

The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of

# Sigmund Freud

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## The Interpretation of Dreams

Sigmund Freud ⓘ

### The Interpretation of Dreams (1900)

#### IV

The dream which follows is an instance of really low egoistic feelings concealed behind affectionate worry.

*My friend Otto was looking ill. His face was brown and he had protruding eyes.*

Otto is my family doctor, and I owe him more than I can ever hope to repay: he has watched over my children's health for many years, he has treated them successfully when they have been ill, and, in addition, whenever circumstances have given him an excuse, he has given them presents. [See p. 116.] He had visited us on the dream-day, and my wife had remarked that he looked tired and strained. That night I had my dream, which showed him with some of the signs of Basedow's [Graves'] disease. Anyone who interprets this dream without regard for my rules will conclude that I was worried about my friend's health and that this worry was realized in the dream. This would not only contradict my assertion that dreams are wish-fulfilments, but my other assertion, too, that they are accessible only to egoistic impulses. But I should be glad if anyone

interpreting the dream in this way would be good enough to explain to me why my fears on Otto's behalf should have lighted on *Basedow's* disease—a diagnosis for which his actual appearance gives not the slightest ground. My analysis, on the other hand,

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brought up the following material from an occurrence six years earlier. A small group of us, which included Professor R., were driving in pitch darkness through the forest of N., which lay some hours' drive from the place at which we were spending our summer holidays. The coachman, who was not perfectly sober, spilt us, carriage and all, over an embankment, and it was only by a piece of luck that we all escaped injury. We were obliged, however, to spend the night in a neighbouring inn, at which the news of our accident brought us a lot of sympathy. A gentleman, with unmistakable signs of Basedow's disease— incidentally, just as in the dream, only the brown discoloration of the skin of the face and the protruding eyes, but no goitre—placed himself entirely at our disposal and asked what he could do for us. Professor R. replied in his decisive manner: 'Nothing except to lend me a night-shirt.' To which the fine gentleman rejoined: 'I'm sorry, but I can't do that', and left the room.

As I continued my analysis, it occurred to me that Basedow was the name not only of a physician but also of a famous educationalist. (In my waking state I no longer felt quite so certain about this.<sup>1</sup>) But my friend Otto was the person whom I had asked to watch over my children's physical education, especially at the age of puberty (hence the night-shirt), in case anything happened to me. By giving my friend Otto in the dream the symptoms of our noble helper, I was evidently saying that if anything happened to me he would do just as little for the children as Baron L. had done on that occasion in spite of his kind offers of assistance. This seems to be sufficient evidence of the egoistic lining of the dream.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Though in fact it was correct. He was an eighteenth-century follower of Rousseau.]

<sup>2</sup> [Footnote added 1911:] When Ernest Jones was giving a scientific lecture on the egoism of dreams before an American audience, a learned lady objected to this unscientific generalization, saying that the author of the present work could only judge of the dreams of Austrians and had no business to speak of the dreams of

*Americans. So far as she was concerned, she was certain that all her dreams were strictly altruistic.— [Added 1925:] By way of excuse for this patriotic lady, I may remark that the statement that dreams are entirely egoistic [p. 267] must not be misunderstood. Since anything whatever that occurs in preconscious thought can pass into a dream (whether into its actual content or into the latent dream-thoughts) that possibility is equally open to altruistic impulses. In the same way, an affectionate or erotic impulse towards someone else, if it is present in the unconscious, can appear in a dream. The truth in the assertion made in the text above is thus restricted to the fact that among the unconscious instigators of a dream we very frequently find egoistic impulses which seem to have been overcome in waking life.*

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But where was its wish-fulfilment to be found? Not in my avenging myself on my friend Otto, whose fate it seems to be to be ill-treated in my dreams<sup>1</sup>; but in the following consideration. At the same time as I represented Otto in the dream as Baron L., I had identified myself with someone else, namely Professor R.; for just as in the anecdote R. had made a request to Baron L., so I had made a request to Otto. And that is the point. Professor R., with whom I should really not venture to compare myself in the ordinary way, resembled me in having followed an independent path outside the academic world and had only achieved his well-merited title late in life. So once again I was wanting to be a Professor! Indeed the words 'late in life' were themselves a wish-fulfilment; for they implied that I should live long enough to see my boys through the age of puberty myself.<sup>2</sup>