

SIGMUND FREUD

The

Interpretation

of Dreams

The Complete and Definitive Text

Translated and Edited by James Strachey

SIGMUND FREUD

THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS

Translated from the German and edited by
James Strachey

Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo



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Praise for Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*

“Freud’s classic. Freud has been a dominant force in Western thinking and here’s the book that started it all.”

—*Psychology Today*

“[An] epoch-making book.”

—*The Economist*

“Today, those practicing quicker therapies and psychopharmacology outnumber psychoanalysts, but Dr. Freud is indisputably with us, informing the very way we think about being human.”

—*Life* magazine

“Freud’s achievement was to give a name to the fears of his age.”

—*New Statesman*

“At the beginning of our century, the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* changed our everyday perception of that essential component of human existence.”

—*The Daily Mail*

“Sigmund Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* sold fewer than 400 copies in its first six years, but the fires it lit are still blazing.”

—Brooke Gladstone, co-host and managing editor, NPR's *On the Media*

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NOTE

THE present edition is a reprint of that included in Vols. IV and V of the *Standard Edition*, London, 1953 (The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis). A few additional notes will be found on p. 623. The editor is deeply indebted to Miss Anna Freud for her unfailing help and criticism at every stage of the work.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

(1)

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL

(a) GERMAN EDITIONS:

| | | | |
|------------------------|--|------------------------|---|
| 1900 | <i>Die Traumdeutung</i> . Leipzig and Vienna: Franz Deuticke. Pp. iv + 375. | | |
| 1909 | 2nd ed. (Enlarged and revised.) Same publishers. Pp. vi + 389. | | |
| 1911 | 3rd ed. (Enlarged and revised.) Same publishers. Pp. x + 418. | | |
| 1914 | 4th ed. (Enlarged and revised.) Same publishers. Pp. x + 498. | | |
| 1919 | 5th ed. (Enlarged and revised.) Same publishers. Pp. ix + 474. | | |
| 1921 1922 | <table><tr><td>6th ed. } 7th ed. }</td><td>(Reprints of 5th ed. except for new preface and revised bibliography.) Pp. vii + 478.</td></tr></table> | 6th ed. } 7th ed. } | (Reprints of 5th ed. except for new preface and revised bibliography.) Pp. vii + 478. |
| 6th ed. } 7th ed. } | (Reprints of 5th ed. except for new preface and revised bibliography.) Pp. vii + 478. | | |
| 1925 | Vol. II and part of Vol. III of Freud, <i>Gesammelte Schriften</i> . (Enlarged and revised.) Leipzig, Vienna and Zurich: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag. Pp. 543 and 1-185. | | |
| 1930 | 8th ed. (Enlarged and revised.) Leipzig and Vienna: Franz Deuticke. Pp. x + 435. | | |
| 1942 | In Double Volume II & III of Freud, <i>Gesammelte Werke</i> . (Reprint | | |

of 8th ed.) London: Imago Publishing Co. Pp. xv and 1-642.

(b) ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS:

| | |
|------|---|
| 1913 | By A. A. Brill. London: George Allen & Co.; New York: The Macmillan Co. Pp. xiii + 510. |
| 1915 | 2nd ed. London: George Allen & Unwin; New York: The Macmillan Co. Pp. xiii + 510. |
| 1932 | 3rd ed. (Completely revised and largely rewritten by various unspecified hands.) London: George Allen & Unwin; New York: The Macmillan Co. Pp. 600. |
| 1938 | In <i>The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud</i> . Pp. 181-549. (Reprint of 3rd ed. with almost the whole of Chapter _ omitted.) New York: Random House. |

The present, entirely new, translation is by James Strachey.

ACTUALLY *Die Traumdeutung* made its first appearance in 1899. The fact is mentioned by Freud at the beginning of his second paper on Josef Popper (1932c): ‘It was in the winter of 1899 that my book on the interpretation of dreams (though its title-page was post-dated into the new century) at length lay before me. But we now have more precise information from his correspondence with Wilhelm Fliess (Freud, 1950a). In his letter of November 5, 1899 (Letter 123), Freud announces that ‘yesterday at length the book appeared’; and from the preceding letter it seems that Freud himself had received two advance copies about a fortnight earlier, one of which he had sent to Fliess as a birthday present.

The Interpretation of Dreams was one of the two books—the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905d) was the other—which Freud kept more or less systematically ‘up to date’ as they passed through their series of editions. After the third edition of the present work, the changes in it were not indicated in any way; and this produced a somewhat confusing effect on the reader of the later editions, since the new material sometimes implied a knowledge of modifications in Freud’s views dating from times long subsequent to the period at which the book was originally written. In an attempt to get over this difficulty, the editors of the first collected edition of Freud’s works (the *Gesammelte Schriften*) reprinted the first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in its original form in one volume, and put into a second volume all the material that had been added subsequently. Unfortunately, however, the work was not carried out very systematically, for the additions themselves were not dated and thereby much of the advantage of the plan was sacrificed. In subsequent editions a return was made to the old, undifferentiated single volume.

By far the greater number of additions dealing with any single subject are those concerned with symbolism in dreams. Freud explains in his ‘History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement’ (1914d), as well as at the beginning of Chapter VI, Section E (p. 363), of the present work, that he arrived late at a full realization of the importance of this side of the subject. In the first edition, the discussion of symbolism was limited to a few pages and a single specimen dream (giving instances of sexual symbolism) at the end of the Section on ‘Considerations of Representability’ in Chapter VI. In the second edition (1909), nothing was added to this Section; but, on the other hand, several pages on sexual symbolism were inserted at the end of the Section on ‘Typical Dreams’ in Chapter V. These were very considerably expanded in the third edition (1911), while the original passage in Chapter VI still remained unaltered. A reorganization was evidently overdue, and in the fourth edition (1914) an entirely new Section on Symbolism was introduced into Chapter VI, and into this the material on the subject that had accumulated in Chapter V was now transplanted, together with a quantity of entirely fresh material. No changes in the *structure* of the book were made in later editions, though much further matter was added. After the two-volume version (1925)—that is, in the eighth edition (1930)—some

passages in the Section on ‘Typical Dreams’ in Chapter V, which had been altogether dropped at an earlier stage, were re-inserted.

In the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh editions (that is from 1914 to 1922), two essays by Otto Rank (on ‘Dreams and Creative Writing’ and ‘Dreams and Myths’) were printed at the end of Chapter V, but were subsequently omitted.

There remain the bibliographies. The first edition contained a list of some eighty books, to the great majority of which Freud refers in the text. This was left unchanged in the second and third editions, but in the third a second list was added, of some forty books written since 1900. Thereafter both lists began to increase rapidly, till in the eighth edition the first list contained some 260 works and the second over 200. At this stage only a minority of the titles in the first (pre-1900) list were of books actually mentioned in Freud’s text; while, on the other hand, the second (post- 1900) list (as may be gathered from Freud’s own remarks in his various prefaces) could not really keep pace with the production of analytic or quasi-analytic writings on the subject. Furthermore, quite a number of works quoted by Freud in the text were not to be found in *either* list. It seems probable that, from the third edition onwards, Otto Rank became chiefly responsible for these bibliographies.

(2)

HISTORICAL

The publication of Freud’s correspondence with Fliess enables us to follow the composition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in some detail. In his ‘History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement’ (1914*d*), Freud wrote, looking back upon his leisurely rate of publication in earlier days: ‘*The Interpretation of Dreams*, for instance, was finished in all essentials at the beginning of 1896 but was not written down until the summer of 1899.’ Again, in the introductory remarks to his paper on the psychological consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes (1925*j*), he

wrote: ‘My *Interpretation of Dreams* and my “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” [1905e] . . . were suppressed by me—if not for the nine years enjoined by Horace—at all events for four or five years before I allowed them to be published.’ We are now in a position to amplify and in certain respects to correct these later recollections, on the basis of the author’s contemporary evidence.

Apart from a number of scattered references to the subject—which, in his correspondence, go back at least as early as 1882—the first important published evidence of Freud’s interest in dreams occurs in the course of a long footnote to the first of his case histories (that of Frau Emmy von N., under the date of May 15) in Breuer and Freud’s *Studies on Hysteria* (1895). He is discussing the fact that neurotic patients seem to be under a necessity to bring into association with one another any ideas that happen to be simultaneously present in their minds. He goes on: ‘Not long ago I was able to convince myself of the strength of this compulsion towards association from some observations made in a different field. For several weeks I found myself obliged to exchange my usual bed for a harder one, in which I had more numerous or more vivid dreams, or in which, it may be, I was unable to reach the normal depth of sleep. In the first quarter of an hour after waking I remembered all the dreams I had had during the night, and I took the trouble to write them down and try to solve them. I succeeded in tracing all these dreams back to two factors: (1) to the necessity for working out any ideas which I had only dwelt upon cursorily during the day—which had only been touched upon and not finally dealt with; and (2) to the compulsion to link together any ideas that might be present in the same state of consciousness. The senseless and contradictory character of the dreams could be traced back to the uncontrolled ascendancy of this latter factor.’

This passage cannot unfortunately be exactly dated. The preface to the volume was written in April 1895. A letter of June 22, 1894 (Letter 19), seems to imply that the case histories were already finished then, and this was quite certainly so by March 4, 1895. Freud’s letter of that date (Letter 22) is of particular interest, as giving the first hint of the theory of wish-fulfilment: in the course of it he quotes the story of the medical student’s ‘dream of convenience’ which is included on p. 150 of the present volume.

It was not, however, until July 24, 1895, that the analysis of his own dream of Irma's injection—the specimen dream of Chapter II—established that theory definitely in Freud's mind. (See Letter 137 of June, 1900.) In September of this same year (1895) Freud wrote the first part of his 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (published as an Appendix to the Fliess correspondence) and Sections 19, 20 and 21 of this 'Project' constitute a first approach to a coherent theory of dreams. It already includes many important elements which re-appear in the present work, such as (1) the wish-fulfilling character of dreams, (2) their hallucinatory character, (3) the regressive functioning of the mind in hallucinations and dreams (this had already been indicated by Breuer in his theoretical contribution to *Studies on Hysteria*), (4) the fact that the state of sleep involves motor paralysis, (5) the nature of the mechanism of displacement in dreams and (6) the similarity between the mechanisms of dreams and of neurotic symptoms. More than all this, however, the 'Project' gives a clear indication of what is probably the most momentous of the discoveries given to the world in *The Interpretation of Dreams*—the distinction between the two different modes of mental functioning, the Primary and Secondary Processes.

This, however, is far from exhausting the importance of the 'Project' and of the letters to Fliess written in connection with it towards the end of 1895. It is no exaggeration to say that much of the seventh chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and, indeed, of Freud's later 'metapsychological' studies, has only become fully intelligible since the publication of the 'Project.'

Students of Freud's theoretical writings have been aware that even in his profoundest psychological speculations little or no discussion is to be found upon some of the *most* fundamental of the concepts of which he makes use: such concepts, for instance, as 'mental energy,' 'sums of excitation,' 'cathexis,' 'quantity,' 'quality,' 'intensity,' and so on. Almost the only explicit approach to a discussion of these concepts among Freud's published works is the penultimate sentence of his first paper on the 'Neuro-Psychoses of Defence' (1894*a*), in which he lays down a hypothesis that 'in mental functions something is to be distinguished—a charge of affect or sum of excitation—which possesses all the characteristics of a quantity (though we have no means of measuring it), which is capable of

increase, diminution, displacement and discharge, and which is spread over the memory-traces of ideas somewhat as an electric charge is spread over the surface of a body.’ The paucity of explanation of such basic notions in Freud’s later writings suggests that he was taking it for granted that they were as much a matter of course to his readers as they were to himself; and we owe it as a debt of gratitude to the posthumously published correspondence with Fliess that it throws so much light precisely upon these obscurities.

It is, of course, impossible to enter here into any detailed discussion of the subject, and the reader must be referred to the volume itself (Freud, 1950a) and to Dr. Kris’s illuminating introduction to it.¹ The crux of the position can, however, be indicated quite simply. The essence of Freud’s ‘Project’ lay in the notion of combining into a single whole two theories of different origin. The first of these was derived ultimately from the physiological school of Helmholtz, of which Freud’s teacher, the physiologist Brücke, was a principal member. According to this theory, neurophysiology, and consequently psychology, was governed by purely chemico-physical laws. Such, for instance, was the ‘law of constancy,’ frequently mentioned both by Freud and Breuer and expressed in these terms in 1892 (in a posthumously published draft, Breuer and Freud, 1940): ‘The nervous system endeavours to keep constant something in its functional condition that may be described as the “sum of excitation.”’ The greater part of the theoretical contribution made by Breuer (another disciple of the Helmholtz school) to the *Studies on Hysteria* was an elaborate construction along these lines. The second main theory called into play by Freud in his ‘Project’ was the anatomical doctrine of the neurone, which was becoming accepted by neuro-anatomists at the end of the eighties. (The term ‘neurone’ was only introduced, by Waldeyer, in 1891.) This doctrine laid it down that the functional unit of the central nervous system was a distinct cell, having no direct anatomical continuity with adjacent cells. The opening sentences of the ‘Project’ show clearly how its basis lay in a combination of these two theories. Its aim, wrote Freud, was ‘to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determined states of specifiable material particles.’ He went on to postulate that these ‘material particles’ were the neurones and that what distinguished their being in a state of

activity from their being in a state of rest was a 'quantity' which was 'subject to the general laws of motion.' Thus a neurone might either be 'empty' or 'filled with a certain quantity,' that is 'ca - thected.'² 'Nervous excitation' was to be interpreted as a 'quantity' flowing through a system of neurones, and such a current might either be resisted or facilitated according to the state of the 'contact-barriers' between the neurones. (It was only later, in 1897, that the term 'synapse' was introduced by Foster and Sherrington.) The functioning of the whole nervous system was subject to a general principle of 'inertia,' according to which neurones always tend to get rid of any 'quantity' with which they may be filled—a principle correlative with the principle of 'constancy.' Using these and similar concepts as his bricks, Freud constructed a highly complicated and extraordinarily ingenious working model of the mind as a piece of neurological machinery.

A principal part was played in Freud's scheme by a hypothetical division of the neurones into three classes or systems, differentiated according to their modes of functioning. Of these the first two were concerned respectively with *external* stimuli and *internal* excitations. Both of these operated on a purely *quantitative* basis; that is to say, their actions were wholly determined by the magnitude of the nervous excitations impinging on them. The third system was correlated with the *qualitative* differences which distinguish conscious sensations and feelings. This division of the neurones into three systems was the basis of elaborate physiological explanations of such things as the working of memory, the perception of reality, the process of thought, and also the phenomena of dreaming and of neurotic disorder.

But obscurities and difficulties began to accumulate and, during the months after writing the 'Project,' Freud was continually emending his theories. As time passed, his interest was gradually diverted from neurological and theoretical on to psychological and clinical problems, and he eventually abandoned the entire scheme. And when some years later, in the seventh chapter of the present book, he took the theoretical problem up once more—though he certainly never gave up his belief that ultimately a physical groundwork for psychology would be established—the neuro-

physiological basis was ostensibly dropped. Nevertheless—and this is why the ‘Project’ is of importance to readers of *The Interpretation of Dreams*—much of the general pattern of the earlier scheme, and many of its elements, were carried over into the new one. The systems of neurones were replaced by *psychical* systems or agencies; a hypothetical ‘cathexis’ of psychical energy took the place of the physical ‘quantity’; the principle of inertia became the basis of the pleasure (or, as Freud here called it, the unpleasure) principle. Moreover, some of the detailed accounts of psychical processes given in the seventh chapter owe much to their physiological forerunners and can be more easily understood by reference to them. This applies, for instance, to the description of the laying down of memory-traces in the ‘mnemic systems,’ to the discussion of the nature of wishes and of the different ways of satisfying them, and to the stress laid upon the part played by verbal thought-processes in the making of adjustments to the demands of reality.

All of this is enough largely to justify Freud’s assertion that *The Interpretation of Dreams* ‘was finished in all essentials at the beginning of 1896.’ Nevertheless, we are now in a position to add some qualifications. Thus, the existence of the Oedipus complex was only established during the summer and autumn of 1897 (Letters 64 to 71); and though this was not in itself a direct contribution to the theory of dreams, it nevertheless played a large part in emphasizing the *infantile* roots of the unconscious wishes underlying dreams. Of more obvious theoretical importance was the discovery of the omnipresence in dreams of the wish to sleep. This was announced by Freud as late as on June 9, 1899 (Letter 108). Again, the first hint at the process of ‘secondary revision’ seems to be given in a letter of July 7, 1897 (Letter 66). The similarity in structure between dreams and neurotic symptoms had, as we have seen, already been remarked on in the ‘Project’ in 1895, and was alluded to at intervals up to the autumn of 1897. Curiously enough, however, it seems thereafter to have been forgotten; for it is announced on January 3, 1899 (Letter 101), as a new discovery and as an explanation of why the book had so long remained unfinished.