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OF DREAMS**
THE PSYCHOLOGY
CLASSIC

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OF DREAMS**
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SIGMUND FREUD
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY SARAH TOMLEY

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**THE INTERPRETATION
OF DREAMS**
The Psychology Classic

SIGMUND FREUD

With an Introduction by
SARAH TOMLEY



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AN INTRODUCTION

BY SARAH TOMLEY

'It became possible to prove that dreams have a meaning, and to discover it.'

—Freud, *An Autobiographical Study*, 1925¹

The publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899 marked the birth of psychoanalysis, which was to have a vast impact on the culture of the twentieth century.

During the nineteenth century, Darwin had disarmed the powers of religion with his evolutionary theories, while Marx had stirred the working people of the world into taking political power. Freud was the last of this great triumvirate who sought to free people, and his quarry was no less than the human mind itself. His theories of the unconscious and the idea that we are all driven by desires and impulses that are not capable of being fully known – let alone controlled – were both thrilling and terrifying to his contemporaries.

More than 120 years after the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, neuroscientists are resurrecting Freud's most important insights as they discover more about the workings of the human brain, and especially its fast, implicit (non-conscious) functioning. Among

them, Antonio Damasio has reflected that ‘Freud’s insights on the nature of affect [emotion] are consonant with the most advanced contemporary neuroscience views’.² How did a nineteenth-century physician come to understand so much about the brain and the mind without any of the tools that are available today?

WHO WAS SIGMUND FREUD?

Freud was born in 1856, three years before the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, and at a time of ‘fragile democracies and unstable aristocracies, inexhaustible capitalism and economic depression, of the de-traditionalising of societies and an exorbitant arms race’.³ His family lived in a small town in Moravia, now part of the Czech Republic, but at the age of four they moved to Vienna. Jakob and Amalia Freud were outsiders, being both Jewish and immigrants, or ‘resident aliens’. They were keen for their first child and son, Sigismund Schlomo Freud, to take up a profession such as medicine or law. Not so much for the guaranteed income, though this was a welcome thought to a family that had suffered huge financial difficulties, but for the prestige and status it would bring. If their children could make a significant and honourable contribution to their adopted culture, they might be granted acceptance and have some sense of ‘home’ – always a challenge for Jewish families in an age of diaspora.

Freud was the firstborn son to his mother, but not his father. Jakob had been married once (perhaps twice) before, and had sons aged 23 and 26 when Sigismund was born. A wool merchant, he is known to have been a kind, easy-going man. Freud recorded nothing about his mother Amalia at all (a fact of no small interest to psychoanalysts). This may be due to the fact that, when Sigismund was one year old, Amalia gave birth to a son, Julius, who died just six to eight months later. Freud effectively lost his mother, in terms of emotional support and daily care, and he was looked after for six months by a Czech Catholic nanny. He later credited this woman with having provided him ‘with the means for living, and going on living’.

Nonetheless, according to his sister Anna, Freud grew up as the favourite of his parents. They were particularly keen that he be given peace and quiet for his studies, even banishing his sisters' beloved piano from the house. From the age of nine until he left school to go to university, Freud was always 'top of his class', as he noted in his *Autobiographical Study*. The young Freud loved literature and was talented at languages, learning Greek, Latin, Spanish, Italian, French, and English. He also had a love of ancient history and archaeology. All of these interests would later play into his discovery of the human mind and his psychoanalytic approach.

YOUNG DOCTOR

Freud always considered himself a scientist and atheist ('I was always an unbeliever', he wrote in 1926). On leaving school in 1873, he enrolled at the University of Vienna, where he studied biology and physiology (he confessed to being a 'dismal failure' in chemistry and zoology). From his third year onwards, he specialized in neurology in Ernst Brücke's institute of physiology. Shortly after receiving his degree, he reluctantly left the research laboratory and took up a job at Vienna General Hospital. He had become engaged to Martha Bernays and needed a secure income.

During this time he also met Josef Breuer, a Viennese doctor. Breuer's insights and friendship would steer Freud away from medicine and towards psychology, specifically through his interest in the cure of physical symptoms with psychological causes. Freud's visit to Paris in 1885 to study female 'hysterics' under the care of Jean-Martin Charcot also heightened his interest in the connections between mind and body.

On his return to Vienna in 1886, Freud married Martha and set up in private practice. Between 1887 and 1895, the couple had six children, making for a hectic and busy home life. At the same time, Freud continued to work with Breuer on formulating their 'talking cure' for hysteria.

In 1895, Breuer and Freud published *Studies on Hysteria*. It was not a bestseller and would take six years to sell 600 copies. The following year, Freud's father died. As he was now a father himself it had extra poignance and sparked a rigorous self-analysis. This was to be almost entirely conducted through an analysis of his dreams – and this is what forms the core of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. For this reason, the book gives the reader a unique insight into Freud's mind and also into the practice of psychoanalysis in the making. In other words, Freud used his own self-analysis to lay the foundations of psychoanalysis.

PUBLICATION AND IMPACT

On its publication in Vienna at the end of 1899, *Die Traumdeutung* was read in large numbers by the general public, who were fascinated by its innovative method of interpreting dreams. Though Freud came to doubt and revise many of his works and ideas, he never lost faith in the book, saying 'it has always been *The Interpretation of Dreams* that has given me back my certainty'.⁴

It explained to the world, for the first time, his theory of the unconscious, which would revolutionize thinking about the human mind. During the following 39 years, Freud published over 320 books, essays, and articles. From the humble beginnings of the Wednesday Society (made up of Freud and four colleagues) in 1902, psychoanalysis as an idea and a practice would spread across the world.

Upon Freud's death from throat cancer in 1939, his obituary in *The New York Times* did not hold back, lauding him as perhaps 'the greatest single influence on the thought of the 20th century'.

A SCIENCE OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

If, as Freud asserted, our dreams are created within the unconscious, we need to know a little about this subterranean part of the mind in order to interpret their messages. Nobel-prize-winning neuroscientist Eric Kandel points out that 'most of our mental life,

including most of our emotional life, is unconscious at any given moment'.⁵

So the unconscious operates 24/7, but what exactly is it? The idea of the unconscious dates back around 2000 years to the physician Galen, who realized that people drew inferences from perceptions that they were not aware of having made. For example, we might assume someone is wealthy because we've taken in details about their clothing without even consciously knowing we've done so. The Christian philosopher St Thomas Aquinas described the unconscious mind as being felt like a ghost – we sense it as a presence, but without substantiality.

The idea of the unconscious continued to fascinate thinkers, but it was not until Freud that it began to be *systematically* addressed. As a physician, Freud wanted to discover the structure and processes of the unconscious. He also wanted to be able to engage and work with it in a scientific way. This was an entirely novel idea. How could even the most brilliant of physicians work with an invisible and essentially unknowable entity? One that is, by definition, beyond our awareness? Freud articulated the question in 1915 as: 'How are we to arrive at a knowledge of the unconscious?' It became the defining question of his life and would lead him to create the 'talking cure' of psychoanalysis – the starting point for every psychotherapeutic approach that has been developed since 1900.

Freud claimed that 'we possess manifold proofs of the existence of the unconscious',⁶ and by 'we' he meant everybody. All of us, he said, have noticed the sudden arrival in our minds of an idea unconnected to anything else we were thinking about. We have all suddenly realized something as though we had just reached a conclusion, but without having been aware of puzzling over a problem at all. These things are only possible, he said, if there is a part of the mind working outside conscious awareness, always busy, but rarely intruding upon the rational, conscious mind.

Freud initially described the structure of the mind as consisting of three areas, which hold thoughts and impulses that are either

conscious, preconscious, or unconscious. We might experience a conscious impulse to go for a bicycle ride; we might mentally grope for a friend's name that is temporarily just outside conscious awareness (held in the preconscious); or we might react to a thought or impulse that we have no conscious awareness of at all (perhaps the real reason we are taking that bike ride is to avoid seeing our partner's father, who is visiting).

Freud investigated all three areas, but the unconscious was the one that fascinated him most. How did information come to be placed in it, and why? What influence did it continue to have? Was unconscious information the stuff of dreams? And what would happen if the material held within the unconscious mind was brought into the light of conscious awareness?

AN ORGANIZED SYSTEM

Freud suggested that there are particular ways that information flows into and around the system that is the mind. This information is then used and stored according to certain 'rules', particularly those imposed by self-censorship. We are very strict with ourselves, he noticed, in terms of what we feel we should and should not think or do. We do this in order to be able to think of ourselves as essentially good people.

This realization became key to Freud's thinking. He explained the mind in dynamic terms, as a system in motion, with information and energy flowing or being blocked through defensive or repressive actions. These actions served to protect our own idea of ourselves. This is uncannily similar to the position that psychotherapists take today. The neuroscientist and psychotherapist Daniel Siegel, for instance, describes the mind as: 'an emergent, self-organizing, embodied and relational process that regulates the flow of energy and information'.⁷ The mind is not a 'thing' but (in simple terms) a collection of neural pathways and processes, like the internet. It makes links (associations) and runs from one site to another (along neural

pathways), often coming to dead ends (incomplete or blocked memories) or feedback loops (circular thinking). And it operates extremely fast – we now know that the unconscious processing capability of the brain is approximately 11 million bits of information per second. Conscious processing is incredibly slow in comparison, at a maximum of 40 bits of information per second.⁸ This means that the vast majority of our thinking goes on without our having any awareness of it at all.

Psychologists have devised experiments to access the processes of the non-conscious mind (as today's scientists prefer to refer to it, perhaps wanting to distance themselves from Freud). However, in the late 1890s, Freud was very aware that he lacked any of the tools that would be necessary to gain a true, neuroscientific study of the mind. His only option was to base all his research on the clinical experience of patients. He also happened to begin his clinical work, almost accidentally, with a group of extremely troubled women who were classed as 'female hysterics'.

THE BIRTH OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Freud's medical career began when he studied under Ernst von Brücke, a pioneer in the field of physiology. Under his tutelage Freud produced outstanding work on the brain, according to Brücke, but the professor steered Freud away from continuing research. The reason was prosaic: he pointed out that Freud's engagement to Martha Bernays and impending marriage necessitated a move towards more remunerative work.

Brücke introduced Freud to Josef Breuer, who in turn introduced Freud to the idea of psychosomatic ('hysterical') symptoms in his patients, such as 'Anna O'. This young woman was paralysed in three limbs, had severe disturbances of sight and hearing, and continually suffered from a strange cough. Breuer told Freud that Anna O's symptoms seemed to improve when she was asked to say whatever came into her mind – even if 'ridiculous, apparently meaningless or

shameful'.⁹ She was allowed to freely associate from one word to another, without trying to make sense of any of it.

Breuer encouraged Freud to set up in private practice, specializing in hysteria. Freud travelled to Paris to study under the famous physician Jean-Martin Charcot, who was using hypnosis to replicate hysterical attacks and possibly cure them. Charcot had found that hysteria occurred equally in men and women and suggested that it was a disease of the nervous system. This strange intermingling of the health of body and mind intrigued Freud, who began to train his focus on psychology, rather than medicine. He noticed that Charcot not only induced trances, but listened to his patients with great attention, noticing every nuance and detail. This was to become a key part of the psychoanalytic practice.

Returning to Vienna, Freud attempted hypnosis with his patients, but failed to achieve inspiring results. Then, one afternoon in 1892, he tried something different. He asked his patient, the 24-year-old 'Elisabeth von R' to lie down on the couch and close her eyes. Freud, meanwhile, kept his hand pressed to her forehead, asking her to say out loud anything and everything that passed through her mind. Employing this 'chimney sweeping' technique (as Breuer called it), and the attentive listening of Charcot, Freud also kept on his analytic hat, 'paying careful attention wherever a connection remained enigmatical or where a link in the chain of causation seemed to be lacking'.¹⁰ This moment marked the birth of psychoanalysis.

The young woman, whose symptoms included acute leg pains, was eventually able to tell Freud of her forbidden love for her deceased sister's husband, and how they had enjoyed long walks together until she became incapable of walking. The woman experienced her thoughts and impulses towards the man she loved as totally unacceptable; they challenged her idea of herself as a good and moral person. It was clear that self-censorship was at play and the stakes were very high; in order to retain an idea of ourselves as being 'good' we will strenuously attempt to banish unwanted and disturbing thoughts from our consciousness. We will, in fact, without consciously knowing it,

push the 'bad' thoughts and impulses into the unconscious. But some part of us does know that we're doing this, Freud realized, because it takes a form of determination to enact the process. 'The presupposition of the whole work was ... the expectation that a perfect and sufficient determination could be demonstrated.'¹¹

The unconscious was operating knowingly (with intention) but not consciously. Hysteria was not a disease of the nervous system, as Charcot had said, but psychologically caused. And the hysterical symptoms were not random, but a *solution* to the real underlying problem. This marked a major step forward in Freud's thinking.

ID, EGO, SUPEREGO – THE FIGHT FOR SUPREMACY

Freud recognized that although human intelligence outstrips that of other animals, we are fundamentally unhappy, regardless of the circumstances of our lives. This is due to two factors. First, we have the ability to time-travel in our minds, so we can re-experience the past, and pre-experience the future. This allows us to learn very quickly, as we are constantly building on past experience. At the same time, past experience may be a faulty way to map out a future, and it can act to trap us within 'old thinking' that prevents us from moving forward. The two-year-old may experience an emotional event of such impact that the adult may still be guided by its 'lesson' even 70 years later.

Secondly, humans have a level of meta-intelligence that most other mammals lack. In other words, we are aware of our thoughts and impulses. This self-awareness adds to our learning abilities and empowers us as social animals to build large societies. At the same time, it allows us to judge ourselves very harshly, sometimes to the point of immobility. The source of this judgement, Freud proposed, was the development of a kind of inner conscience that he called the Superego. As children grow, they absorb the rules and values of their parents, teachers, other authority figures and the wider culture. In the process, they build an idea of what's 'normal' without realizing either that they're

doing this, or that these norms are unique to them. The absorbed rules are taken in as objective truths, rather than subjective opinions, whether it is small things like 'you must always clear your plate' to far-reaching ideas such as the inferiority of another race.

The Superego has to enforce these rules rigidly, Freud saw, because it is always fighting an equally powerful internal force that he called the Id. This is the source of our primitive drives, especially the sexual and aggressive ones. The Id wants food, stuff, people, sex – and it wants it 'now'. It doesn't care about other people, or society's norms, it just seeks instant gratification. The Superego tries to control the rampant desires coming up from the Id, while the more adult Ego, which has the best grip on reality, tries to make the final decision. However, '[a]s the child was once under a compulsion to obey its parents,' Freud observed, 'so the Ego submits to the categorical imperative of its Superego.' This is why our conscious self loses out to the control of the unconscious.

Freud realized that this internal monitor functions to stop us saying or doing 'wrong' things in the external world, but also works to push away thoughts or impulses felt within ourselves that are recognized as 'bad'. That lustful feeling towards someone else's partner? The sudden realization that you don't like your mother? Some of our thoughts and impulses are considered unacceptable, even to ourselves, and Freud discovered that the mind had developed a sophisticated system for dealing with this very problem. We consciously try to 'abrogate' (evade) or 'annihilate' these unwanted thoughts or impulses, he says; we try to get rid of them in some way. But Freud discovered that what actually happens is that the mind somehow boxes off the unwanted thoughts, impulses, and memories, by using one of a variety of methods, so that they are no longer available for access by the conscious mind. It feels as though we've got rid of them, but in fact we're just holding them somewhere else. This process is what Freud refers to as 'repression'. He also realized that if 'the essence of the process of repression lies ... in withholding it from becoming conscious',¹² there must be particular processes that

bring about this 'withholding'. How are we keeping these secrets from ourselves?

TECHNIQUES FOR HIDING FROM OURSELVES

Freud's theory of psychoanalysis rested on a belief in finding logic within an apparently illogical situation, by discovering links between the conscious and unconscious worlds. He believed that his method, which involved data gathering and the definition and measurement of unconscious processes, was scientific.

There were, for instance, many different ways in which we withhold repressed material and discharge its associated emotions.

He identified processes such as *denial* (pretending the feeling doesn't exist); *displacement* (expressing the feeling – such as anger – on a safer target than its real one); *projection* (telling yourself that someone else feels anger, not you); *rationalization* (coming up with a rational, acceptable reason for your behaviour, not the real one); *intellectualization* (focusing on the facts of the situation and avoiding the feelings); and *sublimation* (doing something socially acceptable to gratify the impulse, such as taking up boxing because you feel aggressive towards someone).

Freud's discovery passed the idea of reacting 'defensively' into common language, and his daughter Anna Freud would do further work in the area of defence mechanisms. What's most important about these forms of repression, Freud said, is that the repressed ideas – and their energy – continue to motivate our behaviour and govern our whole perspective on the world. They impact on our lives every single day, and yet we are usually completely unaware of their existence.

At the conscious level, Freud recognized that we do a good job of trying to distract ourselves from uncomfortable knowledge or feelings. These efforts may bring temporary relief, but they are unable to shift the problem itself, which always has roots in the unconscious. So we might *distract* ourselves from the weight of our suffering (from grief, anxiety, or depression, for instance) by increasing the hours we spend

in work and intellectual activity. Or we try to *counteract* it by increasing the things that bring us pleasure, such as art, hobbies or entertainment (video games, box sets, shopping). Freud called these activities 'substitutive satisfactions'. If these strategies fail, we may start to depend on intoxicants, such as alcohol or drugs, to *numb ourselves* to whatever feels so unbearably uncomfortable. If any of the coping mechanisms we use begins to work better than the others, we start to use it exclusively and in a greater, more repeated manner. Eventually, we become addicted to this solution, be it work, shopping, or drugs. At this point, where once the strategy (pleasure, busyness, numbing intoxicants) brought relief from suffering, now it brings only more suffering.

The tragic part of this, says Freud, is that we don't even know what the problem *is*. We are just aware that life seems unbearable in some way, and the feeling may spiral until all seems hopeless and there appears to be no way out. At this point, the suffering may become somatized, so that it is felt in the body and shown in acute and chronic physical symptoms – such as those experienced by his 'hysterical' patients. In observing this, Freud believed he had found the interface between mind and body.

Today, the connection between mind and body in terms of health is largely taken for granted, and the physical symptoms may be every bit as severe as in Freud's day. Many psychiatrists today undertake the treatment of severe physical symptoms resulting from traumatic events, and these have been widely documented by authors such as Gordon Turnbull and Suzanne O'Sullivan. In this respect, Freud was well ahead of his time.

FREUDIAN SLIPS AND THE POWER OF DREAMS

While many later psychoanalysts, such as Karen Horney, saw the goal of therapy as giving a person 'the courage to be himself', for Freud, the goal was slightly different; he said that we need to be helped to face ourselves. This looks at first like a subtle difference, but Freud's idea contains the understanding that we fool ourselves about who we are. We tell ourselves that we are living in line with the Superego's

rules, but in fact the equally powerful demands of the Id mean that we very often break them. We cannot afford to see this, even while we are aware of an intense internal conflict and continue to try to deny those parts of ourselves that we dislike. We don't like to admit to feeling envious of a friend's success, for instance, or of anxiety in a social situation, or perhaps of a feeling of worthlessness around a parent or sibling. We would, understandably, just like to rid ourselves of these problems, once and for all (hence the popularity of 'rational' therapies such as CBT, which offer ways of controlling symptoms, thereby making the feelings easier to deny). We pretend that we're fine, and just need to find a way to manage these 'ridiculous' feelings, which we spend much of our waking hours trying to avoid in some way, only to find them erupt in a myriad of ways in our sleep, or in 'accidents' such as Freudian slips. These slips of the tongue are where our real motivation or feelings become painfully apparent. Freud's term for them was *Fehlleistung*, meaning 'faulty action' – because the conscious mind reaches for one word or action, but the unconscious sneaks out an entirely different one.

Freud used the method of free association pioneered by Breuer to explore these slips in speech and memory, and to explore the real significance of dreams. The task of the psychoanalytic method was to be 'the task of discovering from the accidental utterances and fancies of the patient the thought contents, which, though striving for concealment, nevertheless unintentionally betray themselves'.¹³ For Freud, there are few true accidents in our speech and behaviour. This idea has gained such common currency, but in the early 1900s, when rationality and science were held as the highest – perhaps only – forms of truth, it was a revolutionary idea.

DREAMS AS THE ROYAL ROAD TO THE UNCONSCIOUS

It was through investigating his own dreams and those of others that Freud fleshed out his working method for psychoanalysis. The imaginative realm that we access during sleep, he said, offers us unique

access to the unconscious. As he put it, 'the interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind' (Freud, IOD, ch 7). By analysing dreams, 'we can take a step forward in our understanding of the composition of that most marvellous and most mysterious of all instruments' – the mind itself.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud begins by looking at the history of dream analysis. He finds theories suggesting that dreams are extremely powerful (they prophetically foretell the future) as well as those claiming that dreams are utterly meaningless (they are banal nonsense comprising muddled up pieces of everyday life). Freud picks up on Aristotle's idea that there is something real-world in the content, but instead of dismissing dreams because of their irrationality, as Aristotle had done, Freud suggests that this is what gives dreams their power. They are logical, but their logic and meaning have been heavily disguised by the mind.

In a dream, the real content (Freud called this the 'latent content') has undergone a process of transformation, so that the unconscious is finding expression and yet, not quite. In order to understand the true meaning behind the dream and discover our deepest desires, we need a way to decipher the seemingly irrational dream material or story (the 'manifest content').

Dreams, according to Freud, are a way in which we communicate with ourselves. As psychoanalyst Adam Phillips says, every night the dreamer tells herself secrets about what she wants, like an informer, spying on her past, and especially the unmet needs of that past.¹⁴ What's strange, Freud said, is that we have this extraordinary capability to create and transform material within the mind, and yet we're completely unaware of doing it. He agreed with the philosopher Nietzsche, that everyone is an artist in creating their dreams.

DREAMS AS WISH FULFILMENT

Freud claimed that all dreams are wish fulfilment, sometimes in the simplest of ways, such as when his daughter Anna dreamed of eating

the strawberries she had been forbidden in the day (Freud refers to the day before the dream as the 'dream day'). However, most of the time, dreams represent repressed wishes. This is how dreams tie in with the unconscious processes that take place during our waking days. When unwanted, unliked, perhaps shameful thoughts or desires come up during the day, we may repress them (using one of the methods mentioned above). They are now withheld from consciousness, but the effort involved uses considerable energy. While we are asleep these thoughts and desires (Freud calls them 'involuntary ideas') find a way to break through the barrier into the dreamer's mind. This is because 'the watchman' who censors material emerging from the unconscious 'goes to rest' when we sleep. Freud explains that '[t]he unconscious impulse makes use of this nocturnal relaxation of repression in order to push its way into consciousness with the dream'.¹⁵

Our dreams move from the unconscious to the preconscious, latent level of the mind. But the self-censorship that was there in the day continues, so we now have a situation in which there are two opposing forces: one that constructs the dream wish, and one that censors it. The compromise is distortion. In order to appear in the dream, the latent (real) content must be distorted into the manifest content (that shown in the dream). The repressed material is now heavily disguised within the dream, so that the dreamer does not recognize or come to know the latent material that it contains. This, said Freud, is why dreams are so bewildering and difficult to fathom: they were designed to be.

Yet psychoanalysis provides us with the techniques to decode dreams, Freud said. We can decipher the manifest content through free association, knowledge of recent events and older memories, and by adopting a curious, non-judgemental stance. The patient 'must adopt a completely impartial attitude to what occurs to him, since it is precisely *his critical attitude* which is responsible for his being unable, in the ordinary course of things, to achieve the desired unravelling of his dream or obsessional idea or whatever it may be' (Freud, IOD, ch 2). Initially, we must observe and recount, not reflect. If we allow our self-censoring

part to step in and start editing the account of the dream, all the meaningful details will be lost. The lightning-fast forces of the unconscious (operating at 40 million bits per second), may step in quickly to distort, 'make sense of', or even delete the whole dream from our conscious minds.

ELEMENTS OF THE DREAMWORK

'At bottom, dreams are nothing other than a particular form of thinking. It is the dream-work which creates that form' (Freud, IOD, ch 6). This dreamwork – the creative force that weaves the dream – uses four ways in which to disguise the elements of the dream.

The first, *condensation*, is where a number of dream elements are combined, so that a person in your dream, for instance, may be both your sister and your elementary school teacher. Words may also be combined, as Freudian slips or puns, so that a phone's ring functions to replace a jewellery ring. The second form of encoding is *displacement*, whereby unimportant material in the dream is given great significance, while the truly important content passes by the dreamer in a very insignificant way. This allows heightened emotion to become attached to a seemingly strange thing (because the emotion really belongs with a different element of the dream).

The third form of encoding, known as *secondary revision*, is a process that takes place at the end of the dreaming to weave all the content into a semi-coherent narrative. Secondary revision allows the conscious mind to apply a normalizing sense of 'what it was about', by glossing over inconsistencies and gaps in the dream and allowing us to think that it had a story – in much the same way that we weave all the independent events in our lives into a life story in our minds.

The fourth element that Freud noticed was that dreams do not come to us as thoughts: 'As the involuntary ideas emerge they change into visual and acoustic images' (Freud, IOD, ch 6). This transformation into pictures, particularly, allows another form of encoding, because

words and thoughts must be rendered into a new (pictorial) language, allowing further levels of condensation and displacement.

DECIPHERING YOUR DREAMS

By reading *The Interpretation of Dreams* it may be possible to begin to decode your own dreams, just as many people did when the book was first published. This is a supremely powerful way to get to know yourself, Freud said, but he did not suggest it would be in any way an easy task.

The adoption of the required attitude towards ideas that seem to emerge 'of their own free will', and the abandonment of the critical function normally in operation against them, is hard to do for some people. Freud notes that "the 'involuntary ideas' habitually evoke the most violent resistance, which seeks to prevent them from coming to the surface" (Freud, IOD, ch 2). The resistance is there for the same reason as the self-censorship – we don't really want to know ourselves, especially the 'shadow' parts of our personality, as Jung would say. In the Preface to the first edition, even Freud confesses that while he has included many of his own dreams in the book, 'I have been unable to resist the temptation of taking the edge off some of my indiscretions by omissions and substitutions'.

To read this book is to undertake a high-risk adventure of self-revelation and, in order to proceed, the reader must throw caution (and sense, at least initially) to the wind. But also bear in mind that, for Freud, nothing could ever be entirely wrapped up or certain. He wrote:

It is ... never possible to be sure that a dream has been completely interpreted. Even if the solution seems satisfactory and without gaps, the possibility always remains that the dream may have yet another meaning.

It seems we are always safe from letting ourselves know who we really are.

NOTES

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