INTRODUCTION

Without tracing a direct line of influence, these pages bring together Freud's writings and ancient Jewish traditions of dream interpretation. This intertextual field has been misunderstood, in part because Freud himself vehemently renounced the early interpreters of dreams. Freud's disavowal provokes reexamination of what he so insistently denied.

Numerous writers have commented on Freud's Jewish identity. Their

observations tend to conceive Freud's "Jewishness" too narrowly, however, in predominantly biographical terms. The present analysis turns from Freud the individual to Freud's works, and from personal influences to textual interrelationships between Freudian dream interpretation, the Bible, and the Talmud. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud admits to identifying with the biblical Joseph. Yet as a modern interpreter, he rejects what he takes to be Joseph's archaic methods, and Freud's work on dreams stands in an ambivalent relationship to biblical and Talmudic sources. Freud may not have known the central Talmudic passages on dream interpretation until *Imago* published a relevant article in 1913. Nevertheless, he did study Scripture at an early age, and remarked on its importance for his development; Freud's dreams, letters, and occasional comments reflect his linguistic awareness of Hebrew and Yiddish. Freud knew enough of Judaic traditions to be uneasy about his knowledge.

Freud might have responded more fully and consistently to biblical sources. In order to counter the skepticism of modern science, he repudi-

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ated Joseph and Daniel, who approach dreams as bridges to the future. Freud opposed prophetic dream interpretation and ignored the potential legitimacy of its future orientation. Determined to trace the dream report to prior causes, then, Freud underrated the dreamer’s wish to have the dream turned toward a future. Wishes do not merely precede dreaming; they often color the commitment to interpretation. Because Freud convincingly established new methods, few commentators have recognized that the prophetic dimension of ancient dream interpretation was at once suppressed by Freud and implicit in his practices.

From the beginning, men and women have sought their fortunes in the enigmatic images of dreams. Interpreters respond by shedding light on the darker realm where elusive laws of fiction give birth to infinite possibility. To dream is to deceive oneself: English *dream* and German *träumen* derive from *dreugh*, to deceive. A dream text is a tale told by a dreamer, full of equivocations, signifying everything and nothing. Dreams veer away from reality, and the lost dreamer seeks a guide to a more certain world. But the interpretation of a dream is always subject to revision.

One pragmatic thesis of this book is that no interpretation is intrinsically true, because a present truth depends upon the future reality that confirms, alters, or gives meaning to the interpretive act. Meaning does not stand waiting to be uncovered behind a dream or text, but evolves in front of it, actualized by readers and interpreters who produce new possibilities. It follows that while some commentaries are self-contradictory and demonstrably false, others can only be measured against the way in which they modify the future. When Pablo Picasso was told that Gertrude Stein did not look like his portrait of her, he responded: “That does not make any difference, she will.” Picasso’s portrait has indeed become the predominant image of Stein. This story illustrates the power of the interpretations performed by art, literary criticism, and psychoanalysis.

Meaning is made, not discovered. Freud’s analogies to adventure and archaeology deceptively suggest that the meaning of dreams lies buried in an objective ground. Since the medium of dream texts and interpretations is always language, strategies of interpretation have little in common with an archaeological dig. Language leaves its traces in elusive patterns of collective and individual rhetoric. Freud’s basic approach to oniric meaning—in the correspondence between a dream and the childhood wish that motivates it—is incomplete and awaits a supplemental future orientation.

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If "all the world's a stage," then psychoanalysis revises personal dramas in a scenario of remembering, repeating, and working through. The patient's dream performances reveal typical roles. The dream interpreter, who never merely translates the text of a dreamer's fading past, facilitates a rewriting of the future.

Arthur Schopenhauer writes that "everyone, while he dreams, is a Shakespeare." C. G. Jung also employs the dramatic metaphor and calls the dream "a theater, in which the dreamer is scene, player, prompter, director, author, audience, and critic." The psychoanalyst may also assume these roles. Psychoanalysis is a drama in which the patient tries on masks, playing opposite the analyst's feigned neutrality. To the experienced analyst this proceeding resembles child's play, a game of presence and absence in which the subject creates an imaginary world. Whether we reposition our objects in the world or dream of a new order, one primary impulse is to attain or maintain control. Playing, the child strives against an unpredictable world, as does the dreamer who stages a drama of chaos and order. Some authors assert that Freud manipulated his patients, but it is more accurate to say that the "talking cure" manipulates a patient's fictions.

The dream in itself is a fiction. Because no dream is ever directly conveyed, dream interpretation relies on the retelling of a dream that displaces whatever may have inspired it. To recall a dream is to generate a narrative based on heterogeneous materials; waking associations situate the dream text in a broader linguistic framework. Interpretation translates the dream text into new texts and contexts. The dreamer creates fictions, and the interpreter acts as a literary critic. The meaning of a text is always expressed through another text, and consequently every interpretation is in turn open to interpretation. While no dream is ever fully transcribed or understood, an interpretation may serve limited ends when it incites a patient to change.

The play of inventive associations has linked dreams to prophecy, to sexuality, and to death. According to a Talmudic source, "sleep is one sixtieth of death; dream is one sixtieth of prophecy." The dream interpreter


7. The Babylonian Talmud, tractate Berakhot 57b.
discerns unexpected similarities. The Greek author Artemidorus reports, for instance: "I know of a man who dreamt that he went into a brothel and could not leave. He died a few days later, this being the quite logical result of his dream. For a brothel, like a cemetery, is called 'a place men have in common,' and many human seeds perish there. In a natural way, then, this place resembles death." As a figure for death, the brothel is a commonplace, a communis locus in the symbolism that associates eros and thanatos.

Aristotle states that "the most skillful interpreter of dreams is he who has the faculty of observing resemblances." Because dreams employ distorted images, like reflections on moving water, they do not superficially correspond to what they represent. In connection with poetic style, Aristotle writes that "the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor... since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars." Hence, according to one traditional view, the dream interpreter's task is to return from the metaphorical expression to the literal meaning. Like the poet, the interpreter works freely with metaphors: the dream content is not literally its meaning, but represents meanings figuratively.

Dream interpretation is a variant of textual commentary, and two opposed strategies compete within Freudian interpretation. Freud often indicates that the interpreter perceives symbols that enable him to reconstruct the authentic image from its distorting fragments; at other moments, he follows the more radical demands of free association, giving meaning to dream elements by allowing them to be successively displaced.

The Aristotelian model of resemblance is based on the figure of metaphor. The more radical Freudian method of association reverts to unfamiliar figures of difference, and is unsettling, even to its originator. Freud conceives symptoms and dreams as figurative distortions, framed beyond the conscious intentions of a subject. Although he strives to liberate the dream from its figuration, in his most original phase Freud also accredits every associative displacement and approaches a realization that the dream has no literal meaning. It remains difficult to determine whether dream interpretation is high drama or a comedy of errors.


Scripture has predetermined both the collective dream and the communal reality of the Jews. To the extent that personal dreams represent a non-scriptural imagination, they threaten this textual state. Interpretation of private dreams contends with interpretation of Scripture; to dream or to interpret at a distance from divine language may be to distance oneself from God. Although Jewish life submitted to Mosaic law for centuries, at every moment—even at the reception of the decalogue—this textual mosaic was threatened by the possibility of idol worship. Idolatry displaces writing by imagery, and substitutes forbidden fantasies for the language of God.

Judaic sources insist that Scripture (written Torah) must be understood together with the Talmud (oral Torah). This tradition gives rise to contradictory expectations. On the one hand, rabbinic interpreters sometimes efface themselves before a biblical passage, as if allowing God's text to speak for itself. On the other hand, Jewish interpreters also revise God's words by embedding quotations from Scripture in new contexts.

Twentieth-century psychology has been marked by analogous tensions in connection with the dream text and its interpretation. Freud searched for the meaning of dreams in the past, as if to say that the dreamer's psyche interprets itself by exposing its underlying causes. Yet post-Freudian psychotherapists have recognized that the demands of cure lead beyond thoughts that may have inspired a dream—toward future effects. In consequence, some analysts have shifted their focus from past causes to present conflicts and future possibilities.

Freud was divided between disparate interpretive outlooks. While his fundamental conception of textual and psychological meaning is consistent with the nineteenth-century hermeneutics of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, certain psychoanalytic strategies anticipate contemporary literary theory. In particular, Harold Bloom and Jacques Derrida advance aspects of Freud's work that elude European hermeneutics, reading otherwise and obliquely reflecting rabbinic precursors. No thorough comparison between poststructuralism and rabbinic commentary is possible, however, since rhetorical critics and rabbinic authors have employed highly diverse methods. Rather than attempt to demonstrate analogies between Midrash and contemporary criticism, the present study considers a specific point of contact in psychoanalytic dream interpretation.

Freud’s debt to nineteenth-century interpretive views cannot be traced to specific forerunners, because his fundamental assumptions were typical of an entire milieu. Chajim Steinthal paraphrased Schleiermacher’s views in a way that characterizes the interpreter’s Freud: “The philologist understands the speaker and poet better than he himself and his contemporaries understood him. For he brings clearly into consciousness what was actually, but only unconsciously, present in the other.”  

Freud often assumes that the deeper meaning of verbal expressions is linked to unconscious ideas.

Yet aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis overstep the limits established by nineteenth-century hermeneutics. Freud’s interpretations do more than illuminate a realm of conscious, preconscious, and unconscious thoughts. Freud’s attention to puns, wordplays, and verbal associations—beyond subjective agency—ally him with both current trends in literary criticism and ancient rabbinic practices.

Freud emerges as an intermediate sphere between ancient and modern Judaic commentary, despite his efforts to forestall such associations. He never acknowledges the pseudorabbinic elements of his work, and his silence forms a resonant space in which his repressed precursors echo. Reading Freud in relation to the Bible and Talmud reveals his importance as a *topos* in Judaic thought.

The rabbinic and poststructuralist attention to language is symptomatic of larger concerns: like many rabbis in the Talmudic period, current authors sometimes write ahistorically about the textual universe. One unmistakable rabbinic quest has been to live in the margins of divine language, like marginal commentaries on the Bible or Talmud. Every question that arises, the Talmud suggests, can be resolved in the proper scriptural context. Dreams potentially pose a threat if they follow nonbiblical sources or employ materials foreign to the rabbinic world.

In Vienna, the imagination of Freud and his patients obviously transgressed the boundaries of biblical literature. Scripture no longer provided the key to dreams; associations of all kinds became admissible. With this

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expansion of potential meaning, as the relevant intertexts become conspicuously more diverse, interpretation loses its appearance of dependability.

Rhetorical criticism follows the Freudian lead in observing the dynamics of textuality and intertextuality; in so doing, it also responds to ancient precursors. Like manifest dream contents in Freud’s estimation, every text appears “overdetermined” by possible meanings. Recent poststructuralist authors—for whom both the biblical canon and conscious intentions have lost their primacy—share rabbinic assumptions about textuality, and are acutely aware of the hazards presented by a failure of grounds.

Freud’s relationship to biblical and Talmudic dream interpretation is characterized by denial. Ancient dream interpreters are Freud’s repressed precursors, constantly present in his works by being systematically excluded.