the model of translation introduces an inescapable element of displacement along with that of correspondence.

In his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud also speaks of dream interpretation as a process of translation, and—perhaps for rhetorical reasons—shows greater readiness to acknowledge its obstacles. He anticipates uncertainties over the possibility of a “secure translation of the manifest dream into the latent dream thoughts” (*VEP* 231/IPP 228). To

22. On the Freudian metaphor of translation, see Dalia Judovitz, “Freud: Translation and/or Interpretation,” *Sub-Stance* 22 (1979), 29–38. Compare Johannes Volkelt’s *Die Traum-Phantasie* (Stuttgart: Meyer and Zeller, 1875): “The language of concepts is lacking in the dream fantasy; what it (*die Traumphantasie*) wishes to say, it must depict graphically” (p. 31).
overcome these doubts, Freud recalls that the dream work itself enacts a kind of “translation of the dream thoughts into a primitive mode of expression analogous to pictographic writing” (VEP 232//ILP 229). This accounts for the ambiguities in the dream language and nonetheless encourages hopes that translation in the opposite direction may succeed. In addition to the topological model, Freud suggests a linguistic, structural relationship between dreams and their meanings. He explains that unlike even the most ambiguous language, dreams are not a vehicle of communication, but aim precisely not to be understood (VEP 234//ILP 231). Freud conceives the dream report as a kind of monologue that can only be overhead, and that is not intended as a communication. Subsequent analysts have, however, recognized the strategic significance of dream texts in a psychoanalytic context, and in the efforts of consciousness to come to terms with inaccessible contents.

Freud was aware of possible objections to his claims to make dream interpretation into a scientific method, and expressed the problems of dream interpretation as the question of “whether one can give, for every product of the dream life, a complete and assured translation into the mode of expression of waking life” (GW 1 , 561/TT 219). This forms part of a larger issue in efforts to know the unconscious: “We know it, of course, only as something conscious, after it has undergone a transformation (Um­setzung) or translation (Übersetzung) into something conscious” (SA 3, 125/GPT 116). In turn, the translation from the dream language into waking language parallels the transference (Übertragung) of psychical energies from one investment (Besetzung) to another. Because these transfers combine metaphoric substitution and metonymic association, however, there is no direct homology between the two components.

At variance with his more confident assertions, at times Freud complains that the dream work does not follow the predictable patterns of translation: “It is remarkable and incomprehensible that in this translation, a carryover as if into another script or language, the methods of merging and combination find their application” (VEP 180//ILP 172). Ordinarily, Freud admits, a translation is more concerned to preserve distinctions; but the dream work mixes everything up, multiplies ambiguities, and is, in short, an eminently unreliable translator. The model of translation takes a turn that


unsettles the notion that a dream's meaning corresponds to a clear dream thought.25

Given that dreams—like "primitive languages"—are characteristically ambiguous, how can the interpreter claim to discern and specify meanings? Just as authorities on hieroglyphics will produce relatively similar translations of sample writings, Freud claims, "correctly schooled analysts" will arrive at similar interpretations (VEP 235/ILP 232). The "correct" school was, of course, Freud's own, a conclusion that avoided the problems of divergent methods of translation.

The theory of dream symbolism is one aspect of dream interpretation that Freud modifies and radically expands in later editions of The Interpretation of Dreams. During his years as a psychoanalyst, he becomes familiar with recurring symbolism common to dreams, popular tales, and literature. To the extent that Freud relies on dream symbols as fixed elements that have uniform equivalents, he dispenses with the patient's associations and relies on simple correspondences between symbols and their meanings. In assuming the possibility of "fixed translations," he inclines toward a more traditional view, closer to that of the ancient dream books (VEP 160/ILP 150). Whereas Freud initially searches for the meaning of a dream in the interaction between a dream report and the dreamer's associations, he later perceives recurrent patterns of signification in the dream language and reduces the role of successive displacements for certain symbols. In a footnote of 1925, Freud indicates the possibility of interpreting some dreams by translating them independently of associations (Td 247n/ID 274n).

According to Freud's first edition of The Interpretation of Dreams, the dreamer's associations are necessary for interpretation of all but the most transparent, infantile dreams. In later editions and in his Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Freud attributes to symbols an increasingly constant signifying function. Rather than base his theories on a practice that resists all stability, Freud alters his prior model. Thus evolve the maligned "phallic symbols" among other commonplaces of anti-Freudian discourse. Freud's own writings illustrate the interaction between interpretive

25. In one context, Freud remarks that "a dream is, as a rule, not translatable into other languages" (Td 120n/ID 132n). Compare Derrida, "Freud et la scène de l'écriture," in L'écriture et la différence: "The possibility of translation, if it is far from being annulled—because between the points of identity or of adherence of the signifier to the signifier, experience never stops spreading out distances—appears principally and definitively limited... There is no translation, or system of translation, except if a permanent code allows one to substitute or transform the signifiers in preserving the same signified" (p. 311). In English, see Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," in Writing and Difference, pp. 209–10.
correspondences and displacements. His revisions consistently diminish the role of metonymic disruptions, as if these were repressed, unacceptable thoughts or ancient precursors.

The competing models of interpretation by correspondence and association are in some ways analogous to the basic mechanisms of the dream work: condensation (Verdichtung) and displacement (Verschiebung). Condensation parallels a general correspondence view in which latent dream thoughts are translated into equivalents; displacement evokes a movement of association or allusiveness, in which manifest contents transpose loosely connected correlates. The interpreter tries to reverse these processes, guessing at the original contents behind distorting translations and transpositions. The overdetermination of dream contents does not disqualify such efforts, although multiple correspondence complicates the model. When the dreamer provides associations to components of a dream, texts pile up on texts and vie for dominion. Continuous displacements prevent the interpreter from arriving at a definitive reading, although certain interpretations are more compelling or more therapeutically effective than others.

The analyst finds himself in the situation of translating a translation, without any firm assurance that he can restore the hypothetical original. The dreamer endlessly distorts anew, and the interpreter can never produce a completely whole text, without gaps. The analytical situation hence becomes an interweaving of narratives in which Freud tries to secure a recognition of the past. As life continues, the narratives cannot pause, and the dreamer struggles to guide certain fantasies into the future.

Freud protests too much when he insists that his dream interpretations have no bearing on future events and only reconstruct dream thoughts that are represented in the dream. The analyst need not be overly disturbed by the suspicion that dreams are influenced by suggestion (SA Supp. 263/TT 210). While Freud grants that the manifest content of dreams will be influenced by the analyst, he denies all influence on the latent dream thoughts or on the mechanism of the dream work (SA Supp. 264/TT 211; cf. VEP 240/ILP 238).

Freud discounts the claims of interpretive suggestion, then, by describing two distinct phases of dream interpretation: translation and evaluation (SA Supp. 261/TT 208). While the dream work transforms the latent dream thoughts into manifest content, the dream interpretation moves in the opposite direction, translating from manifest to latent content. Subsequently Freud evaluates the personal meaning of the latent content, implying that this content is not altered by interpretation. At the same time, there are hints that the elusive processes of translation from one language to the other are themselves an essential feature of the dream.

Freud links his comments on dream interpretation as translation, moving from manifest to latent dream contents, to a genetic history of lin-
linguistic development. The manifest dream expression is like a primitive lan­
guage that employs pictorial signs and concrete metaphors; waking thought,
like modern languages, favors abstraction. The abstract is directly linked to
the concrete by a genealogical model: "most abstract words are faded con­
crete ones" (VEP 183/ILP 175). The dream work revives dead metaphors,
returning to the primitive forms that are rich in imagery.26

Freud’s dream theory aims to show that dreams express the past that
has determined them. Strictly speaking, Freud maintains, nothing new can
arise in a dream. Whereas image sequences may be explained as elabora­
tions of previous thoughts and wishes, then, novel thought processes in
dreams threaten to disturb the Freudian model of the distorting dream work.
Thus Freud occasionally reduces speech in dreams to being a repetition of
the day’s residues and minimizes its creative role in psychological develop­
ment; he insists that dialogue in dreams derives from actual exchanges dur­
ing waking experience. Certain unacknowledged demands compel Freud to
deny that the language of dreams has a creative aspect.27

The agency of the dream work is beyond the conscious control of the
subject, and represents a sense in which language speaks.28 Freud tends to
limit the dream work by writing as if mental activities governed the linguis­
tic distortions in dreams. Ultimately, Freud wishes to trace the dream work
to particular modes of censorship that operate in each dreamer. The mecha­
nisms of the dream work are similar to rhetorical figures, however, and it
may be incorrect to assume that consciousness controls them. On the con­
trary, consciousness itself may be dominated by turns of rhetoric. Every­
thing is determined in mental life, Freud asserts, and he conceives this
determination as a chain of relationships in the psyche. But if language is
the determinant, then dreams cannot simply be interpreted as the product of

26. One extensive discussion of language in dream interpretation is Marshall Edel­
son’s Language and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis (New Haven: Yale University

27. See Robert Bossard, Psychologie des Traumbewusstseins (Zürich: Rascher,

28. Several nineteenth-century authors anticipate this Heideggerian formulation;
dream theorists note that dreams give expression to forces beyond reason. See, for
example, Hildebrandt, Der Traum und seine Verwertung für’s Leben, p. 56: “The
dream warns . . . from within”; a sense of passivity leads the Sprachgenius to say,
“this or that came to me in a dream (mir hat dies oder das geträumt)” (p. 17). In
Die Traum-Phantasie, Volkelt links the unconscious forces to Socrates’ daimonion,
which he interprets as a power of conscience that is attributed with a divine origin
(p. 160). What is given by the unconscious, Volkelt paraphrases Eduard von Hart­
mann, has something mystical and daemonic about it (p. 167).
an individual’s past. Freud himself breaks the boundaries of personal history when he notes shared symbols, linguistic devices, and predictable mechanisms of the dream work.

The dream work is like the work of rhetoric, and its characteristic turns are analogous to figures of speech. This partially explains Freud’s image of the dream as an architectural facade, an ornamentation that stands for or in front of the substantial edifice. Freud ambiguously ascribes to the dream image the functions of both concealment and revelation. At times Freud acts as if he must tear away the surfaces that mask a more “authentic” content, the repressed infantile wishes. Yet he also recognizes that the real interest in dreams derives neither from their shared sexual origins nor from the materials of latent thoughts, but from their multifarious means of disguise.

Dreams employ figures that simultaneously present and distort, represent and misrepresent. In accordance with his philological assumptions, Freud has recourse to mental contents that are the “authentic” meanings beyond the “inauthentic” forms. At the same time, his practice of free association challenges the bipartite model of meaning, which is fundamental to Freud’s entire interpretive program. Moreover, the figurative activity of a dream need not stand for determinate literal contents. Freud implicitly relies on a hermeneutic model of translation by resemblance, although the overdetermination of linguistic expressions casts doubt on whether translation ever fully succeeds.

Freud grants importance to “every nuance of the linguistic expression, in which the dream lay before us” (Td 492–93/ID 552). Behind apparently “meaningless or inadequate” language, Freud discerns a significant distortion of an underlying draft, and hence he respects “even this defect in the expression” (ibid.). His approach is reminiscent of certain interpretive practices in religious contexts. For Freud, the dream is analogous to Scripture; both employ vivid, “primitive” expressions. Like ancient rabbis, the Freudian commentator is never justified in discarding a garbled passage or in assuming that the text is corrupt. “In short,” Freud writes, “what according to the opinion of other authors is supposed to be an arbitrary improvisation, hurriedly brought together in the embarrassment of the moment, this we treated as a holy text” (Td 492–93/ID 552).

**Dreams of Wordplay**

Freud provides many examples of dreams that operate by linguistic play. In a note of 1909, he observes that “oriental dream books” often take ver-

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29. The growing literature on this subject renders unnecessary an extensive discussion here. See, for example, Didier Anzieu, *L’auto-analyse de Freud et la découverte de la psychanalyse*, 2d ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975), and
bal echoes into consideration; this accounts for the incomprehensibility of popular translations of these works. Freud calls one of Artemidorus's reports "the most beautiful example of a dream interpretation, which has been handed down to us from antiquity." Based on Alexander's dream of a satyr (Greek satyros), Aristander interpreted: "Tyre is yours" (Sa tyros). Alexander confirmed the interpretation by mounting an attack and conquering this city. Freud emphasizes the inner connections between dreams and language, citing Ferenczi's notion that "every language has its own dream language" (Td 120n/ID 132n). He also obliquely identifies with the ancient "dream books" when he adds that his own book on dreams may be similarly untranslatable.

Freud frequently employs linguistic resonances as clues to the meaning of dreams. A dreamer "pulls out (zieht . . . hervor) a (certain, familiar) woman from behind a bed." This means, Freud states, that he "prefers this woman" ("gibt dieser Dame den Vorzug") (VEP 135/ILP 120–21; cf. Td 398/ID 444). The physical movement of hervorzehen signifies an emotional Vorzug. Freud interprets the dream without reference to the life of the dreamer, as if verbal echoes (like some symbols) were immutable components in dream interpretation. Ambiguity and overdetermination suggest, however, that no single verbal relation is definitive, but merely forms part of a more extensive chain of significations.

In its "considerations of representability," the dream work takes advantage of concealed figures in language. Freud explains that dreams employ words that "were originally intended pictorially, concretely, and that are at present used in a faded, abstract sense"; the dream work returns to their "earlier, full significance" (Td 396/ID 442). Some dreams enact a condensation by combining key words. Freud himself dreams of an "Auto-didasker," which he interprets as a composite of "author" (Autor), "auto-didact" (Autodidakt), and "Lasker," a proper name (Td 299–300/ID 334). The significance of the dream may be derived from particular associations related to this neologism. Other dreams are structured around verbal reversals (VEP 186/ILP 180).

Freud's most interesting sequence of dreams based on wordplay occurs at the close of his discussion of condensation in The Interpretation of Dreams (Td 297–304/ID 331–39). One example alludes to Yiddish. To begin with, Freud narrates the dream of a female patient, and analyzes its final, "meaningless word combination":

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She finds herself with her husband at a peasants' festivity (Bauernfestlichkeit) and then says, "This will end in a general 'Maistollmütz.' " In the dream [she had] the vague thought that this was a pudding made from corn, a sort of polenta. Analysis divides the word into corn (Mais)—mad (toll)—mad for men (mannstoll)—Olmütz [a place name], all of which were recognizable as remnants from a table conversation with her relatives. (Td 297–98/ID 331)

Freud may read his own concerns into the association from Maistoll to mannstoll; his brief account does not explain the patient's role in the dream analysis. Freud next probes deeper into the meaning of the first component, Mais:

Apart from the allusion to the recently opened Jubilee Exhibition [of Emperor Franz Josef in 1898], behind Mais were concealed the words: Meissen (a Meissen [Dresden] porcelain figure representing a bird); Miss (her relatives' English governess had traveled to Olmütz); and mies=disgusting, unpleasant in the jokingly used Jewish jargon, and a long chain of thoughts and associations led away from every syllable of the word cluster. (Td 298/ID 331)

This allusion to Yiddish, which Freud calls the "Jewish jargon," has broader implications.30 As an ancient sectarian appears to dream of Cappadocia in a mixture of Aramaic and Greek, this patient dreams of Mais/mies in a mixture of German and Yiddish. The repressed "primitive" language, for assimilated Austrian Jews, was Yiddish. Freud does not reflect on the significance of this linguistic conglomerate, nor does he convey his subsequent interpretation. This dream could perhaps have been interpreted in connection with a popular Judaic tradition of which this woman may have been consciously or unconsciously aware. Freud's own reference to Yiddish encourages juxtaposition of this Maistoll dream with a story purportedly told by R. Nachman of Bratslav:

Once a king told his beloved, the viceroy: "I see in the stars that whoever eats any grain that grows this year will go mad. If so, what is your advice?" And he answered him: "Therefore let us prepare grain for them so that they will not have to eat from this year's harvest." And the king answered him, "If so, when only we are not mad, and all the world is mad, then it will appear the opposite, that

we are the mad ones. (And to prepare grain for everyone is impossible.) Therefore, certainly we too must eat this year’s grain. But we will make a sign on our foreheads, so that at least we will know that we are mad. For when I look at your forehead and you look at mine, we will know from this sign that we are mad.”

This story refers to themes that engrossed Freud: madness, prophecy, and consciousness. The legendary king, like Freud, aims at recognition of a mental condition. There is no way to determine whether Freud’s patient knew this particular story, or only a smattering of Yiddish words. Freud does not reflect on the larger questions raised by dreams that contain bilingual expressions; he seems to assume that all languages may play a part in dream formation. In another instance, Freud interprets one of his dreams by reference to German, English, and Latin (Td 227//ID 333). At issue is the linguistic tradition or textual canon, presumably linked to the dreamer’s associations, that permits dream interpretation.

An Absurd Decree

At the end of Freud’s discussion on “absurd dreams,” his dream of “My Son, the Myops” is like a palimpsest—in James Sully’s words quoted by Freud—that “discloses beneath its worthless surface-characters traces of an old and precious communication” (Td 152n//ID 169n). Greek and Hebrew have been covered by layers of Aramaic, Yiddish, and Austrian-German slang. On the basis of his associations, Freud shows that this dream is not as absurd as first appears. He translates “nonsense” words by recognizing the foreign signifiers they conceal, in order to decipher their hidden message. Freud will conclude this analysis by affirming that “the dream is often deepest (am tiefstinigkeit) when it appears most mad” (Td 429//ID 480).

In the first part of Freud’s dream, a man refers to “my son, the Myops” (Td 273//ID 303). According to Freud’s interpretation, the father and son represent Freud and his eldest son. Myops is a condensation of myopia and Cyclops. The classical Greek reference is, however, overshadowed by Hebraic allusions; one aspect of Freud’s myopic shortsightedness is his

one-sided neglect of ancient Judaic traditions. The references to Hebrew and Yiddish counter Freud’s pretense that he knows little of these languages. Since Freud learned Hebrew as a child, it must have remained active in his unconscious processes; in any case, his associations lead him directly to “the Jewish question” and to Passover. 32

The context of Freud’s dream is Theodor Herzl’s play The New Ghetto, which he saw in early January 1898. 33 Although Freud does not mention Herzl’s name in his analysis, he acknowledges that the dream thoughts relate to “concern for the future of children, to whom one cannot give a fatherland; concern about educating them in such a way that they will be free-minded [or independent, freizügig].” Much to the point, Herzl’s play deals with Jewish efforts to escape “the new ghetto” that remains within after Jews have freed themselves from the external barriers. 34 Freedom of movement and thought had been crucial issues for European Jews since the eighteenth century: Jewish emancipation culminated in the dual solutions of assimilation and Zionism. In a note, Freud further associates his dream—of evacuating his children from Rome—with a childhood envy of relatives who had been able to relocate in another land (Td 429n/ID 481n). Combining Roman and Hebraic elements, the dream reflects Freud’s concern with questions of national identity:


As a result of certain events in the city of Rome, it is necessary to evacuate the children, which also takes place. The scene is then in front of a gateway, a double door in the ancient style (the Porta Romana in Siena, as I am already aware during the dream). I sit on the edge of a fountain and am very dejected, close to tears. A female person—an attendant or nun—brings the two boys out and delivers them to their father, who was not myself. The older of the two is clearly my eldest; I do not see the face of the other one. The woman who brought out the boy requests a kiss from him in parting. She is remarkable for having a red nose. The boy refuses her the kiss, but while reaching out his hand in parting says: *Auf Geseres*, and to both of us (or to one of us): *Auf Ungeseres*. I have the notion that the latter signifies a preference. *(Td 426/ID 477–78)*

The dream opens with a scene of crisis in a Roman context. 35 Freud’s first interpretive act alludes to Psalm 137:1, “By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept.” 36 Although Freud does not discuss this biblical reference, its intimations of national misfortune are directly relevant to the dream. The psalm refers to a moment of oppression during the Babylonian exile:

> By the waters of Babylon, we sat down and wept, when we thought of Zion. We hung up our harps upon the willows, in the midst thereof.

35. Freud does not specify the reason for the need to evacuate children from Rome. His later associations indicate that plague may have been the cause, and in particular a plague against the first-born (compare Exodus 11–12). This adds significance to the presence of Freud’s first-born son in the dream, in direct confrontation with Geseres. Robert Paul has suggested to me that Rome, a place of Christian exile in this dream, may be a symbolic substitute for Egypt and Babylon. Concerning Freud’s dreams of Rome, compare Grinstein, *On Sigmund Freud’s Dreams*, chapter 3, and Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), pp. 189–93. In another context, Schorske states that Freud’s “wish to be free himself from anti-Semitism reasserted itself in his dreams” (p. 188). On a picture postcard of the Arch of Titus addressed to Karl Abraham in 1913, Freud wrote: “*Der Jude übersteht’s!* (the Jew endures or withstands it [the Roman exile?]).” See Freud and Abraham, *Briebe 1907–1926*, p. 145.

For they themselves who held us captive bid us sing, and be joyful in our wailings . . . sing us a song of Zion.37

Freud’s associations recall this exilic mourning for Zion. The psalm gives additional meaning to Freud’s concern over his children’s freedom. In connection with issues of exile and return, Freud performs a further interpretation with reference to the Israelites’ flight from Egypt.

The key words in Freud’s analysis are the coinages Auf Geseres and Auf Ungeseres in place of the expected parting, Auf Wiedersehen. After Freud follows a series of linguistic associations, the dream emerges as a reflection on Passover. Freud works from linguistic clues:

According to information which I have received from rabbinic scholars (Schriftgelehrten), Geseres is a genuine Hebrew word, derived from a verb goiser, and is best conveyed by “imposed sufferings, doom.” According to the use of the word in the jargon [Yiddish], one would think that it meant “weeping and wailing.” (Td 427/ID 478)

From whom did Freud receive his philological information, which contradicts the leading scholarship available in the late nineteenth century? The nineteenth-century Christian scholar Gesenius calls g’zerah an Aramaism.38 Freud’s information is inaccurate; Geseres is not “a genuine Hebrew word,” but is rather Yiddish, of Aramaic origin. The Hebrew root g-z-r means to cut or separate; in Aramaic and late Hebrew sources gazar and g’zerah refer to a decree.39 It is unlikely that Freud deliberately contradicted the leading biblical philologist of his day, although this might also be explained in terms of the Jewish-Christian tensions that characterize the dream. Even Freud’s transliteration is questionable, since it renders the


39. Ibid. See also A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, William Gesenius et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), pp. 160, 1086. Pfrimmer also observes the inaccuracy of Freud’s philological information in Freud: Lecteur de la bible, p. 122. The Aramaic word g’zerah, meaning “decree,” occurs in the Book of Daniel 4:14 and 4:21, in the relevant context of Nebuchadnezzar’s ominous dream and Daniel’s interpretation. Of the many anti-Semitic decrees that preceded Freud’s dream, one may recall the Vienna g’zerah: in 1421, after an accusation of ritual murder, the Jews were killed or expelled.
verb according to its Yiddish pronunciation. Freud indeed seems to have consulted an Eastern European rabbi; or he himself may have provided the misinformation which he then attributed to another source. While Freud attempts to deny his own knowledge of Hebrew, his questionable philology indicates that he was responsible for the gloss on Geseres. In any event, the interpretation Freud gives to his dream depends on his partial knowledge of Yiddish.

Freud both insists on the relevance of a Hebrew association and denies knowledge of the Hebrew word. He tells us that he receives his information from rabbis, thereby distancing himself from what his unconscious affirms. At the same time, Freud himself associates the Yiddish gezeres with "weeping and wailing." While Gesere has come to mean this in modern (especially Austrian) German, gezeres more exactly refers to evil decrees or misfortunes. Freud recalls a doctor's words, responding to a distressed mother: "Was machen Sie für Geseres?" (Td 428/ID 480). This implicitly refers to the Yiddish-German expression machen ein Geseire, meaning "to make an uproar" or "to make a fuss." In connection with his dream of exile, Freud raises linguistic issues relating to Hebrew, Aramaic, and Yiddish—and evokes themes of misfortune and suffering. At the beginning of his dream, confronted by the exilic scene of Psalm 137, Freud himself had been near to tears. Having experienced some kind of evil de-

40. A German-Jewish scholar would have been more likely to transliterate this verb form gauzer, as David Blumenthal has pointed out to me.

41. The word Schriftgelehrten is incorrectly translated by James Strachey as "philologists"; it specifically refers to rabbinic scholars, as in Luther's Bible translation, and may carry a light ironic tone.

42. See Deutsches Wörterbuch, ed. Gerhard Wahrig (Berlin: Bertelsmann, 1977), p. 1528. Even more striking is the entry under "Geseier" in the Deutsches Wörterbuch, ed. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1897), vol. 4, pt. 2, p. 4023. Freud may have consulted this work, which derives the word from Hebrew. In any event, Freud did not concern himself with accurate philology, instead basing his interpretation on his own (Yiddish-influenced) associations. Indeed, machen ein Geseires was not an unusual expression in Austrian German, according to information I have received from the Grimm Wörterbuch and Maximilian Aue.

43. See Alexander Harkavy's Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary, 2d ed. (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1928), p. 144. In Chassidic circles, a decree (g'zerah) was also employed during ritual exorcisms.

cree (Aramaic *g'zerah*), he makes a fuss (Yiddish-Austrian *Geseres*). The meaning of Freud's coinage, *Auf Geseres*, is lost and found in translation.

On another level, the word pair *Geseres* and *Ungeseres* reminds Freud of dough that is *gesäuert* and *ungesäuert*, leavened and unleavened. He explains that "during their hasty departure from *Egypt*, the children of *Israel* did not have time to let their dough rise, and to this day, in memory of this, eat unleavened bread at Easter-time." In his assimilated Viennese context, Freud does not employ the word *Passah* (or *Pesach*), but instead refers to Passover as *Osterzeit*, Easter time. This linguistic quirk aptly reflects Freud's cultural predicament. In any case, Freud gives meaning to his apparently meaningless verbal combination by recalling the Jewish practice of eating unleavened bread in memory of the Exodus. This is all the more reason for his concern that his children will become free-minded or independent, *freizügig*. Freud's relevant associations further include the office of a "*Dr. Herodes*" (*Td 428/ID 479*), whose name approximates that of Herod the Great, king of Judea, who captured Jerusalem in 37 B.C.E. with the help of the Romans. "*Herod*" is also the name of the later king who massacred the children of Judea.45

Freud's dream enacts a drama of conflicting cultures. The opening difficulties suggest persecution; the eldest son appears to choose between the female attendant, possibly a nun, and Freud.46 The father experiences a measure of relief when the boy gives a sign of preference, the words *Auf Ungeseres* rather than *Auf Geseres*. The negative form of this Aramaic decree, misfortune, or Yiddish clamor, suggests a possible relief. But in light of Freud's associations to Passover, the word *Ungeseres* indicates a further preference for unleavened bread, following the Jewish tradition. By refusing to kiss the nun and associating her with evil decrees and leavened bread, Freud's eldest son chooses to remember the Jewish condition of exile; he affirms the bread of servitude.47 The freedom of his relatives to emigrate is one of Freud's childhood memories, as it is also a collective memory of the Jews.

If *Auf Geseres* and *Auf Ungeseres* have significance, what do they mean? The speaker's movement, as he addresses himself to the attendant

45. Alexander Grinstein mentions the possible significance of Freud's association to either of the Herods. See *On Sigmund Freud's Dreams*, p. 329.


47. Freud's sons were members of Zionist youth organizations, according to Jacob Meitlis's recollections. See Jacob Meitlis, "The Last Days of Sigmund Freud," *Jewish Frontier* 18 (September 1951), 21. See also Falk, "Freud and Herzl," 378.
and to Freud, may be interpreted as signifying personal pronouns; then we might supply the missing words in these garbled statements: ‘‘Auf Ihnen—Geseres (Upon you [nun]—evil decrees)’’ and ‘‘Auf dir—Ungeseres (Upon you [father]—revoked evil decrees).’’ Freud’s eldest son commands or prophesies misfortune to the woman, and revokes misfortune with respect to Freud. Auf Geseres is both a word of parting to the ghetto of Jewish separatism and a reaffirmation of Yiddish resonances in German-Jewish speech.

Freud interprets his dream as expressing a fear of one-sidedness, and in particular as attempting to resolve his concern over a one-sided intellectual development (Td 428/1D 480). His own one-sided interpretation states that the dream “contradicts this concern” (ibid.). But his eldest son’s dual gesture does not merely balance the emotional and intellectual realms; it counters a one-sidedness in Freud’s preference for Greek and denial of Judaic traditions.\(^48\) In the process of his interpretation, despite his associations to Yiddish and Aramaic, Freud avoids acknowledging further meanings of Auf Geseres.

Freud’s denials take many forms. Most immediately, he excludes the two key words, “Herzl” and “Passover,” from his discussion of the dream. Although he mentions The New Ghetto, he chooses to omit its author’s name, which later became synonymous with Zionism. Furthermore, he avoids the words Pesach and Passah, instead referring to Passover as Easter time. On a deeper level, Freud evades the themes raised by Herzl’s play. In brief, The New Ghetto acknowledges the superficial achievements of Jewish emancipation in order to assert that Jews have nevertheless failed to free themselves from a new, internal ghetto. At this point in his pre-Zionist thought (1894), Herzl viewed assimilation favorably, as a means to greater freedom. Freud’s dream, in contrast, shows a preference for the Zionism that has been associated with Herzl’s name since the First Zionist Congress of 1897.\(^49\)

Freud calls this central dream “‘My Son, the Myops,’” privileging its allusion to the Greek Cyclops and diminishing the importance of the Ara-

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48. Compare Falk, “Freud and Herzl,” 383. In Freud’s Discovery of Psychoanalysis, McGrath associates Freud’s concern with vision to the biblical stories of Jacob and Joseph (p. 239). For an alternative interpretation of this dream, see Vitz, Sigmund Freud’s Christian Unconscious, pp. 90–92. In particular, Vitz asserts that “‘Freud’s rejection of Geseres or ‘salted’, and his preference for ‘unsalted’ or Ungeseres, suggested a preference for non-kosher food—that is, for the ‘advantage’ of the gentile world’” (p. 91).

49. Compare Loewenberg’s “A Hidden Zionist Theme in Freud’s ‘My Son, the Myops . . . ’ Dream,” 129–32.
maic $g'zerah$. If this Passover dream fulfills a wish, it does so by resolving a specific conflict concerning Jewish identity. Freud worries about the fate of his children and hints at a solution through a linguistic innovation. Although he himself speaks condescendingly of Yiddish as "the jargon," Freud's Auf Geseres dream decrees for his son the task of upholding it. In The New Ghetto, the mother of the protagonist explains that she educated herself in order not to shame her son, and "became accustomed to a better way of speaking than Jewish-German (Judendeutsch)" (act I, scene iv). Directly at variance with Herzl's earlier vision, Freud's dream returns to Yiddish and counteracts the assimilatory, pre-Zionist ideas. His dream-son recalls the flight from Egypt, and instead of employing an entirely assimilated Austrian German, brings together Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish, and German in a unique verbal compound. While he shows that his dream is not absurd, Freud declines to read its decree.

The Grand Verneinung

Freud's "talking cure" and methods of dream interpretation have occasionally been understood in the context of Jewish traditions, yet the nature of this association remains unclear. His essay "Negation" ("Die Verneinung") facilitates an understanding of his own relationship to Judaic dream interpretation. Although Freud refers to a drama that unfolds during psychoanalysis, his discussion—like that of transference—has broader implications.

"Negation," perhaps better rendered by "denial" or "disavowal," names a mental and verbal strategy, in some ways analogous to distortions of the dream work, by which repressed thoughts find conscious expression. The repressed material is expressed at the same time that it is


51. Some authors attempt to establish a terminological distinction between Verneinung and Verleugnung. In their Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis differentiate between logical or grammatical négation (Verneinung) and psychological dénégation (Verleugnung). They acknowledge, however, that Freud's essay on "Die Verneinung" leaves ambiguity between these two possible senses (p. 113); it employs only the word Verneinung. See also Ver Eecke, Saying "No," pp. 3–7, 20.
denied: "Negation is a means of taking cognizance of what is repressed; it is really a lifting (Aufhebung) of the repression, but indeed not an acceptance of what is repressed" (SA 3, 373/GPT 214). Freud observes the evident split that arises between the intellectual function and affective processes, when the intellect recognizes what has been repressed, while repudiating it under the influence of the emotional life. Freud subsequently alludes to his seminal essay on "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through" (SA Supp. 207–15/TT 157–66). This earlier article presents the elaborate analytical procedure through which Freud aims at an overcoming (Überwindung) of repressed materials, after making them available to the intellectual and emotional faculties of a patient. 52

Freud describes negation by providing examples and explaining their linguistic forms. He writes that "to deny something in one's judgment means, at bottom [to say]: 'That is something which I would most like to repress'" (SA 3, 374/GPT 214). Instead of simply repressing the materials, the intellect expresses them together with a denial, a "no." At this point Freud employs a suggestive metaphor, comparing this "no," which is "the hallmark (Merkzeichen) of repression" to a "stamp of origin (Ursprungs­zertifikat), such as 'made in Germany' " (ibid.). Freud's figure implicitly represents the individual psyche as a European topography, divided by national boundaries. The politics of trade require that products bear an imprint stating their place of origin; the laws of repression, Freud suggests, require that repressed materials bear the negating stamp of "no." Foreign goods are stamped in the international language of trade, English; unconscious materials are marked by the function of judgment. 53 Consciousness may thereby boycott unconscious contents.

Like a consumer who must decide whether to buy or not to buy foreign goods, the psyche reflects: "I would like to eat that, or I would like to spit it out... I would like to bring this into me and exclude that" (SA 3,

52. Freud's concise essay "Negation" illustrates his strategic considerations. Freud employs the free associations and phenomena of negation to set a trap; the German language makes the connection between associations and traps particularly evident. "Negation" opens with a reflection on the manner in which patients provide associations (Einfälle). The second paragraph subsequently sets a trap (Falle) for the patient by asking what the least likely association might be.

53. John Murray Cuddihy suggests that the "id" is analogous to the "yid," striving to enter consciousness as the Jew strives to enter European civilization. See The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Lévi-Strauss, and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity (New York: Basic Books, 1974). From a linguistic standpoint, one might say that the id is like Yiddish, striving to become German in the mouths of assimilating German Jews.
Freud calls this the "language of the oldest, oral instinctual impulses," and it is a language against which the conscious "I" struggles. The boundaries of the psyche are comparable to political borders, separating national cultures and languages; boundaries divide both within the psyche and between the psyche and what is external to it. Reality testing performs the work of a border guard when it "controls" the distortions of perception (SA 3, 375/GPT 216).

Freudian Verneinung combines the emergence and disavowal of a repressed mental content. Conscious judgment corresponds to the workings of unconscious repression when it hinders free movement in the psyche by stamping foreign materials with a "no." Hence Freud concludes his essay by observing that this negative stamp indicates the presence of unconscious materials: "There is no stronger proof of the successful uncovering of the unconscious than when the patient reacts: 'I never thought that'" (SA 3, 377/GPT 217). According to Freud's analysis, these words are the trademark, assigned by the intellectual function of judgment, signifying (to caricature the Freudian psychoanalytic landscape) "Made in the Unconscious."

Later authors have applied the Freudian theory of denial to more general psychological and literary problems, although without always drawing attention to Freud's own denials. Anna Freud's The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense (1936) analyzes the battles of the "I" with its affective life. Harold Bloom has extended the Freudian model, and has shown that the relationships between authors may be understood in terms of mechanisms of defense. According to Bloom's interpretations of Romantic poetry, the poetic ego struggles against prior authors, attempting to clear imaginative space for its own productions. A kind of denial or "lie against time"
enables strong poets to vie with their precursors. Bloom's literary criticism arises, in part, from a strong reading (or "misreading," in his own term) of Freudian Verneinung. His central assumption may be paraphrased: Every major text represses, and employs a system of defenses against, prior texts. Hence a text "is not a gathering of signs on a page, but is a psychic battlefield upon which authentic forces struggle for the only victory worth winning, the divinating triumph over oblivion." Bloom focuses attention on the poetic dramas in which battles for strength work themselves out. This is one sense in which we may apply Freud's Verneinung to Freud himself, especially concerning the relationship between his methods of dream interpretation and ancient traditions.

Freud's discussion of denial applies to his own work, which both affirms and negates Judaic sources. The new science of dream interpretation acknowledges—and yet establishes itself at an overstated distance from—prior models. Freud's Interpretation of Dreams is subject to distortions like those of the dream work; his interpretation of dreams invented a dream of

55. Current literary theory has been divided over questions of psychology and textuality. Paul de Man's review of The Anxiety of Influence remains an incisive reading of the Freudian dimension in Harold Bloom's project. De Man criticizes Bloom's psychological approach, emphasizing the textual status of misreading: "Texts originate in contact with other texts rather than in contact with the events or the agents of life (unless, of course, these agents or events are themselves treated as texts). To say that literature is based on influence is to say that it is intratextual." See Paul de Man, "Review of Harold Bloom's Anxiety of Influence," in Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism, 2d ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 273. De Man questions the psychological basis of Bloom's analyses, arguing that beneath the psychological "drama" lies a "linguistic model that could be described in a very different tone and terminology" (ibid., p. 274). De Man, then, preferred to "set aside the trappings of psychology" in order to understand the relationship between texts.


57. Tensions between the psychology and the textuality of influence are evident in one exchange between Jacques Derrida and Harold Bloom. In his essay "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Derrida writes: "What is a text, and what must the psychical be in order to be represented by a text?" (See L'écriture et la différence, p. 297; in English, see Writing and Difference, p. 199.) He refers to the Freudian metaphor of the Wunderblock, a writing toy which shares certain characteristics with the mind (see SA 3, 365–69/GPT 207–12). Harold Bloom explicitly reverses Derrida's quotation, asking: "What is a psyche, and what must a text be if it can be represented by a psyche?" (See Poetry and Repression, p. 1.)
interpretation that separated its inventor from his precursors. The present work uncovers the Freudian tactics that allow him to clear space for his writings by disavowing their Judaic antecedents. This denial was virtually inevitable, since Freud could only have cast further doubt upon his views by linking them to biblical or Talmudic sources. While Freud insisted on the scientific status of psychoanalysis, he censored from all of his exports the imprimatur: Made in (Exile from) Jerusalem. This Jewish goiser or g'zerah, doom or decree, was a malaise that Freud always repressed and yet never renounced.

Freud carefully distinguishes his practices of dream interpretation from those of ancient times, replacing the divine apparatus by mechanisms of the dream work. Dreams thereby become expressions of individual wishes and lose their potentially prophetic significance. According to ancient beliefs, dreams are primarily concerned with the future, but Freud understands them as expressions of past desires: the dream represents an aspect of personal history. Freud's essays on "the occult significance of dreams" reject the notion that dreams can foretell the future and reconceive telepathy as thought transference.

In the final paragraph of The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud again raises questions about the relationship between dreams and the future. Although he dismisses the prophetic view of dreams, he grants a certain similarity between ancient beliefs and his own theories. His first gesture is entirely negative: "And the value of dreams for knowledge of the future? There is naturally no question of that (Daran ist natürlich nicht zu denken)" (Td 588/ID 659). Freud's denial literally asserts that a prophetic value of dreams is "naturally not to be thought." Freud did not wish to entertain such archaic thoughts; he raises the question of this possible content only to reject it vigorously. Rather, he repeats, dreams are of value "for knowledge of the past" (Td 588/ID 660). Here Freud's language is again significant. Where the standard translation reads, "it would be truer to say instead," a more accurate translation is, "one would prefer to [or, one might] substitute for this (man möchte dafür einsetzen)." Freud virtu­ally acknowledges his own wish to replace the ancient future orientation in dream interpretation with an orientation toward the past.

Freud writes as if dreams rather than interpretations were at issue, and asserts that "dreams derive from the past in every sense." Claiming to have solved the riddle of dreams, Freud nevertheless does grant some merit to earlier views: "Indeed, the old belief that dreams show us the future is not entirely lacking in the import of truth." He alludes to the fact that a wish inherently aims toward the future; a dream that represents a repressed wish thus does reveal something about the future. Yet Freud is still concerned to contradict Joseph, and recasts the older views in his own terms: "By representing a wish as fulfilled, the dream by all means leads us into the future; but this future, taken by the dreamer to be present, is shaped by
the indestructible wish into the image of its past" (Td 588/ID 660). The wish-fulfilling dream reveals a desired future that is, however, predetermined by the dreamer's past. A biblical echo is close to the surface of Freud's resonant concluding words. Having just admitted that the "old belief" contains some truth, Freud proceeds to appropriate an ancient tradition. In place of "God created man in his image" (Gen. 1:27), Freud asserts his humanistic dogma: the indestructible wish creates the future in the image of its past. Libido takes the place of God as the determinant of human destiny.

Freud revises Hebraic traditions, replacing religious belief by an interpretive discipline purporting to be a twentieth-century science. Where the Bible represents dreams as messages from God, Freud views them as messages from the unconscious; where Joseph and Daniel discover the meaning of dreams in the future, Freud shows how dreamers' wishes arise from the past.

Freud's dominant theme in *The Interpretation of Dreams* is not dreams, but interpretation. In an unspoken confrontation with Judaic traditions, Freud evades this point by avoiding rabbinic statements on dream interpretation, concentrating instead on renouncing the prophetic procedures of Joseph. The Talmud and Midrash anticipate his skepticism, including his recognition of mundane meanings behind what others wished to view as prophetic. Moreover, tractate Berakhot and Lamentations Rabbah might have forced Freud to recognize that no meaning inheres in a dream; all meaning depends on interpretation. Wishes are always present, and future-directed, guiding the hand of the interpreter.

A dream of interpretation leads Freud to unconscious wishes as a foundation of meaning, at odds with the Talmudic metaphor "all dreams follow the mouth," which emphasizes the active role of the interpreter. Freud seeks to pierce beyond the dream report to motivating contents. Certain Judaic sources show, in contrast, how meaning emerges through a grafting of text upon text, of dream upon Scripture and of Scripture upon dream. The meanings of texts always evolve through other texts, translations, associations, transformations. Freud's dream of interpretation is a method that denies its own place as a revision of Judaic traditions. Freud "feared for the future of his work; he feared that it would be known to posterity as a Jewish science."58

As the Talmudic interpretation of "Cappadocia" brings together Aramaic and Greek, Freud's interpretations of certain dreams pass through German, English, Yiddish, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. In the Talmud, to

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the extent that the Hebrew Bible is considered the blueprint for reality, linguis­
tic hybrids pose a potential threat. Nonbiblical languages and expres­
sions, if they bear hidden layers of non-Hebraic contents, may challenge the
priority of God’s words. Freud’s insistently secular interpretations power­
fully pose this threat, in each case deciphering an individual dream code on
the basis of the patient’s free associations. Freud discerns virtually endless
meanings in every dream or linguistic utterance, thus decentering the
claims of Scripture. Only the operations of the dream work remain con­
stant, forming the dream, deforming meaning, and informing interpreta­
tion. Freud’s own dreams and methods of interpretation, when re­
interpreted, express his own repressed position in Judaic culture.

Freud takes a step beyond Talmudic dream texts when he points to the
overdetermined quality of signification and translates various linguistic
codes. In retrospect, the Talmud places in question the scientific pretenses
of modern psychology when it reveals the active power of the interpreter
who, by offering meaning, casts himself in the role of prophet. Further­
more, the Midrashic narratives of rabbis and dream interpreters anticipate
Freud’s skeptical approach to dream prophecy.

Freud presumes to work objectively when he translates manifest con­
tents into latent contents or dream thoughts. The Talmud recognizes a ten­
dency toward arbitrariness in the processes of interpretation, which does
not prevent prophetic interpretations from being fulfilled. The overdetermi­
nation of dream contents prevents Freud from claiming a definitive inter­
pretation, yet he hesitates to admit that dream interpretation may follow
arbitrary patterns. The dream work is ultimately indistinguishable from the
interpreter’s work.