

THE THEORY OF YOUR DREAMS

The Interpretation of Dreams is often thought to be Freud's best book-length work. It was, indeed, Freud's first lengthy statement of a substantially original psychological theory. Freud wrote the book in the late 1890's and published it in 1900; it had a second edition in 1909, and thereafter many subsequent editions. By Freud's own account it was not well received by the scientific readers for whom it was intended, that is by physicians and academic psychologists, but it was something of a popular success. Freud's book found an audience among educated lay persons, and it was with this group that Freud found his most immediate and direct following. *The Interpretation of Dreams* is a long and complex book, and it is deeply revealing of Freud's procedures, his style of argument and his theoretical development.

The book begins with a thorough review of the scientific literature about dreams; but it is a review and not a criticism. Freud mentions some well-known features of memory in dreams — that what is dreamed of may often be long-forgotten memories, that the events recollected in dreams are often very unimportant, and that events that have recently occurred often figure in dreams. The important problem, for Freud, is what it is that determines the choice of the content of dreams. One suggestion, that the content of dreams is determined by external stimuli during sleep, Freud finds unsatisfactory — partly because such views do not present enough details about the connection between external stimuli and the contents of dreams, but also because Freud himself does not merely want *causes* of the dream content, he wants *motives* for that content; reasons. His choice of words suggests as much. Internal organic stimuli are another possible cause of the content of dreams; thus a 'dental stimulus' may bring about dreams of teeth falling out. This, at least, was a theory popular in medical circles in Freud's day. Freud's objection to these theories is an interesting one:¹

The obvious weakness of these attempted explanations, plausible though they are, lies in the fact that, without any other evidence, they can make successive hypotheses that this or that group of organic sensations enters or disappears from mental perception, till a constellation has been reached which affords an explanation of the dream (IV, p. 38).

In other words, this theory can produce explanations of any bit of dream

content, and there is no straightforward way to test the hypotheses such explanations will involve. Freud, like most of us, was better at seeing the methodological weaknesses of theories advocated by others than he was at seeing similar weaknesses with his own views.

Freud also discussed a theory, due to Vold, which states that the content of dreams is determined by the position of the dreamer's limbs according to fairly definite rules — e.g., the actual position of the limb corresponds roughly to its position in the dream. Now Freud offers a curious but characteristic objection to this theory; he does not put forward any doubts as to whether it can be or has been tested, or that what it claims is true. He objects, rather, that such theories do not show how the specific content of the dream is determined: "I should be inclined to conclude from findings such as these that even the theory of somatic stimulation has not succeeded in completely doing away with the apparent absence of determination in the choice of what dream-images are produced" (IV, p. 9). This remark is characteristic of Freud: he regarded all events, psychological ones included, as determined, and thought it a great advantage of a theory or explanation that it succeeded in removing the appearance of chance. How Freud used this principle, and what validity it has, will concern us again later on.

Freud describes some of the commonly accepted psychological characteristics of the contents of dreams — their hallucinatory character, their nonsensicality, their 'craziness' in some cases, and so on. He mentions three theories — approaches really — to mental functioning in dreams. According to the first, all normal psychical activity occurs in sleep just as in a normal conscious state, but the state of sleep itself somehow produces the strange features of dreams. According to a second, dreams involve a lowering of mental activity — a loosening of connections, etc.; and according to still a third approach there are special mental capacities that are exercised in dreaming but which play no role in normal consciousness. Freud's own preference is clearly for the third kind of view, but he offers no arguments against the others. Finally, Freud turns to the literature on dream interpretation, which is, he points out, a popular literature, not a scientific one at all. Then, as now, 'interpreting' dreams was a popular pastime, and books on how to do it were common. Moreover, dream interpretation has a long history, so that there is nothing novel or modern in it. Freud distinguished between two approaches to the interpretation of dreams: in the holistic approach, the entire dream is replaced by some analogous, meaningful story. In the piecemeal approach, the dream is treated rather like a message in code, and

individual pieces of the dream are decoded. Freud favors the latter procedure, which was one followed by popular dream books of the day. Such books gave keys for translating elements of the dream:

If I consult a 'dream book', I find that 'letter' must be translated by 'trouble' and 'funeral' by 'betrothal'. It then remains for me to link together the keywords which I have deciphered in this way and, once more, to transpose the result into the future tense. An interesting modification of the process of decoding, which to some extent corrects the purely mechanical character of its method of transposing, is to be found in the book written upon the interpretation of dreams by Artemidorus of Daldis. This method takes into account not only the content of the dream but also the character and circumstances of the dreamer; so that the same dream-element will have a different meaning for a rich man, a married man, or, let us say, an orator, from what it has for a poor man, a bachelor or a merchant (IV, p. 98–99).

Freud remarks in a footnote introduced in a later edition that Artemidorus used the associations of the dream-*interpreter* to the elements of the dream to determine the meanings of dream elements:

A thing in a dream means what it recalls to the mind — to the dream-*interpreter's* mind, it need hardly be said. An insuperable source of arbitrariness and uncertainty arises from the fact that the dream-element may recall *various* things to the interpreter's mind and may recall something different to different interpreters. The technique which I describe in the pages that follow differs in one essential respect from the ancient method: it imposes the task of interpretation upon the dreamer himself. It is not concerned with what occurs to the *interpreter* in connection with a particular element of the dream, but with what occurs to the *dreamer* (IV, p. 98n.).

And Freud tells us clearly what is wrong with popular dream interpretation:

It cannot be doubted for a moment that neither of the two popular procedures for interpreting dreams can be employed for a scientific treatment of the subject. The symbolic method is restricted in its application and incapable of being laid down on general lines. In the case of the decoding method everything depends on the trustworthiness of the 'key' — the dream-book, and of this we have no guarantee (IV, pp. 99–100).

Freud's introductory survey and criticisms of other views of dreams have given us fair criteria to judge his own theory by, for they are his criteria: a satisfactory dream theory ought to remove the appearance that the content of dreams has no determining causes, but it ought not to do so in such a way as to make its causal suppositions untested or untestable; a theory which proposes that dreams have a meaning should provide a general procedure for interpreting them, and a warrant which demonstrates the trustworthiness of that procedure. These are Freud's own demands on competing theories, and we must bear them in mind as we pursue *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

Freud tells us that he came to realize that dreams had significance, and how to interpret them, from the role they played in the associations of his patients. The method of dream interpretation was modeled on Freud's developing method for determining the causes of the symptoms of his neurotic patients; by now, 1900, that method had become what is known as 'free association.' The patient was simply to report everything that came into his mind, starting with some initial topic. In the case of dreams, the patient was to begin his association from any dream element. The important point was that the subject learn not to keep back any thought that should occur to him, however absurd, nonsensical, rude or improper it might be. He gives us no more definite account of his method, but illustrates it instead. The illustration is from one of his own dreams, which Freud recounts and which he interprets for us. He adopts this procedure, he tells us, because the only other dreams and associations available to him are from his patients, and they are suspect because his patients are mentally ill. Freud takes up the objection that such self-interpretations are liable to arbitrariness and are untrustworthy and he dismisses it in two sentences:

No doubt I shall be met by doubts of the trustworthiness of 'self-analyses' of this kind; and I shall be told that they leave the door open to arbitrary conclusions. In my judgement the situation is in fact more favourable in the case of *self-observation* than in that of other people; at all events we may make the experiment and see how far self-analysis takes us with the interpretation of dreams (IV, p. 105).

Freud's reply to this sort of worry misses two points of complaint about his procedure. As an illustration of the method of free association, Freud's self-observations are confusing, as we shall see, because unlike cases in which a patient's associations are faithfully recorded by an analyst, in Freud's record we have no separation of association and interpretation. They are one. More importantly, the real question at issue is whether analyses of dreams, regardless of whether made by the dreamer or by another, are trustworthy. It is of no use to know that self-observation is more reliable than the observation of others if, in this context, both are exceedingly unreliable. The point is surely this: we know *before-hand* that, if a person is asked to associate his thoughts with elements of a dream, and report his associations, after a while we will be able to make up a cogent story, thought, fear, wish, or whatever from the resulting associations. We know that simply from our elementary psychological knowledge of people. There is nothing special about dreams in this regard; much the same could be done with rock formations or with blotches of ink or Thematic Apperception Tests or whatever. Unless he or she is enormously

stupid, the person doing the associating can make up such a story from the elements of his or her associations. Indeed if the associator is clever, many such stories can be made up. Now the production of such associations from dream elements and the resulting stories will do nothing to establish that the *dreams* are expressing that story, that thought, anymore than the stories that result from people observing random ink blots or rock formations and then associating freely give evidence that the ink blots or the rock formations are expressing those stories. Accordingly, so far as Freud's aim is to establish that dreams express thoughts, and to determine what those thoughts are, his self-analysis is pointless; no matter how many dreams are analyzed, no 'experiment' has been conducted, or can be. We see, too, that the emphasis on the problem of self-observation as against observing others' associations is misplaced: the problem is with the inference from associations plus story to the conclusion that the story tells us what the dream expresses, and this inference is made neither more nor less difficult according to whether or not the associator and the person piecing the associations together are one and the same.

One might hope, in spite of the above, that when many dreams are collected from many persons, together with the connected associations and resulting stories, there will be some invariant, common features of the stories, the dreams, or their connections. If there are such common features, the question arises whether or not they are specific to associations made from dream elements or whether instead they are common as well to the stories made from associations starting from rock formations or ink-blot, etc. That can only be decided by collecting associations and stories from rock formations, ink-blot, etc., as well as from dreams. Then we would have something like an experiment, though a poor one, which might indicate that the associations and stories made from dream elements have peculiar features which make them different from the associations and stories that start with other subjects. That would, of course, still fall considerably short of demonstrating that the stories give the meaning that the dreams express. But even so, the experiment would be a poor one, and for a reason that also should make us wonder about Freud's procedure. The person, whoever he is, that is tying the associations together to make the story may very well be influenced in the kind of story he makes up by whether or not the associations begin with dreams on the one hand, or with rock formations on the other; the more so if he believes that the stories so made from dreams have special properties. In other words the dream interpreter's own views about what he is doing seem a relevant factor which may determine whether or not the dream stories

and the rock formation stories do or do not have common features. Unless the dream interpreter's opinions on such matters could somehow be controlled, even the most dramatic differences in the two sorts of stories might be due solely to the interpreter's bias.

Freud's description of his method is defective in other, equally serious ways. There are no rules given for piecing associations together to make a story, and without them there seems little guarantee or even likelihood that from the same associations different interpreters would obtain the same thought or story, unless, of course, all of the interpreters were in the grip of some common theory. Again, Freud gives us no rules for stopping the dreamer's associations, or for insisting that he continue, or for coming back again and demanding new associations with an element of the dream previously subjected to association, and so on. It is pretty clear that in dealing with his patient's dreams, and with his own, Freud did all of these things. It should also be clear that without rules severely restricting when and how these things are to be done, the person conducting the interpretation may have it within his power, simply by stopping the dream associations when he likes, or insisting on their continuance when he likes, to obtain associations that will fit into a plausible story of whatever specific kind the interpreter should like to have.

The moral of all of this is that unless Freud provides much more detailed criteria than those I have described for interpreting dreams, his procedures are simply worthless. They tell us nothing. Let us see then how Freud proceeds. He illustrates his method by giving and interpreting one of his own dreams. The dream is as follows:

A large hall — numerous guests, whom we were receiving. — Among them was Irma. I at once took her on one side, as though to answer her letter and to reproach her for not having accepted my 'solution' yet. I said to her: "If you still get pains, it's really only your fault." She replied: "If you only knew what pains I've got now in my throat and stomach and abdomen — it's choking me" — I was alarmed and looked at her. She looked pale and puffy. I thought to myself that after all I must be missing some organic trouble. I took her to the window and looked down her throat, and she showed signs of recalcitrance, like women with artificial dentures. I thought to myself that there was really no need for her to do that. — She then opened her mouth properly and on the right I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish grey scabs upon some remarkably curly structure which were evidently modelled on the turbinal bones of the nose. — I at once called in Dr. M. and he repeated the examination and confirmed it . . . Dr. M. looked quite different from usual; he was very pale, he walked with a limp and his chin was clean-shaven . . . My friend Otto was now standing beside her as well, and my friend Leopold was percussing her through her bodice and saying: "She has a dull area low down on the left." He also indicated that a portion of the skin on the left

shoulder was infiltrated. (I noticed this, just as he did, in spite of her dress) . . . M. said: "There's no doubt it's an infection, but no matter; dysentery will supervene and the toxin will be eliminated." . . . We were directly aware, too, of the origin of the infection. Not long before, when she was feeling unwell, my friend Otto had given her an injection of a preparation of propyl, propyls . . . propionic acid . . . trimethylamin (and I saw before me the formula for this printed in heavy type) . . . Injections of that sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly . . . And probably the syringe had not been clean (IV, p. 107).

Irma was actually a patient of Freud's who had relapsed; Freud had, the evening of the dream, written out an account of the case to give to Dr. M., as Freud says "in order to justify myself." M., Otto, and Leopold were all physician acquaintances of Freud's, and Otto had mentioned the case to Freud the previous day with, Freud thought, implied reproof. Given that background, Freud's interpretation of his own dream is an altogether plausible one, namely that it expresses his anxiety over the soundness of his own medical procedures, and that

The dream fulfilled certain wishes which were started in me by the events of the previous evening (the news given me by Otto and my writing out of the case history). The conclusion of the dream, that is to say, was that I was not responsible for the persistence of Irma's pains, but that Otto was. Otto had in fact annoyed me by his remarks about Irma's incomplete cure, and the dream gave me my revenge by throwing the reproach back on to him. The dream acquitted me of the responsibility for Irma's condition by showing that it was due to other factors — it produced a whole series of reasons. The dream represented a particular state of affairs as I should have wished it to be. *Thus its content was the fulfilment of a wish and its motive was a wish* (IV, p. 118--119).

As one reads the dream report over, Freud's interpretation of it certainly forms a plausible enough story. But our concern ought to be with how he came to the story, not just with whether the story itself is plausible. For Freud offers the dream as an illustration of his method, and the real conclusion that we are supposed to absorb is not that his dream of Irma meant such and such, but that his methods of dream interpretation are good ones. Now Freud gives us several pages of report of his associations with elements of the dream; though in fact what he gives us is not that at all, but something much more complex. For Freud's 'associations' include conclusions as to what dream elements mean or represent, queries regarding such conclusions, associations from such conclusions, that is, associations starting from elements of the interpretation of the dream, and, of course, associations with the dream elements themselves. Moreover, all of this is run together so that it is very difficult in many instances to determine just what is going on. Very little

of what we get sounds like the free association procedure Freud has described for us.

Here are some passages:

I reproached Irma for not having accepted my solution; I said: "If you still get pains, it's your own fault." I might have said this to her in waking life, and I may actually have done so. It was my view at that time (though I have since recognized it as a wrong one) that my task was fulfilled when I had informed a patient of the hidden meaning of his symptoms: I considered that I was not responsible for whether he accepted the solution or not — though this was what success depended on. I owe it to this mistake, which I have now fortunately corrected, that my life was made easier at a time when, in spite of all my inevitable ignorance, I was expected to produce therapeutic successes. — I noticed, however, that the words which I spoke to Irma in the dream showed that I was specially anxious not to be responsible for the pains which she still had. If they were her fault they could not be mine. Could it be that the purpose of the dream lay in this direction? (IV, pp. 108–109.)

The above sounds much more like a commentary on a bit of the dream and its connection with features of Freud's life than it does any bit of association. Sometimes, however, Freud sounds more like his own patient:

I took her to the window to look down her throat. She showed some recalcitrance, like women with false teeth. I thought to myself that really there was no need for her to do that. I had never had any occasion to examine Irma's oral cavity. What happened in the dream reminded me of an examination I had carried out some time before of a governess: at a first glance she had seemed a picture of youthful beauty, but when it came to opening her mouth she had taken measures to conceal her plates. This led to recollections of other medical examinations and of little secrets revealed in the course of them — to the satisfaction of neither party (IV, p. 109).

In other places we get virtually no association with a dream element; instead we are simply told by Freud what it means, or we get associations with the interpretation. For example:

No matter. This was intended as a consolation. It seemed to fit into the context as follows. The content of the preceding part of the dream had been that my patient's pains were due to a severe organic affection. I had a feeling that I was only trying in that way to shift the blame from myself. Psychological treatment could not be held responsible for the persistence of diphtheritic pains. Nevertheless I had a sense of awkwardness at having invented such a severe illness for Irma simply in order to clear myself. It looked so cruel. Thus I was in need of an assurance that all would be well in the end, and it seemed to me that to have put the consolation into the mouth precisely of Dr. M. had not been a bad choice. But here I was taking up a superior attitude towards the dream, and this itself required explanation (IV, p. 114).

And, finally, Freud stops certain chains of association:

In spite of her dress. This was in any case only an interpolation. We naturally used to examine the children in the hospital undressed: and this would be a contrast to the manner in which adult female patients have to be examined. I remembered that it was said of a celebrated clinician that he never made a physical examination of his patients except through their clothes. Further than this I could not see. Frankly, I had no desire to penetrate more deeply at this point (IV, p. 113).

This is virtually all there is to Freud's characterization of his method. The method itself, so far as we can judge from Freud's description of it, is inadequate in every way to demonstrate the points Freud wishes to maintain, but his illustration of it is almost as unsatisfactory. Conclusions and haltings may, of course, be part of a subject's associations, but Freud's self-analysis still leaves one with little sense of how Freud applied his procedures to others.

What is striking about the first dream interpretation of the entire book, and the most detailed one, is that the interpretation offered is enormously plausible largely because it is an almost literal reading of the content of the dream, in which the blame for Irma's illness is placed with Otto, not Freud. But the use of the dream in Freud's argument is to get us to accept his method, which is then used to 'establish' any number of claims about dreams and their meaning. The method itself is worthless, for the reasons I have given earlier; the objections to it are obvious ones, and if they did not occur to Freud, they certainly would have occurred to many of his scientifically trained readers. It is hard to believe that they did not occur to Freud himself. The whole business seems the cheapest of rhetorical tricks: from the plausibility of the interpretation we are supposed to infer the reliability of the method at getting at the real meaning of dreams. But the Irma dream is one whose interpretation can be read almost on its face, and the elaborate 'analysis' Freud offers us contributes virtually nothing.

Freud's dream of Irma expresses a wish, and in the succeeding two chapters Freud attempts to convince the reader that in this regard the Irma dream is not only typical, but that without exception dreams universally express wishes. This seems a wholly implausible thesis: one thinks of dreams characterized by diffuse anxiety, and of nightmares. Freud, however, is not without resources; he introduces a distinction between what he calls the "manifest content" of the dream and the "latent content" of the dream. The former is the content of the dream as it is reported, the latter the content of the dream as it is interpreted. The two sorts of content, manifest and latent, may be

entirely different, and while the manifest content of the dream may not express a wish, the latent content always does. The bulk of these chapters is devoted to establishing this proposition by giving us snippets of the interpretations of dreams which seem, on their face, not to express wishes at all, but which, when interpreted, do express wishes. Many of these dreams, Freud explains, were produced by his patients as evidence that his theory of dreams was in error, and he regards some of them as quite clever attempts at establishing that conclusion. But if his patients were convinced of his thesis by the interpretations Freud offers of their recalcitrant dreams, then they cannot have been very clever people. For by Freud's method every dream could be made out to be an expression of a wish just as every dream could, with almost equal ease, be made an expression of disgust or regret or fear or . . . The arguments are not better than the evidence for the reliability of the method of interpretation, and for that Freud has given us not a whit of evidence. The hypothesis that all dreams express wishes is simply one for which there is abundant negative evidence, and the introduction of the distinction between latent and manifest content is *nothing* more than the hypothesis that all of those dreams that appear to constitute counter-examples to the hypothesis have a hidden meaning which is the expression of a wish. Not a shred of evidence is presented for this supposition, since the dream interpretation procedure, or rather its results, constitutes no evidence at all, for reasons noted earlier. The distinction between manifest and latent content is then a perfectly *ad hoc* hypothesis; that is, an hypothesis introduced for the purpose of reconciling a theory with apparent counter-evidence, and without sustaining evidence of its own.

Freud's discussion does, however, make clearer certain of his devices. For one thing, we learn that he did not hesitate to reject associations, even those which led to an intelligible and plausible interpretation, if he disliked their direction. Thus:

The patient, who was a young girl, began thus: "As you will remember, my sister has only one boy left now - Karl; she lost his elder brother, Otto, while I was still living with her. Otto was my favourite; I more or less brought him up. I'm fond of the little one too, but of course not nearly so fond as I was of the one who died. Last night, then, I dreamt that *I saw Karl lying before me dead. He was lying in his little coffin with his hands folded and with candles all round - in fact just like little Otto, whose death was such a blow to me.* Now tell me, what can that mean? You know me. Am I such a wicked person that I can wish my sister to lose the one child she still has? Or does the dream mean that I would rather Karl were dead than Otto whom I was so much fonder of?"

I assured her that this last interpretation was out of the question (IV, p. 152).

Freud may have had good reason to believe that certain sorts of meanings were unlikely to be expressed in dreams. Of the example just quoted, Freud later remarks (IV, p. 248) that it was not a "typical" dream of death because the dreamer felt no grief in the dream, and therefore the wish the dream expressed was not a wish for her nephew's death, but something else. One can imagine that generalizations such as this one, which are rather independent of the free-association procedure, might be elaborated into a system of hypotheses about dreams, a system whose principles could be tested against one another. Something like that happened, I have suggested,² in the Rat Man Case with Freud's hypotheses about the aetiology of psychoneurosis. But, whatever one may imagine, in fact Freud seems never to do anything comparable with dreams. The point remains that Freud did not hesitate to cut short lines of association that were not leading in directions he thought appropriate.

Another of Freud's devices³ is to confirm an interpretation by finding two or more elements of the dream which are independently associated with a key figure in the interpretation of the dream. Thus Freud reports the following dream told him by "A clever woman patient of mine . . .":

"I wanted to give a supper-party, but I had nothing in the house but a little smoked salmon. I thought I would go out and buy something, but remembered then that it was Sunday afternoon and all the shops would be shut. Next I tried to ring up some caterers, but the telephone was out of order. So I had to abandon my wish to give a super-party" (IV, p. 147).

Freud rejected a first set of associations his patient had with the dream:

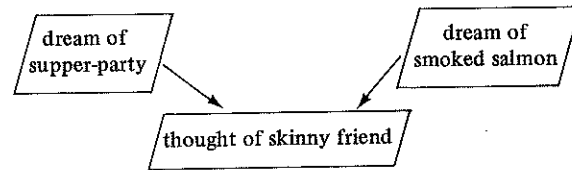
The associations which she had so far produced had not been sufficient to interpret the dream. [N.B. This is misleading; the patient's associations had suggested a meaning for the dream, but not one that Freud liked.] I pressed her for some more. After a short pause, such as would correspond to the overcoming of a resistance, she went on to tell me that the day before she had visited a woman friend of whom she confessed she felt jealous because her (my patient's) husband was constantly singing her praises. Fortunately this friend of hers is very skinny and thin and her husband admires a plumper figure. I asked her what she had talked about to her thin friend. Naturally, she replied, of that lady's wish to grow a little stouter. Her friend had enquired, too: "When are you going to ask us to another meal? You always feed one so well."

The meaning of the dream was now clear . . . "What the dream was saying to you was that you were unable to give any supper-parties, and it was thus fulfilling your wish not to help your friend to grow plumper. The fact that what people eat at parties makes them stout had been brought home to you by your husband's decision not to accept any more invitations to supper in the interests of his plan to reduce his weight" (IV, p. 148).

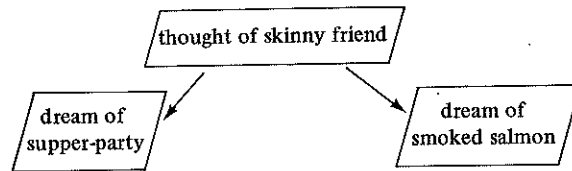
All that was now lacking was some coincidence to confirm the solution. The smoked salmon in the dream had not yet been accounted for.

"How," I asked, "did you arrive at the salmon that came into your dream?" "Oh," she replied, "smoked salmon is my friend's favourite dish" (IV, p. 148).

Freud's story gives us evidence that the content of her dream made the woman think of the friend of whom she was jealous. That is what happens in the association: starting from the dream, she thinks of her friend. Why does she think of the friend? What about the dream makes her think of the friend? It would appear two things. First, the dream is about a failed attempt to give a supper-party and the previous day her friend had asked her when she would give another such party. And, second, the dream mentions smoked salmon which is her friend's favorite dish. The *apparent* causal links then are these:



Now Freud transposes these causal relations evidenced by the patient's associations to give us:



But what are the grounds for the transposition? Evidence for the first causal model is not necessarily evidence for the second. If we think *simply* in terms of the second causal picture, the fact that the dream both contains a failed attempt at a supper-party and mentions smoked salmon, and both of these elements lead to the remembrance of features of the patient's friend, seems an amazing coincidence that demands explanation. The best explanation seems to be that these elements of the dream have a common cause, and that cause has to do with a thought about the friend in question. But if we stand back for a moment we see that *this* coincidence is manufactured: one associates, at Freud's direction, until one thinks of something which has connections with several elements in one's dream; the several elements cause

the common thought, not vice versa, and the coincidence requires no further explanation. The method of manufacture is all the explanation required. The *real* coincidence is that on the one hand, on one day the dreamer was visited by a friend, whose favorite dish is smoked salmon, and who had asked her when she, the dreamer, planned to have another supper-party, and, on the other hand, that night she dreamed of a supper-party and smoked salmon. Is *this* coincidence evidence of a causal connection between the encounter with her skinny friend in the dream? Perhaps it is, in the case at hand, for the real event and the dream are proximate in time and share a number of independent features, and one doubts that any other event so proximate would share these features. But, once again, Freud is not so much attempting to convince us of the correct interpretation of a specimen dream as to convince us of a *method*, and, once again, there is no reason to think the method trustworthy in general. As the span of time between the real event and the dream increases — and in many of Freud's applications it increases to years — the chances of coincidence increase immeasurably, and the inference to a causal connection becomes increasingly ill founded. The inference is all the worse when one is not sure whether the events recalled through association really occurred. That was Freud's actual situation at the close of the nineteenth century.

The Interpretation of Dreams formed a turning point in Freud's life and work: half a rotation from scientist towards mountebank. The book contrasts vividly with most of what Freud had published before. Freud's published work before the end of the 1890's seems to be honest, responsive to criticism, and sensitive to methodological and empirical difficulties. His writings from the period are nearly empty of the rhetorical trickery and evasiveness that mars his discussions of dreams. Freud's first book, on aphasia, is straightforwardly and coherently argued, pressing against the predominant accounts (e.g., Wernicke's⁴) of aphasic disorders the fact that certain predicted combinations of aphasias had not been found in the clinic. His collaboration with Breuer in *Studies on Hysteria* had produced an interesting body of cases and a rather sketchy theory to account for them, a sketch not very far removed from those common at the time in French psychiatric circles. Freud had produced and defended characterizations of two 'actual neuroses' — anxiety neurosis and neurasthenia — and hypotheses about their aetiology. He had offered an aetiology for hysteria which had clear empirical consequences, and he had proposed an account of the psychological mechanism of the disease. By my reading there is nothing intellectually dishonest in any of this. Why, then, the sudden near-chicanery and aloofness of *The Interpretation of Dreams*?

I believe that the dream book represents a complex and unwholesome resolution of an intellectual crisis that beset Freud in the very last years of the decade. Perhaps, as biographers claim, there was a personal crisis as well, in which case *The Interpretation of Dreams* may express a change of character, a kind of broken faith, a self-deception. But I will leave psychology aside, and make my conjecture from epistemology instead.

By 1897 Freud's attempts to develop an original and fundamental psychiatry were a shambles, and he knew it. His account of aphasia had been developed no further, and examples of the 'missing' combinations of aphasia were beginning to be found. His account of the sexual aetiology of 'actual neuroses' met with apparent counter-examples in the clinic, and was salvaged only by re-diagnosing the apparent counter-examples not as actual neurotics but as psychoneurotics — hysterics in particular. Freud's theory of the actual neuroses therefore depended for its legitimacy on the reliability of his developing methods of psychoanalysis. On the basis of the results of these methods — including free association and dream interpretation — Freud had published his theory of hysteria, a principal tenet of which was that every hysteric has as a child been seduced into precocious sexual activity. Yet by 1897 Freud was convinced that the seduction theory was founded on a tissue of falsehoods. In public he continued to defend his psychoanalytic methods; in private, we know from his correspondence with Fliess, he was consumed with misgivings. In print, he continued to claim as he had in *Studies on Hysteria* that his interventions, suggestions, and outright demands in therapy could have no contaminating effect on psychoanalytic conclusions. In letters he showed that he had every reason to abandon this smug conviction. Moreover, nothing in Freud's publications or letters from the period suggests that he was enjoying any considerable success as a therapist. Rather the reverse.

Faced with the evidence that the methods on which almost all of his work relied were in fact unreliable, Freud had many scientifically honorable courses of action available to him. He could have published his doubts and continued to use the same methods, reporting his results in company with caveats. He could have published his doubts and abandoned the subject. He could have attempted experimental inquiries into the effects of suggestion in his therapeutic sessions. He did none of these things, or others one might conceive. Instead he published *The Interpretation of Dreams* to justify by rhetorical devices the very methods he had every reason to distrust.

The Interpretation of Dreams reveals a kind of failure of Freud's character, a weakness of intellectual will. Yet it is not as though Freud abandoned reason with the publication of his dream book. In later years he could and did

construct acute arguments, criticize and revise his own theories and behave as the savant he clearly was. What he could not do and did not do was to candidly and publicly face the issue of the warrant for believing in the reliability of his methods. Freud's 'tally argument', so ably discussed by Adolf Grünbaum (see Note 3), was a clever and ingenious counter-attack against criticisms of his methods, but it was not a serious treatment of the issue. A central tenet of Freud's argument was that only veridical psychoanalytic insight can produce enduring cures of psychoneurotics. He produced no empirical evidence for that thesis, I think because he had none to produce. In that respect, Freud's tally argument was but another rhetorical device. At the turn of the century Freud once and for all made his decision as to whether or not to think critically, rigorously, honestly, and publicly about the reliability of his methods. *The Interpretation of Dreams* was his answer to the public, and, perhaps, to himself.⁵

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NOTES

¹ All references by volume and page number are to J. Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953–1974). The quotations from this edition cited in this paper are reprinted with the permission of George Allen and Unwin.

² Compare my 'Freud, Kepler, and the Clinical Evidence,' in R. Wollheim (ed.), *Freud* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), and Chapter 6 of *Theory and Evidence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

³ For related assessments of this Freudian strategem, see Adolf Grünbaum, 'The Foundations of Psychoanalysis,' in L. Laudan (ed.), *Mind and Medicine: Problems of Explanation and Evaluation in Psychiatry and the Biomedical Sciences*, pp. 143–309. *Pittsburgh Series in Philosophy and History of Science*, vol. 8 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). An earlier version of this paper, 'Can Psychoanalytic Theory Be Cogently Tested on the Couch?' appears in *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* 5 (1982), 155–255, 311–436.

⁴ [See Carl Wernicke, 'The Symptom Complex of Aphasia: A Psychological Study on an Anatomical Basis' and the introductory essay by Norman Geschwind, 'The Work and Influence of Wernicke' in *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 4 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969), pp. 1–97 — Ed.]

⁵ I wish to thank Adolf Grünbaum and Martha Harty for helpful conversations.