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Scientific Art: The Interpretation of Dreams

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Imagine Freud late in 1899 awaiting publication of The Interpretation of Dreams. His letters reveal apprehension and excitement, the pride and pleasure of accomplishment, but sadness as well, as if he felt the loss already of what later he called his "splendid isolation." Since co-authoring Studies on Hysteria with Breuer, he had labored alone, unburdening himself during that half decade only to Fliess in Berlin and, at home, to his sister-in-law Minna. He had revised his tactics for therapy and now listened patiently for associations, or at least tried to. Those he treated tended still to be flamboyantly ill persons whose troubles had not yielded to current neurological or psychiatric care. Observing and puzzling, he had begun his systematic and often painful self-analysis, correlating it with what he learned of their turmoils. Slowly, even haltingly, he came to understand the oedipal configuration of everyone's childhood and the ongoing power of long-buried wishes. The creative ordeal was over. His discoveries would soon be public.

Of course the dream book took considerable risks for a middle-aged Jewish doctor with a family to support, not the least of which was its concentration on an ancient mystery of mental life. However elusive dreams may seem, more appropriate perhaps for biblical figures or fortune-tellers than for scientists, Freud contended that they can be understood. They have meaning and unexpected centrality, for their processes illuminate all psychic functioning, all civilization. He knew he was introducing a general psychology of mind through an odd focus: reason enough for feeling uneasy. But he liked to challenge and to soar, though he labored scrupulously—even foolhardy with regard to the curative prospects of cocaine. He had gone to Paris to study with Charcot, then further ruffled Viennese feathers by studying hypnotism with Bernheim. Soon he would describe himself as less a scientist by temperament than a conquistador—an adventurer.
He came to rate the dream book foremost among his works. "It contains . . . the most valuable of all the discoveries it has been my good fortune to make," he would write in 1931. "Insight such as this falls to one's lot but once in a life-time." Now, however, just weeks before it was to appear, he felt no confidence. When the worst of his mood cleared, he remarked to Fliess: "I do not think that my self-criticism was wholly unjustified." His art of truth preoccupied him, and ultimately the cogency of his ideas: "Somewhere inside me there is a feeling for form, an appreciation of beauty as a kind of perfection; and the tortuous sentences of the dream-book, with its high-flown, indirect phraseology, its squinting at the point, [have] sorely offended one of my ideals." He added: "I do not think I am going far wrong if I interpret this lack of form as a sign of deficient mastery of the material." Doubtless depression after hard effort and an idiom of self-punishment governed his judgment; his later estimate of the book, after all, belies this severity. But the comments to Fliess tell us something overt and of great importance: for his own work Freud did not separate science from art; he thought manner essential to matter—of its essence. The issue of appropriate form in fact engaged him while he wrote the book. However discomforted he became under pressure of the moment, he had recognized the challenge of form and met it—as we should if we hope to understand why, in The Interpretation of Dreams, the first psychoanalyst emerged simultaneously with the writer who was to earn the Goethe Prize for German letters. Freud forged both a new science of mind and his mode of expression for it in the dream book. Thereafter his distinctive command informed his presentations, In the nature of things, his prose had to persuade readers to trust his procedure and thought or fail to. And to him, we know, it rallied Sachs, Adler, Federn, and Rank in Vienna, Ferenczi in Budapest, Bleuler and Jung in Zurich, Abraham and Eitingon in Berlin, Jones in England, Prince and Putnam in America—and so many others to this day. It is no small matter in the gradual ascendancy of psychoanalysis since 1900 that Freud wrote so well.

Not all remained convinced, nor does everything he wrote convince in retrospect, but few who read him doubt the powerful hold of his expo-

1. The Interpretation of Dreams, in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. James Strachey and Anna Freud (London, 1966-1974), IV and V, xxxii. First published 1900. Subsequent references to this edition will be identified by the letters S.E., followed by the volume number and the date of original publication. References to The Interpretation of Dreams will be identified by a simple page number.


sitions. He writes seriously yet with verve, attractively aware of occasions and of his audience. Rarely do his most technical pieces exclude a reasonably informed reader. Psychoanalytic professionals can learn from his general essays. Busy candidates are known to enjoy reading through the 24-volume collected works during the first year of training at analytic institutes. Typically, Freud's attentiveness to detail and to intricacy win respect while transmitting his excitement of discovery, his wonder at human ways.

His prose proves available. Clear, forceful, and rich in allusion, it explores unreasonableness, that perceived inner mystery we manage to some degree to hide from others and even from ourselves, but of which we feel the lure. Many readers admire his ability to muster opposing arguments that anticipate their own and thereby to incorporate their doubts into the ongoing discussion. Stanley Edgar Hyman traced the continuing debate Freud seems to have with an ideal listener, who questions, doubts and argues. 4 The Introductory Lectures amplify this dialectical procedure. They make much of the social exchange that lectures imply. For part of The Future of an Illusion, his examination of organized religion, he launches into dialogue. In The Question of Lay Analysis, entirely through dialogue, he defends nonmedical practitioners of psychoanalysis by explaining, at length and charmingly, the technique and theory of his developed therapy.

His mode of presentation always has this sociable impulse, though not always so prominently. Characteristically, his manner implies that he and his readers are complex persons with emotional intelligences, that in addition to sharing interests and concerns, a wider human community, and a capacity for rational understanding, he and they are capable of fears, misperceptions, enthusiasms, anger, consistencies, rigidities, smiles, boredom, and flights of imagination. Just as his mature clinical technique recognizes a patient's transference of early emotions to the analyst, and the analyst's to the patient, so his sociable prose embodies the human relativity of psychological observation. At all times Freud's defining voice sounds. In his prose he cuts a figure, visible against the background, and that presence affords perspective. It evokes felt response—illumination, disagreement, thought—and helps to gauge it. Relational reality has been central to scientific theory since Einstein's papers of 1905, but the forms of scientific communication rarely testify to it. Freud's writings do. Students of literature will recognize the problem of point of view in a new setting. 5 For like any realized narrator, Freud enlists sympathy and engages judgment.

Reading him consequently involves getting to know him—or rather,

those aspects of himself he brings to his writings. One comes to expect rhythms as well as terminology, his wit no less than his honesty. He is fond of aphorism and anecdote—measuring egoism, as an instance, by the married couple one of whom said to the other: "If one of us dies, I shall move to Paris." He is learned. He is clearly though not insistently Jewish. His irony proves bracing, as do his occasional sarcasm and his impatience with stupidity. Wondrously open to all that he does not comprehend, he also gets opinionated. He proves testy about ideas from others that may be useful but for which he is not ready. Not overtly combative, he does not shy from controversy: choosing surprising focuses (dreams, jokes, slips of the tongue, neuroses as a window on health), and often-dramatic titles ("A Child Is Being Beaten," *Totem and Taboo*, "Family Romances," "Character and Anal Erotism," "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing-Pad,'" *Civilization and Its Discontents*, "The 'Uncanny'"). His first major case study, Dora, admits failure; his second, Little Hans, is about a boy he has not analyzed. Freud is probingly curious, calmly alert. The master detective of the unconscious, he unravels enigmas and articulates with care: "In my experience anyone who is in any way, whether socially or ethically, abnormal mentally is invariably abnormal in his sexual life. But many people are abnormal in their sexual life who in every other respect approximate to the average, and have, along with the rest, passed through the process of human cultural development, in which sexuality remains the weak spot" (*S.E.*, VII [1905], 149). With his vast command of expression and his synthesizing power, he can reflect broadly without pretense: "Life, as we find it, is too hard for us; it brings too many pains, disappointments and impossible tasks. In order to bear it we cannot dispense with palliative measures" (*S.E.*, XXI [1930], 75). He speculates willingly and moves constantly on: "As we already know, the interdependence of the complicated problems of the mind forces us to break off every enquiry before it is completed—till the outcome of some other enquiry can come to its assistance" (*S.E.*, XIV [1917], 258). But his certainties emerge from clinical experience: "Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences" (*S.E.*, II [1895], 7). Repeatedly he warns that theoretical ideas are not the base of science but its superstructure; they yield to observations. Then, in his 60s, he reformulates his theory of instincts and remaps the topography of the mind, postulating a structure of id, ego, and superego. He respects, and warms to, human exigencies: "He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore" (*S.E.*, VII [1905] 77f.). In short, Freud himself is part of the story. He makes intellectual work experiential. By writing as he does, he evokes—and participates in—the social process of thought.

6. Italics within quotations are Freud's throughout.
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Because he is part of the story, his scientific reports announce their kinship with storytelling. They have plot and pace as well as purport. They hum with confrontation. And thus they serve objectivity, by expressly testifying to his conviction that psychological scrutiny is rooted in subjectivity, for both reporter and reader. "Mediocre spirits demand of science a kind of certainty which it cannot give, a sort of religious satisfaction," he told Marie Bonaparte. "Only the real, rare, true scientific minds, can endure doubt, which is attached to all our knowledge. . . . Mental events seem to be immeasurable and probably always will be so."8 This assurance, which is at once psychoanalytic and literary, he did not have before the dream book. Studies on Hysteria, for example, included a markedly uneasy explanation of why his case studies seemed to be stories:

I have not always been a psychotherapist. Like other neuropathologists, I was trained to employ local diagnoses and electro-prognosis, and it still strikes me myself as strange that the case histories I write should read like short stories and that, as one might say, they lack the serious stamp of science. I must console myself with the reflection that the nature of the subject is evidently responsible for this, rather than any preference of my own. The fact is that local diagnosis and electrical reactions lead nowhere in the study of hysteria, whereas a detailed description of mental processes such as we are accustomed to find in the works of imaginative writers enables me, with the use of a few psychological formulas, to obtain at least some kind of insight into the course of that affection. Case histories of this kind are intended to be judged like psychiatric ones; they have, however, one advantage over the latter, namely an intimate connection between the story of the patient's sufferings and the symptoms of his illness—a connection for which we still search in vain in the biographies of other psychoses. (S.E., II [1895], 160 f.)

Literary forms may fit uncomfortably with sober science, but as Henry James might say, there it was. The nature of hysteria itself committed Freud to tracing connections back in time, and thus to narrative. The passage has his look already: his openness, his unwillingness to indulge what clearly has not worked, his commitment to the idea of cause, his intellectual ambitiousness (somewhat veiled here)—today hysteria, tomorrow the other mental illnesses. But that stamp of science worried him.

What he gained by pursuing narrative despite the uneasiness can be illustrated by the case of "Miss Lucy R." A young English governess in the home of a wealthy widower and factory manager, she complained of depression and fatigue, and of having lost all sense of smell except for the constant odor of burned pudding. Freud pauses over technique before going on. She proved insusceptible to hypnotism, at which he wasn't much good anyway, so he questioned her directly about the outstanding symptom. When her memory failed, he pressed her forehead or held her head between his hands, then let go, expecting that at that moment some image would come to her mind. He believed this procedure could work, because Bernheim had shown him that, if pressured, people can recall when awake what had occurred during hypnotic somnambulism. He then describes

Lucy's recent past as it emerged in treatment. She remembered playing at cooking with her young charges, two days before her birthday. Having just given notice, she planned to go home to England, for she had been hurt that the other servants intrigued against her, thinking she had become uppity, and disappointed in her employer's backing. As they were making pudding, a letter arrived from her mother, but the children ran to intercept it and, with much laughter and affection, promised to give it to her only on her birthday. In the interim the pudding burned. She felt torn by love for the children and her desire to leave, and she sadly recalled the promise she had made to their dying mother to look after them—to "take their mother's place with them." Freud seized upon the wish to take their mother's place. Could she be in love with her employer? She agreed that she was and called to mind an affecting moment when he had confided that he depended on her. At the time she thought it possible he loved her.

Soon cigar smoke replaced burned pudding in her nostrils. Apparently one smell had screened the other. With much difficulty she remembered two occasions when the man reacted angrily to people kissing his children. Once after lunch, as the men smoked cigars, the grandfatherly Chief Accountant bent to kiss them good-bye, and the father shouted: "Don't kiss the children!" She felt stabbed to the heart. Even earlier, a lady had dared to kiss them on the mouth, and though he held his temper until she left, he vented his fury on poor Lucy: if anything like that were to happen again, she would be fired. This last episode, the earliest in the series, occurred shortly after she thought that he might love her. When she reconstructed it, her depression lifted and her sense of smell was restored.

Her case, as told, has the believable feel of fiction. It combines suspenseful revelation—complete with an excursus on technique—and causal explanation. Building scene upon scene, it demonstrates their connectedness and in Lucy's major symptom has a unifying image. Into this expository pattern, Freud weaves such supporting information as her chronic suppurative rhinitis that underlay the nasal symptom. He seems to have liked her forthrightness and adult attitude. When she realized her feelings, she took responsibility for them, volunteering that she couldn't help loving but could certainly control what she said or did about it. The sequential process of her therapy, recreated through incrementally developing narrative in "Miss Lucy R.,” suggests an ever-unfolding mystery. "Strangely enough,” Freud concludes, “success did not run pari passu with the amount of work done. It was only when the last piece of work had been completed that recovery suddenly took place” (S.E., II [1895], 124). Something remained unsolved.

That was in 1895. Before the turn of the century he understood that sexuality spreads back to childhood, that traumas alone do not start neuroses, and that wish and fantasy, defended against, govern psychic development. Even before his characterizing ideas and presence emerged in The Interpretation of Dreams, that is to say, his case studies gave...
expression to experiential human mystery, and to modesty about the intellect's capacity finally to comprehend it. Reading the early case of Lucy, one can ponder all that Freud did not yet know—or know to ask: why she chose a man above her station, then stayed on to love him hopelessly; what buried loyalties to parents were operating; why, like her mother, she was sickly without really being ill; why neither doctor nor patient considered Freud's own cigar smoking. But subsequent advances always afford pleasurable access to Freud's writings, because he presented more than at any moment he had conceptualized. The negative oedipus complex, countertransference, preoedipal factors, aggression, anxiety as a signal, the superego, varieties of ego defenses, the adaptive and creative strengths of the ego—all figure long before being identified as such. His works show the grounds for conclusions that followed, and alert to detail and to persuasiveness—to the social requirements of thought—they continue to reward study and interpretation. Freud was an empirical scientist. His theory helped him to see, and with new observations he added to and reformulated his theory. But the enigmatic human psyche fascinated him. "I am pretty well alone here in tackling the neuroses," he told Fliess on May 21, 1894. "They regard me as a monomaniac, while I have the distinct feeling that I have touched on one of the great secrets of nature" (L. no. 18). In his masterful prose he preserved that respect for mystery as, throughout his career, he reported his awesome discoveries.

III

The strategic problem he faced in the dream book, as in all his psychoanalytic writing, was to juxtapose propriety with the detailed information needed for cogency. This book introduced his psychoanalytic method and psychology, however, and posed unique problems. He wanted to prevent his understanding of dreams and mental processes from being dismissed because based on the neuroses of his patients. How could he best demonstrate the proximity of psychic illness and health? His decision was inspired. He would make much of his own dreams, the only other ones he had analyzed by using free associations to trace the latent meaning of manifest content. So *The Interpretation of Dreams* became at once an original scientific treatise and an autobiography. Carl Schorske has memorably illuminated this dual structure in an essay that discusses Freud's transformation of a changing political and social actuality into psychological theory. To appreciate the magnitude of Freud's undertaking, he suggests that we imagine Saint Augustine including his *Confessions* in *The City of God*, or Rousseau integrating his *Confessions* into *The

9. A remarkable parallel to this letter is that of Freud's Viennese neighbor Theodor Herzl to Chief Rabbi Moritz Goldmann the following year: "I have the solution to the Jewish question. I know it sounds mad. But I have it." See A. Elon, *Herzl* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1975), p. 149.

Origins of Inequality. Freud, of course, planned not to confess too much—though he may have wished to—because over and above embarrassment to himself, exhibitionism would explode the crucial claims he makes in the book to normalcy, and thus to representativeness.

His father died in October 1896, when Freud was 40. Within a few months he began his systematic self-analysis. The book was written for the most part during 1898 and 1899: chapters 2 through 6 in order, and perhaps an early version of 7; then the summary of existing literature on dreams, chapter 1, which he found a chore; finally chapter 7, “the psychology,” in September 1899. All the while he submitted drafts, ideas, and other observations to Fliess. As early as December 1897 he recognized the expository problem: “Since I have started studying the unconscious I have become so interesting to myself. It is a pity one always keeps one’s mouth shut about the most intimate things. Das Beste, was Du wissen kannst, Darfst Du den Buben doch nicht sagen” (L. no. 77). Before long he was pondering his seminal idea, though with a nice ambiguity about it and his readers: “The repetition of experiences of the prehistoric [infantile] period is a wish-fulfilment in itself and for its own sake; a recent wish leads to a dream only if it can be associated with material from that period, if the recent wish is a derivative of a prehistoric wish or can get itself adopted by such a wish. I do not know yet to what extent I shall be able to stick to this extreme theory, or let it loose in the dream book” (L. no. 84). However one reads this, the issue already seems both psychoanalytic and literary.

In the dream book, unlike Studies, he accepts the exigencies of his discoveries and resorts unabashedly to narrative. In that way he follows associations and shows their connections, and he apologizes only when curtailing explanation to preserve his privacy. No longer protected or constrained by an older colleague, he is more assured than formerly, more perceptibly present. He needed to be: the extension of sexuality and of psychic determinism back into childhood required careful, intriguing presentation. “Intelligence is always weak,” he recognized, “and it is easy for a philosopher to transform resistance into discovering logical refutations” (L. no. 125). Affably and slowly, therefore, he guides his readers through difficult territory. A specimen dream, “Irma’s Injection,” shows that a dream fulfills a wish, and the next chapter widens the claim—all dreams fulfill wishes. Why then do most not seem to? The chapter on dream distortion that follows amplifies and complicates the matter: “a dream is a (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish” (p. 160). As he explained to Fliess: “The whole thing is planned on the model of an imaginary walk. First comes the dark wood of the authorities (who cannot see the trees), where there is no clear view and it is easy to go

11. Mephistopheles comment, in Goethe’s Faust, Part I, Scene iv: “The best that you know, you must not tell to little boys.” The quotation was a favorite of Freud’s. Many years later, he used it to close his statement when accepting the Goethe Prize. See S.E., XXI (1930), 206-212.
astray. Then there is a cavernous defile through which I lead my readers—my [specimen dream] with its peculiarities, its details, its indiscretions and its bad jokes—and then, all at once, the high ground and the open prospect and the question: 'Which way do you want to go?' " (L. no. 114). His way round resistance in *The Interpretation of Dreams* is the way of art.12

An imaginary walk and sociable discourse, then, to tell two related stories of different density and accessibility. The first is long and scientific. Although historically befuddling to observers, dreams have meaning and can be analyzed; they are formed in certain ways and exemplify all mental functioning. The second is personal, by way of illustration. In bits and pieces, suggestively unfolding to deeper levels but never completely told, it concludes with his revelation in the Preface to the second edition that he grasped the book's significance to him only after finishing it: "It was, I found, a portion of my own self-analysis, my reaction to my father's death—that is to say, to the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man's life." Together these stories expound a complex and consistent thesis—and withhold direct statement of its most radical part until, presumably, all resistances have been allayed. Freud says outright that "a wish which is represented in a dream must be an infantile one" near the end (p. 553), and even then embeds it in discursive theory. Having wondered how to "let it loose" in the dream book, he took the entire book to do so. To be sure, he implied, suggested, indeed dramatized it earlier. But only after providing the felt believability of experience, the way fiction does, did he say it. The personal story prepared the way with empirical evidence—by beguiling and delaying.

Concurrently, the scientific story occasioned the autobiography and obscured it. We can follow Schorske's lead, for example, in considering the latent meaning of Freud's opening dreams. In "Irma's Injection" he proves severe with a recalcitrant patient, two skeptical colleagues and his wife in order to protest his conscientiousness. "R. was my Uncle" reaches deeper; he dismisses R. as a simpleton and N. as a criminal, seizing upon possible charges against these two doctors, who, like himself, hoped to be appointed Professors but being Jews would not be; he even identifies with the Minister who oversees the anti-Semitic policy so that his wish, in the dream, might be fulfilled. Then chapter 5, on "The Material and Sources of Dreams," correlates several dreams. He asserts his rights in the discovery of the anaesthetic qualities of cocaine and briefly depicts his father as a philistine (who gives little Sigmund books with colored plates to tear up and then remonstrates with studious Sigmund for buying books), before exposing him as a coward. When Freud was a boy, his father, Jakob, to show him how much better conditions had become, recalled the

time "a Christian" had jostled him and shouted: "Jew! get off the pave­ment!" Jakob had merely picked up his hat. In dreams his son surrounds that painful memory with early predictions of his own great destiny, with evocations of the Bürger Ministry of the 1860s (when all Jewish schoolboys aspired to be Cabinet Ministers), with Hannibal the Semitic general who threatened Rome, and with Winckelmann the archaeologist who redis­covered its treasures and could be said to have conquered it. An interlude with his mother in the kitchen, rubbing her hands to show him the earth we come from and the death we owe, precedes a final savaging of Jakob, "The Dream of Count Thun." This begins in political anger against the incumbent Prime Minister and ends with the dreamer helping a blind, old man to urinate—the loudest boast of all, to the father who once repri­manded the incontinent child for peeing in the parental bedroom. The little scamp had come to something after all.

"It cannot be denied," Freud contends further on, "that to interpret and report one's dreams demands a high degree of self-discipline. One is bound to emerge as the only villain among the crowd of noble characters who share one's life" (p. 485). Surely he earns that remark. His willingness to publish these things about himself testifies to his courage, to his com­mitment to his discoveries. But the revelations are intermittent, after all. The scientific narrative, pushing on to its triumphant conclusion in chapter 7, muffles the autobiography, and unless primed for it readers do not linger over his story. After the Count Thun dream, furthermore, the book becomes more technical. The transition—and the dream book's emotive center—is a series of "Typical Dreams," which generalize the confession into common stuff. This sequence takes one through stages of a life from infancy through development to achievement and guilt; from exhibitionist dreams to dreams about the death of loved ones (notably fathers, as exemplified by Oedipus Rex and Hamlet), to a glimpse of flying dreams (which Freud insists he does not have and later reveals to have "grossly sensual meaning"—not too much pleasure for this Jewish con­quistador!), to dreams of failing examinations that one has long since passed—which reassure a grown and accomplished man while allowing him to punish the naughty child within. Freud refers here for the first time in his published writings to Sophocles' play. Doing so, he universalizes his autobiography—and takes refuge not only in typical phenomena, true for everybody, but in the immortality of legend and art. Under Oedipus' auspices he tells for the first time of the boy's sexual love for the mother that accompanies hostility toward the father. When the sequence ends, he assumes his scientific task more earnestly.

In the remaining half of the book he describes how we make dreams, the dreamwork (chapter 6) and locates dreams in the nexus of mental acts (chapter 7). Condensations unify much from the present and past, and displacements of accent help to disguise it. Because dreams tend to be pictorial, representability is crucial; word-sounds, however, afford mani-
fold, surprising, and often ridiculous links to memories—as anyone who has free-associated to dreams will testify—and the forms of dreams can express cunning qualification, denial, reversal, and disapproving judgment of latent wishes. By “secondary revision” we fashion the intelligibility that most dreams have as we dream them but lose when we think of them. In these ways the dreamwork serves sleep, for it camouflagesthe very wishes it represents as fulfilled.

All the while the personal story becomes more elusive, in part because Freud added a great deal of other illustrative material to chapter 6 through the years, but most of all because his emphasis is different. When he recurs to the Irma, R. was my Uncle, or Count Thun dreams in the latter half of the book, he clearly does so to explain specifics of the dreamwork; and most of the autobiographical dreams he introduces—which include “Non Vixit,” “Jakob and Garibaldi,” “Goethe’s Attack on Herr M.,” and “Old Brücke”—he presents in segments, again to exemplify aspects of the dreamwork. Nevertheless, the latent contents of his dreams, although cushioned and distanced by priorities of theory, continue the direction toward complex adulthood already signified in the sequence of “Typical Dreams.” No less burningly ambitious than before, Freud now seems further along in his self-analysis and more at peace with his mourning: his ambition is channeled and his vengeance tempered. After Jakob lost all bodily control during his last illness, the son, whose irreverent recesses had been stirred, dreamed lovingly of him as Garibaldi in order to grant a father’s wish to be seen “great and unsullied” (p. 429) in his children’s eyes. Against the family’s wishes but in regard for Jakob’s preferences, he decided to make the funeral unceremonious. Repeatedly he cites his childhood idiom of warm and combative friendships, recognizing that he has contributed to his difficulties with admired teachers and friends—and seeming to prepare himself for the coming break with Fliess.13 “No one’s irreplaceable” (p. 485), he tells himself, relieved to have survived when a friend died; but he records his losses and regrets. Concern for the well-being of his children surfaces when he tries to reassure himself that the boys can avoid disastrous loves, or about the fate of Jews: “The Jewish problem, concern about the future of one’s children, to whom one cannot give a country of their own, concern about educating them in such a way that they can move freely across frontiers” (p. 442). He broods protectively over psychoanalysis, his brain-child, defending it against critics and wishing for it—and himself—a viable future. “It is absurd to be proud of one’s ancestry,” he says of Count Thun; “it is better to be an ancestor oneself” (p. 434). At times he has to remind himself that “children may perhaps achieve what their father has failed to” (p. 455). And as his sad dissatis-

faction upon finishing the dream book suggests, he did not easily forgive himself that success. Often these dreams hint at oedipal hopes and fears, and we could probe them more deeply than Freud chose to. But what matters is that he made something of his infantile wishes, something in addition to psychoanalysis. The overweening child lives on in the man, but the man has become fatherly, a Mensch—with cares and commitments, griefs, guilts and pleasures, and with important work to do: “My own immortal works have not yet been written” (p. 453). Jung reported that when Freud, Ferenczi, and he sailed together to the United States, they analyzed each other’s dreams, and that Freud’s seemed to be concerned mostly with cares for the future of his family and of his work. Those of the second half of The Interpretation of Dreams substantiate that impression. Even in his dreams Freud took hold. Like Lucy R., he accepted responsibility.

IV

The Interpretation of Dreams offers experiential instruction in a new theory of mind. Through interwoven stories it invites identification with two quite different figures—a knowledgeable and purposive scientist, who from the first earns respect by trying to assimilate all that he can from past attempts at dream interpretation; and a confessed villain, who enters late, demands all rights in his world, and gradually becomes socialized. During the course of the book these two merge and underscore its basic truth: our forward movement is always retrospective. In other words, everything that is likable about the narrator—his clarity, his sociable care of presentation, his eccentric, challenging focus that proves itself central, his tenacious and bold intelligence, his intriguing analyses and ideas—derives circuitously and at each moment from a child’s imperious will. Once we have been shown that relatedness, we are ready for radical theory. The dream book is impressively crafted. In fact it accounts for its art, because as it demonstrates Freud’s development, it historicizes his expository manner—the manner that, we have seen, would characterize his psychoanalytic writings thereafter. The artificer of this educational experience, who includes Goethe, Zola, and Mozart in his dreams and who unriddles Oedipus Rex and Hamlet, has long responded to mimetic truth. In his muster of evidence and plausible conclusions, moreover, his winning persuasion that champions disconcerting and unwelcome ideas, one sees attorney Freud, the aspiring Cabinet Minister of a once-liberal state, who as a lad thrilled to the proud combats of Semitic Hannibal and to the exploits of Napoleon’s supposedly Jewish general Masséna. Behind the investigator of mysteries stands a curious and studious son, whose thorough, confrontational cast of mind seems Talmudic—and an insur- gent and libidinous little boy.

Other biographical sources help to fill in the picture. While at medical school Freud translated John Stuart Mill, and from youth he admired England, specifically its Parliamentary freedoms; he tells in the dream book of naming one of his sons after Cromwell, its revolutionary hero. So he acted consonantly with established loyalties when (soon after the Dreyfus trial sparked resurgent anti-Semitism in Europe, Hitler’s admired Karl Lueger came to power in Vienna, and Herzl created political Zionism) he postulated a mind of primarily poetic process and liberal organization, that vulnerably compromises among conflicting desires, every one of which demands representation. Freud’s resonant, broadly available prose implies a democracy of intellect open to all readers. His own pleasure in writing, we know, dated back to school days, as did his involvement with literature. Jones speculates that had Freud’s path not been scientific it would have been literary; he is said to have told someone that as a young man he thought of becoming a novelist; and when courting his wife he mentioned an oriental tale he might write, which only she would be allowed to see. But although he loved and cited imaginative writers, credited them with discovering the unconscious and borrowed the name for the infantile complex from one of them, he was also chary of them. Perhaps the competitor in him took over. At any rate he seems to have needed the verifying procedures of science to grant legitimacy to his adventurous imagination. Hence he adored Goethe, who was both poet and scientist; indeed he claimed that listening to Goethe’s essay on Nature converted him to science. He was fascinated by Leonardo da Vinci, another artist-scientist; and he felt special admiration for Shakespeare, whose possibly Baconian identity he pondered for years. From such rich and specific history Freud crafted his scientific art. In it he looms dependably—observing, dramatizing, and reasoning, offering a human presence for perspective. His forceful, trustworthy, and lucid prose, understandable and engaging, incorporates the details of lived actuality as it modulates easily between narrative and explanation, between fiction and dry science.

In the psychoanalytic theory Freud expounds in chapter 7 of The Interpretation of Dreams, all thought and sustaining culture, as well as dreams, symptoms, and neuroses, derive from infantile satisfactions that with great complication we desire again and again. His papers on aesthetics would explain within a decade that literature gratifies those desires by disguising them to make them acceptable, much the way dreams do. Of course literature has communicative purposes having exactly to do with its difference from dreams, to which psychoanalysis could do justice only later, when it took greater cognizance of conscious thought and of society. The early emphasis on drive and defense, however, directed his attention to the interplay of fantasy, intellect, and trust in absorbing writing. “It is
an author's privilege to be allowed to leave us in . . . uncertainty,” he observed (S.E., IX [1907], 14). “The charm of his language and the ingenuity of his ideas offer us a provisional reward for the reliance we place in him.” That provisional reward he analyzes when pondering how creative writers, who inevitably pay tribute to “His Majesty the Ego, the hero alike of every day-dream and every story” (S.E., IX [1908], 150), manage to make their fantasies interesting to others: “the essential ars poetica lies in the technique of overcoming the feeling of repulsion in us which is undoubtedly connected with the barriers that rise between each single ego and the others. We can guess two of the methods used by this technique. The writer softens the character of his egoistic day-dreams by altering and disguising it, and he bribes us by the purely formal—that is, aesthetic—yield of pleasure which he offers us in the presentation of his phantasies. We give the name of an incentive bonus, or a fore-pleasure, to a yield of pleasure such as this, which is offered to us so as to make possible the release of still greater pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources” (p. 153). He did not go much further toward a psychology of aesthetics, although from the dream book on, his own writings brought the cunning, full, and communicative appeal of art to science. His procedure, his discoveries, and his mode of expression allied, securing his pattern of scientific creativity. That the great writer emerged when the psychoanalyst did should sow confusion in the camps of the two cultures, which deserve no less. For it is an old foolishness to ask whether psychoanalysis is an art or a science. Freud knew—he learned from Goethe—that the best one knows should not be told to little boys. We may add that no child can tell such things, nor can anyone who denies that he has been a child ever tell or understand them.

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