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Sigmund Freud

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The Interpretation of Dreams

Sigmund Freud ⓘ

The Interpretation of Dreams (1900)

The Psychology of the Dream-Processes¹

Among the dreams which have been reported to me by other people, there is one which has special claims upon our attention at this point. It was told to me by a woman patient who had herself heard it in a lecture on dreams: its actual source is still unknown to me. Its content made an impression on the lady, however, and she proceeded to 're-dream' it, that is, to repeat some of its elements in a dream of her own, so that, by taking it over in this way, she might express her agreement with it on one particular point.

The preliminaries to this model dream were as follows. A father had been watching beside his child's sick-bed for days and nights on end. After the child

had died, he went into the next room to lie down, but left the door open so that he could see from his bedroom into the room in which his child's body was laid out, with tall candles standing round it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it, and sat beside the body murmuring prayers. After a few hours' sleep, the father had a dream that *his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?'* He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them.

The explanation of this moving dream is simple enough and, so my patient told me, was correctly given by the lecturer. The glare of light shone through the open door into the sleeping man's eyes and led him to the conclusion which he would have arrived at if he had been awake, namely that a candle had fallen over and set something alight in the neighbourhood of the body.

[^{PEP}] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 513*

¹ *[Some light has been thrown on the difficulties presented in the later sections of this chapter by Freud's early correspondence with Wilhelm Fliess (Freud, 1950a). Cf. the Editor's Introduction (p. xv ff.).]*

509

It is even possible that he had felt some concern when he went to sleep as to whether the old man might not be incompetent to carry out his task.

Nor have I any changes to suggest in this interpretation except to add that the content of the dream must have been overdetermined and that the words spoken by the child must have been made up of words which he had actually spoken in his lifetime and which were connected with important events in the father's mind. For instance, *'I'm burning'* may have been spoken during the fever of the child's last illness, and *'Father, don't you see?'* may have been derived from some other highly emotional situation of which we are in ignorance.

But, having recognized that the dream was a process with a meaning, and that it can be inserted into the chain of the dreamer's psychical experiences, we may still wonder why it was that a dream occurred at all in such circumstances, when the most rapid possible awakening was called for. And here we shall observe that this dream, too, contained the fulfilment of a wish. The dead child behaved in the dream like a living one: he himself warned his father, came to his bed, and caught him by the arm, just as he had probably done on the

occasion from the memory of which the first part of the child's words in the dream were derived. For the sake of the fulfilment of this wish the father prolonged his sleep by one moment. The dream was preferred to a waking reflection because it was able to show the child as once more alive. If the father had woken up first and then made the inference that led him to go into the next room, he would, as it were, have shortened his child's life by that moment of time.

There can be no doubt what the peculiar feature is which attracts our interest to this brief dream. Hitherto we have been principally concerned with the secret meaning of dreams and the method of discovering it and with the means employed by the dream-work for concealing it. The problems of dream-interpretation have hitherto occupied the centre of the picture. And now we come upon a dream which raises no problem of interpretation and the meaning of which is obvious, but which, as we see, nevertheless retains the essential characteristics that differentiate dreams so strikingly from waking life and consequently call for explanation. It is only after we have disposed of everything that has to do with the work of interpretation that

*[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 514
510*

we can begin to realize the incompleteness of our psychology of dreams.

But before starting off along this new path, it will be well to pause and look around, to see whether in the course of our journey up to this point we have overlooked anything of importance. For it must be clearly understood that the easy and agreeable portion of our journey lies behind us. Hitherto, unless I am greatly mistaken, all the paths along which we have travelled have led us towards the light—towards elucidation and fuller understanding. But as soon as we endeavour to penetrate more deeply into the mental process involved in dreaming, every path will end in darkness. There is no possibility of *explaining* dreams as a psychical process, since to explain a thing means to trace it back to something already known, and there is at the present time no established psychological knowledge under which we could subsume what the psychological examination of dreams enables us to infer as a basis for their explanation. On the contrary, we shall be obliged to set up a number of fresh hypotheses which touch tentatively upon the structure of the apparatus of the mind and upon the play of forces operating in it. We must be careful, however, not to pursue these hypotheses too far beyond their first logical links, or their value will be lost in uncertainties. Even if we make no false inferences and take

all the logical possibilities into account, the probable incompleteness of our premises threatens to bring our calculation to a complete miscarriage. No conclusions upon the construction and working methods of the mental instrument can be arrived at or at least fully proved from even the most painstaking investigation of dreams or of any other mental function taken *in isolation*. To achieve this result, it will be necessary to correlate all the established implications derived from a comparative study of a whole series of such functions. Thus the psychological hypotheses to which we are led by an analysis of the processes of dreaming must be left, as it were, in suspense, until they can be related to the findings of other enquiries which seek to approach the kernel of the same problem from another angle.

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 515*
511

The Forgetting Of Dreams

I suggest, therefore, that we should first turn to a topic that raises a difficulty which we have not hitherto considered but which is nevertheless capable of cutting the ground from under all our efforts at interpreting dreams. It has been objected on more than one occasion that we have in fact no knowledge of the dreams that we set out to interpret, or, speaking more correctly, that we have no guarantee that we know them as they actually occurred. (See p. 45 ff.)

In the first place, what we remember of a dream and what we exercise our interpretative arts upon has been mutilated by the untrustworthiness of our memory, which seems quite especially incapable of retaining a dream and may well have lost precisely the most important parts of its content. It quite frequently happens that when we seek to turn our attention to one of our dreams we find ourselves regretting the fact that, though we dreamt far more, we can remember nothing but a single fragment which is itself recollected with peculiar uncertainty.

Secondly, there is every reason to suspect that our memory of dreams is not only fragmentary but positively inaccurate and falsified. On the one hand it may be doubted whether what we dreamt was really as disconnected and hazy as our recollection of it; and on the other hand it may also be doubted whether a dream was really as connected as it is in the account we give of it, whether in attempting to reproduce it we do not fill in what was never there, or what has been forgotten, with new and arbitrarily selected material, whether we do not add embellishments and trimmings and round it off so that there is no

possibility of deciding what its original content may have been. Indeed one author, Spitta (1882, [338]),¹ goes to the point of suggesting that in so far as a dream shows any kind of order or coherence, these qualities are only introduced into it when we try to recall it to mind. [Cf. p. 47.] Thus there seems to be a

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 516*

¹[Added in text in 1914 and transferred to footnote in 1930:] *So too Foucault [1906, 141 f.] and Tannery [1898].*

512

danger that the very thing whose value we have undertaken to assess may slip completely through our fingers.

Hitherto in interpreting dreams we have disregarded such warnings. On the contrary, we have accepted it as being just as important to interpret the smallest, least conspicuous and most uncertain constituents of the content of dreams as those that are most clearly and certainly preserved. The dream of Irma's injection contained the phrase 'I *at once* called in Dr. M.' [p. 111]; and we assumed that even this detail would not have found its way into the dream unless it had had some particular origin. It was thus that we came upon the story of the unfortunate patient to whose bedside I had 'at once' called in my senior colleague. In the apparently absurd dream which treated the difference between 51 and 56 as a negligible quantity, the number 51 was mentioned several times. [See p. 435.] Instead of regarding this as a matter of course or as something indifferent, we inferred from it that there was a *second* line of thought in the latent content of the dream leading to the number 51; and along this track we arrived at my fears of 51 years being the limit of my life, in glaring contrast to the dream's dominant train of thought which was lavish in its boasts of a long life. In the '*Non vixit*' dream [p. 421 ff.] there was an inconspicuous interpolation which I overlooked at first: '*As P. failed to understand him, Fl. asked me*', etc. When the interpretation was held up, I went back to these words and it was they that led me on to the childhood phantasy which turned out to be an intermediate nodal point in the dream-thoughts. [See p. 483 f.] This was arrived at by way of the lines:

Selten habt ihr mich verstanden,

Selten auch verstand ich Euch,

Nur wenn wir im Kot uns fanden,

*So verstanden wir uns gleich.*¹

Examples could be found in every analysis to show that precisely the most trivial elements of a dream are indispensable to its interpretation and that the work in hand is held up if attention is not paid to these elements until too late. We have

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 517*

¹[Literally: 'Rarely have you understood me, and rarely too have I understood you. Not until we both found ourselves in the mud did we promptly understand each other.' Heine, *Buch der Lieder*, 'Die Heimkehr', LXXVIII.]

513

attached no less importance in interpreting dreams to every shade of the form of words in which they were laid before us. And even when it happened that the text of the dream as we had it was meaningless or inadequate—as though the effort to give a correct account of it had been unsuccessful—we have taken this defect into account as well. In short, we have treated as Holy Writ what previous writers have regarded as an arbitrary improvisation, hurriedly patched together in the embarrassment of the moment. This contradiction stands in need of an explanation.

The explanation is in our favour, though without putting the other writers in the wrong. In the light of our newly-won understanding of the origin of dreams the contradiction disappears completely. It is true that we distort dreams in attempting to reproduce them; here we find at work once more the process which we have described as the secondary (and often ill conceived) revision of the dream by the agency which carries out normal thinking [p. 488 ff.]. But this distortion is itself no more than a part of the revision to which the dream-thoughts are regularly subjected as a result of the dream-censorship. The other writers have at this point noticed or suspected the part of dream-distortion which operates manifestly; we are less interested, since we know that a much more far-reaching process of distortion, though a less obvious one, has already developed the dream out of the hidden dream-thoughts. The only mistake made by previous writers has been in supposing that the modification of the dream in the course of being remembered and put into words is an *arbitrary* one and cannot be further resolved and that it is therefore calculated to give us a misleading picture of the dream.¹ They have underestimated the extent to which psychical events are determined. There is nothing arbitrary about them. It can be shown quite generally that if an element is left undetermined by one train of thought, its determination is immediately effected by a second one. For

instance, I may try to think of a number arbitrarily. But this is impossible: the number that occurs to me will be unambiguously and necessarily determined by thoughts of mine, though they may be

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 518*

¹[A misunderstanding in a contrary direction of the importance of the text of dreams is discussed towards the end of Freud's paper on the technical uses of dream-interpretation in therapeutic analyses (1911e).]

514

remote from my immediate intention.¹ The modifications to which dreams are submitted under the editorship of waking life are just as little arbitrary. They are associatively linked to the material which they replace, and serve to show us the way to that material, which may in its turn be a substitute for something else.

In analysing the dreams of my patients I sometimes put this assertion to the following test, which has never failed me. If the first account given me by a patient of a dream is too hard to follow I ask him to repeat it. In doing so he rarely uses the same words. But the parts of the dream which he describes in different terms are by that fact revealed to me as the weak spot in the dream's disguise: they serve my purpose just as Hagen's was served by the embroidered mark on Siegfried's cloak.² That is the point at which the interpretation of the dream can be started. My request to the patient to repeat his account of the dream has warned him that I was proposing to take special pains in solving it; under pressure of the resistance, therefore, he hastily covers the weak spots in the dream's disguise by replacing any expressions that threaten to betray its meaning by other less revealing ones. In this way he draws my attention to the expression which he has dropped out. The trouble taken by the dreamer in preventing the solution of the dream gives me a basis for estimating the care with which its cloak has been woven.

Previous writers have had less justification in devoting so much space to the *doubt* with which our judgement receives accounts of dreams. For this doubt has no intellectual warrant. There is in general no guarantee of the correctness of our memory; and yet we yield to the compulsion to attach belief to its data far more often than is objectively justified. Doubt

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 519*

¹[Footnote added 1909:] See my *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, [1901b, Chapter XII (A), Nos. 2 to 7.—No. 2 relates to a letter written by Freud to Fliess on August 27, 1899 (Freud, 1950a, Letter 116), while he was correcting the proofs of the present volume, in which he prophesied that the book would contain 2,467 misprints. (See below, p. 532n.)]

²[There was only one spot on Siegfried's body where he could be wounded. By a trick, Hagen persuaded Kriemhild, who alone knew where the spot was, to embroider a small cross on Siegfried's cloak at the vital point. It was there that Hagen later stabbed him. (*Nibelungen-lied*, XV and XVI.)]

515

whether a dream or certain of its details have been correctly reported is once more a derivative of the dream-censorship, of resistance to the penetration of the dream-thoughts into consciousness.¹ This resistance has not been exhausted even by the displacements and substitutions it has brought about; it persists in the form of doubt attaching to the material which has been allowed through. We are especially inclined to misunderstand this doubt since it is careful never to attack the more intense elements of a dream but only the weak and indistinct ones. As we already know, however, a complete transvaluation of all psychical values takes place between the dream-thoughts and the dream [p. 330]. Distortion is only made possible by a withdrawal of psychical value; it habitually expresses itself by that means and is occasionally content to require nothing more. If, then, an indistinct element of a dream's content is in addition attacked by doubt, we have a sure indication that we are dealing with a comparatively direct derivative of one of the proscribed dream-thoughts. The state of things is what it was after some sweeping revolution in one of the republics of antiquity or the Renaissance. The noble and powerful families which had previously dominated the scene were sent into exile and all the high offices were filled by newcomers. Only the most impoverished and powerless members of the vanquished families, or their remote dependents, were allowed to remain in the city; and even so they did not enjoy full civic rights and were viewed with distrust. The distrust in this analogy corresponds to the doubt in the case we are considering. That is why in analysing a dream I insist that the whole scale of estimates of certainty shall be abandoned and that the faintest possibility that something of this or that sort may have occurred in the dream shall be treated as complete certainty. In tracing any element of a dream it will be found that unless this attitude is firmly adopted the analysis will come to a standstill. If any doubt is thrown upon the value of the element in question, the psychical result in the patient is that none of the involuntary ideas underlying that element comes into his head. This result is not a self-evident one. It would not make nonsense if someone were to say: 'I don't know for certain whether

such and such a thing came into the dream, but here is what occurs to me in connection with it.' But in fact

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 520*

¹ *[For the same mechanism of doubt in cases of hysteria see a passage near the beginning of Part I of the case history of 'Dora' (1905e).]*

516

no one ever does say this; and it is precisely the fact that doubt produces this interrupting effect upon an analysis that reveals it as a derivative and tool of psychical resistance. Psychoanalysis is justly suspicious. One of its rules is that *whatever interrupts the progress of analytic work is a resistance.*¹

The *forgetting* of dreams, too, remains inexplicable unless the power of the psychical censorship is taken into account. In a number of cases the feeling of having dreamt a great deal during the night and of only having retained a little of it may in fact have some other meaning, such as that the dream-work has been perceptibly proceeding all through the night but has only left a short dream behind. [Cf. pp. 279 f., 489, and 576.] It is no doubt true that we forget dreams more and more as time passes after waking; we often forget them in spite of the most painstaking efforts to recall them. But I am of opinion that the extent of this forgetting is as a rule over-estimated; and there is a similar over-estimation of the extent to which the gaps in a dream limit our knowledge of it. It is often possible by means of analysis to restore all that has been lost by the forgetting of the dream's content; at least, in quite a number of cases one can reconstruct from a single remaining fragment not, it is true, the dream—which is in any case a matter of no importance—but all the dream-thoughts. This demands a certain amount of attention and self-discipline in carrying out the analysis; that is all—but it shows that there was no lack of a hostile [i.e. resistant] purpose at work in the forgetting of the dream.²

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 521*

¹ *[Footnote added 1925:] The proposition laid down in these peremp tory terms —'whatever interrupts the progress of analytic work is a resistance'—is easily open to misunderstanding. It is of course only to be taken as a technical rule, as a warning to analysts. It cannot be disputed that in the course of an analysis various events may occur the responsibility for which cannot be laid upon the patient's intentions. His father may die without his having murdered him; or a war may break out which brings the analysis to an end. But behind its obvious*

exaggeration the proposition is asserting something both true and new. Even if the interrupting event is a real one and independent of the patient, it often depends on him how great an interruption it causes; and resistance shows itself unmistakably in the readiness with which he accepts an occurrence of this kind or the exaggerated use which he makes of it.

²*[Footnote added 1919:] I may quote the following dream from my Introductory Lectures [Freud, 1916-17, Lecture VII] as an example of the meaning of doubt and uncertainty in a dream and of its content being at the same time shrunk down to a single element; in spite of this the -dream was successfully analysed after a short delay: 'A sceptical woman patient had a longish dream in the course of which some people told her about my book on jokes and praised it highly. Something came in then about a "channel", perhaps it was another book that mentioned a channel, or something else about a channel ... she didn't know ... it was all so indistinct. 'No doubt you will be inclined to expect that the element "channel";, since it was so indistinct, would be inaccessible to interpretation. You are right in suspecting a difficulty; but the difficulty did not arise from the indistinctness: both the difficulty and the indistinctness arose from another cause. Nothing occurred to the dreamer in connection with "channel", and I could of course throw no light on it. A little later—it was the next day, in point of fact—she told me that she had thought of something that might have something to do with it. It was a joke, too,— a joke she had heard. On the steamer between Dover and Calais a well-known author fell into conversation with an Englishman. The latter had occasion to quote the phrase: "Du sublime au ridicule il n'y a qu'un pas. [It is only a step from the sublime to the ridiculous.]" Yes, replied the author, "le Pas de Calais"—meaning that he thought France sublime and England ridiculous. But the Pas de Calais is a channel—the English Channel [or, more precisely, the Straits of Dover]. You will ask whether I think this had anything to do with the dream. Certainly I think so; and it provides the solution of the puzzling element of the dream. Can you doubt that this joke was already present before the dream occurred, as the unconscious thought behind the element "channel"? Can you suppose that it was introduced as a subsequent invention? The association betrayed the scepticism which lay concealed behind the patient's ostensible admiration; and her resistance against revealing this was no doubt the common cause both of her delay in producing the association and of the indistinctness of the dream-element concerned. Consider the relation of the dream-element to its unconscious background: it was, as it were, a fragment of that background, an allusion to it, but it was made quite incomprehensible by being isolated.'*

Convincing evidence of the fact that the forgetting of dreams is tendentious and serves the purpose of resistance¹ is afforded when it is possible to observe in analyses a preliminary stage of forgetting. It not infrequently happens that in the middle of the work of interpretation an omitted portion of the dream comes to light and is described as having been forgotten till that moment. Now a part of a dream that has been rescued from oblivion in this way is invariably the most important part; it always lies on the shortest road to the dream's solution and has for that reason

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 522*

¹ *On the purposes of forgetting in general see my short paper on the psychical mechanism of forgetting (Freud, 1898b). [Added 1909:] Later included [with modifications] as the first chapter in my Psychopathology of Everyday Life (Freud, 1901b).*

518

been exposed to resistance more than any other part. Among the specimen dreams scattered through this volume, there is one in which a part of its content was added like this as an afterthought.¹ It is the travel dream in which I revenged myself on two disagreeable fellow-travellers and which I had to leave almost uninterpreted on account of its gross indecency. [See p. 455 ff.] The omitted portion ran as follows: *'I said [in English], referring to one of Schiller's works: "It is from ..." but, noticing the mistake, I corrected myself: "It is by ..." "Yes", the man commented to his sister, "he said that right."*²

Self-corrections in dreams, which seem so marvellous to some writers, need not occupy our attention. I will indicate instead the recollection which served as the model for my verbal error in this dream. When I was nineteen³ years old I visited England for the first time and spent a whole day on the shore of the Irish Sea. I naturally revelled in the opportunity of collecting the marine animals left behind by the tide and I was occupied with a starfish—the words *'Hollthurn'* and *'holothurians* [sea-slugs] occurred at the beginning of the dream—when a charming little girl came up to me and said: *'Is it a starfish? Is it alive?'* *'Yes,'* I replied, *'he is alive,'* and at once, embarrassed at my mistake, repeated the sentence correctly. The dream replaced the verbal error which I then made by another into which a German is equally liable to fall. *'Das Buck ist von Schiller'* should be translated not with a *'from'* but with a *'by'*. After all that we have heard of the purposes of the dream-work and its reckless choice of methods for attaining them, we shall not be surprised to hear that it effected this replacement because of the magnificent piece of condensation that was made

possible by the identity of sound of the English 'from' and the German adjective 'fromm' ['pious']. But how did my blameless memory of the sea-shore come to be in the dream? It served as the most innocent possible example of my using a word indicating gender

[*PEP*] This page can be read in German in *GESAMMELTE WERKE* Vol 2, Page 523

¹[Another instance will be found on p. 155 n. Yet another occurs in the analysis of Dora's second dream (Freud, 1905e, Section III).]

²[Footnote added 1914:] Corrections such as this in the usages of foreign languages are not infrequent in dreams but are more often attributed to other people. Maury (1878, 143) once dreamt, at a time when he was learning English, that, in telling someone that he had visited him the day before, he used the words 'I called for you yesterday'. Whereupon the other answered correctly: 'You should have said "I called on you yesterday".'

³[In the first edition only (but not in the 1925 reprint of it) this read "seventeen". See Jones (1953), 35-6.]

519

or sex in the wrong place—of my bringing in sex (the word 'he') where it did not belong. This, incidentally, was one of the keys to the solution of the dream. No one who has heard, furthermore, the origin attributed to the title of Clerk Maxwell's '*Matter and Motion*' [mentioned in the dream, p. 456] will have any difficulty in filling in the gaps: Molière's '*Le Malade Imaginaire*'—'*La matière est-elle laudable?*'¹—A motion of the bowels.

Moreover I am in a position to offer an ocular demonstration of the fact that the forgetting of dreams is to a great extent a product of resistance. One of my patients will tell me he has had a dream but has forgotten every trace of it: it is therefore just as though it had never happened. We proceed with our work. I come up against a resistance; I therefore explain something to the patient and help him by encouragement and pressure to come to terms with some disagreeable thought. Hardly have I succeeded in this than he exclaims: 'Now I remember what it was I dreamt.' The same resistance which interfered with our work that day also made him forget the dream. By overcoming this resistance I have recalled the dream to his memory.

In just the same way, when a patient reaches some particular point in his work, he may be able to remember a dream which he had dreamt three or four or even more days before and which had hitherto remained forgotten.²

Psycho-analytic experience³ has provided us with yet another proof that the forgetting of dreams depends far more upon resistance than upon the fact, stressed by the authorities, that the waking and sleeping states are alien to each other [p. 45]. It not infrequently happens to me, as well as to other analysts and to patients under treatment, that, having been woken up, as one might say, by a dream, I immediately afterwards, and in full possession of my intellectual powers, set about interpreting it. In such cases I have often refused to rest till I have arrived at a complete understanding of the dream; yet it has

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 524

¹*[‘Is the matter laudable?’—Old medical terminology for ‘Is the excretion healthy?’—The next phrase is in English in the original.]*

²*[Footnote added 1914:] Ernest Jones has described [1912b] an analogous case which often occurs: while a dream is being analysed the patient may recollect a second one which was dreamt during the same night but whose very existence had not been suspected.*

³*[This paragraph and the next were added in 1911.]*

520

sometimes been my experience that after finally waking up in the morning I have entirely forgotten both my interpretative activity and the content of the dream, though knowing that I have had a dream and interpreted it.¹ It happens far more often that the dream draws the findings of my interpretative activity back with it into oblivion than that my intellectual activity succeeds in preserving the dream in my memory. Yet there is no such psychical gulf between my interpretative activity and my waking thoughts as the authorities suppose to account for the forgetting of dreams.

Morton Prince (1910 [141]) has objected to my explanation of the forgetting of dreams on the ground that that forgetting is only a special case of the amnesia attaching to dissociated mental states, that it is impossible to extend my explanation ‘of this special amnesia to other types and that my explanation is consequently devoid of value even for its immediate purpose. His readers are thus reminded that in the course of all his descriptions of these dissociated states he has never attempted, to discover a dynamic explanation of such phenomena. If he had, he would inevitably have found that repression (or, more precisely, the resistance created by it) is the cause both of the dissociations and of the amnesia attaching to then-psychical content.

An observation which I have been able to make in the course of preparing this manuscript has shown me that dreams are no more forgotten than other mental acts and can be compared, by no means to their disadvantage, with other mental functions in respect of their retention in the memory. I had kept records of a large number of my own dreams which for one reason or another I had not been able to interpret completely at the time or had left entirely uninterpreted. And now, between one and two years later, I have attempted to interpret some of them for the purpose of obtaining more material in illustration of my views. These attempts have been successful in every instance; indeed the interpretation may be said to have proceeded more easily after this long interval than it did at the time when the dream was a recent experience. A possible explanation of this is that in the meantime I have overcome some of the internal resistances which previously obstructed me. When making these

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 525*

¹[Cf. *Postscript to the 'Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy' (Freud, 1922c).*]

521

subsequent interpretations I have compared the dream-thoughts that I elicited at the time of the dream with the present, usually far more copious, yield, and I have always found that the old ones are included among the new. My astonishment at this was quickly halted by the reflection that I had long been in the habit of getting my patients, who sometimes tell me dreams dating from earlier years, to interpret them—by the same procedure and with the same success—as though they had dreamt them the night before. When I come to discuss anxiety-dreams I shall give two examples of postponed interpretations like these. [See p. 583 ff.] I was led into making my first experiment of this kind by the justifiable expectation that in this as in other respects dreams would behave like neurotic symptoms. When I treat a psychoneurotic—a hysteric, let us say—by psycho-analysis, I am obliged to arrive at an explanation for the earliest and long since vanished symptoms of his illness no less than for the contemporary ones which brought him to me for treatment; and I actually find the earlier problem easier to solve than the immediate one. As long ago as in 1895 I was able to give an explanation in *Studies on Hysteria* [Breuer and Freud, 1895] of the first hysterical attack which a woman of over forty had had in her fifteenth year.¹ [This patient was Frau Cäcilie M., referred to near the end of Case History V.]

And here I will mention a number of further, somewhat disconnected, points on the subject of interpreting dreams, which may perhaps help to give readers

their bearings should they feel inclined to check my statements by subsequent work upon their own dreams.

No one should expect that an interpretation of his dreams will fall into his lap like manna from the skies. Practice is needed even for perceiving endoptic phenomena or other sensations

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 526

¹[Added in the text in 1919 and transferred to a footnote in 1930:] Dreams which occur in the earliest years of childhood and are retained in the memory for dozens of years, often with complete sensory vividness, are almost always of great importance in enabling us to understand the history of the subject's mental development and of his neurosis. Analysis of such dreams protects the physician from errors and uncertainties which may lead, among other things, to theoretical confusion. [The example of the 'Wolf Man's' dream was no doubt especially in Freud's mind (1918b).]

522

from which our attention is normally withheld; and this is so even though there is no psychical motive fighting against such perceptions. It is decidedly more difficult to get hold of 'involuntary ideas' Anyone who seeks to do so must familiarize himself with the expectations raised in the present volume and must, in accordance with the rules laid down in it, endeavour during the work to refrain from any criticism, any *parti pris*, and any emotional or intellectual bias. He must bear in mind Claude Bernard's¹ advice to experimenters in a physiological laboratory: 'travailler comme une bête'—he must work, that is, with as much persistence as an animal and with as much disregard of the result. If this advice is followed, the task will no longer be a hard one.

The interpretation of a dream cannot always be accomplished at a single sitting. When we have followed a chain of associations, it not infrequently happens that we feel our capacity exhausted; nothing more is to be learnt from the dream that day. The wisest plan then is to break off and resume our work another day: another part of the dream's content may then attract our attention and give us access to another stratum of dream-thoughts. This procedure might be described as 'fractional' dream-interpretation.

It is only with the greatest difficulty that the beginner in the business of interpreting dreams can be persuaded that his task is not at an end when he has a complete interpretation in his hands—an interpretation which makes sense, is coherent and throws light upon every element of the dream's content.

For the same dream may perhaps have another interpretation as well, an 'over-interpretation', which has escaped him. It is, indeed, not easy to form any conception of the abundance of the unconscious trains of thought, all striving to find expression, which are active in our minds. Nor is it easy to credit the skill shown by the dream-work in always hitting upon forms of expression that can bear several meanings—like the Little Tailor in the fairy story who hit seven flies at a blow. My readers will always be inclined to accuse me of introducing an unnecessary amount of ingenuity into my interpretations; but actual experience would teach them better. [See p. 297 f. n.]

On the other hand,² I cannot confirm the opinion, first stated

[*PEP*] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 527*

¹ [*The French physiologist (1813-78).*]

² [*This paragraph was added in 1919.*]

523

by Silberer [e.g. 1914, Part II, Section 5], that all dreams (or many dreams, or certain classes of dreams) require two different interpretations, which are even stated to bear a fixed relation to each other. One of these interpretations, which Silberer calls the 'psycho-analytic' one, is said to give the dream some meaning or other, usually of an infantile-sexual kind; the other and more important interpretation, to which he gives the name of 'anagogic', is said to reveal the more serious thoughts, often of profound import, which the dream-work has taken as its material. Silberer has not given evidence in support of this opinion by reporting a series of dreams analysed in the two directions. And I must object that the alleged fact is nonexistent. In spite of what he says, the majority of dreams require no 'over-interpretation' and, more particularly, are unsusceptible to an anagogic interpretation. As in the case of many other theories put forward in recent years, it is impossible to overlook the fact that Silberer's views are influenced to some extent by a purpose which seeks to disguise the fundamental circumstances in which dreams are formed and to divert interest from their instinctual roots. In a certain number of cases I have been able to confirm Silberer's statements. Analysis showed that in such cases the dream-work found itself faced with the problem of transforming into a dream a series of highly abstract thoughts from waking life which were incapable of being given any direct representation. It endeavoured to solve the problem by getting hold of another group of intellectual material, somewhat loosely related (often in a manner which might be described as 'allegorical') to the abstract thoughts, and at the same time capable of being represented with

fewer difficulties. The *abstract* interpretation of a dream that has arisen in this way is given by the dreamer without any difficulty; the *correct* interpretation of the material that has been interpolated must be looked for by the technical methods which are now familiar to us.¹

The question whether it is possible to interpret *every* dream must be answered in the negative.² It must not be forgotten

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 528*

¹ *Freud also discussed this point in a long footnote in his paper 'A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams' (1917d) and towards the end of his 'Dreams and Telepathy' (1922a).]*

² *[This question is considered at greater length in Freud, 1925i, Section A.]*

524

that in interpreting a dream we are opposed by the psychical forces which were responsible for its distortion. It is thus a question of relative strength whether our intellectual interest, our capacity for self-discipline, our psychological knowledge and our practice in interpreting dreams enable us to master our internal resistances. It is always possible to go *some* distance: far enough, at all events, to convince ourselves that the dream is a structure with a meaning, and as a rule far enough to get a glimpse of what that meaning is. Quite often an immediately succeeding dream allows us to confirm and carry further the interpretation we have tentatively adopted for its predecessor. A whole series of dreams, continuing over a period of weeks or months, is often based upon common ground and must accordingly be interpreted in connection with one another. [Cf. pp. 193 and 362.] In the case of two consecutive dreams it can often be observed that one takes as its central point something that is only on the periphery of the other and *vice versa*, so that their interpretations too are mutually complementary. I have already given instances which show that different dreams dreamt on the same night are, as a quite general rule, to be treated in their interpretation as a single whole. [See p. 333 f.]

There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown. [Cf. p. 111 n.] The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot, from the nature of things, have any definite endings;

they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium.

But we must return to the facts concerning the forgetting of dreams, for we have failed to draw one important conclusion from them. We have seen that waking life shows an unmistakable inclination to forget any dream that has been formed in the course of the night—whether as a whole directly after waking, or bit by bit in the course of the day; and we have

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 529*
525

recognized that the agent chiefly responsible for this forgetting is the mental resistance to the dream which has already done what it could against it during the night. But if all this is so, the question arises how it comes about that a dream can be formed at all in the face of this resistance. Let us take the most extreme case, in which waking life has got rid of a dream as though it had never occurred. A consideration of the interplay of psychical forces in this case must lead us to infer that the dream would in fact not have occurred at all if the resistance had been as strong during the night as during the day. We must conclude that during the night the resistance loses some of its power, though we know it does not lose the whole of it, since we have shown the part it plays in the formation of dreams as a distorting agent. But we are driven to suppose that its power may be diminished at night and that this makes the formation of dreams possible. This makes it easy to understand how, having regained its full strength at the moment of waking, it at once proceeds to get rid of what it was obliged to permit while it was weak. Descriptive psychology tells us that the principal *sine qua non* for the formation of dreams is that the mind shall be in a state of sleep; and we are now able to explain this fact: *the state of sleep makes the formation of dreams possible because it reduces the power of the endopsychic censorship.*

It is no doubt tempting to regard this as the only possible inference that can be drawn from the facts of the forgetting of dreams, and to make it the basis for further conclusions as to the conditions of energy prevailing during sleeping and waking. For the moment, however, we will stop at this point. When we have entered a little more deeply into the psychology of dreams we shall find that the factors making possible the formation of dreams can be viewed in another way as well. It may be that the resistance against the dream-thoughts becoming conscious can be evaded without any reduction having taken place in

its power. And it seems a plausible idea that *both* of the two factors favouring the formation of dreams—the reduction and the evasion of the resistance—are simultaneously made possible by the state of sleep. I will break off here, though I shall pick up the argument again presently. [Cf. p. 573 f.]

There is another set of objections to our method of interpreting dreams with which we must now deal. Our procedure

[*PEP*] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 530*
526

consists in abandoning all those purposive ideas which normally govern our reflections, in focussing our attention on a single element of the dream and in then taking note of whatever involuntary thoughts may occur to us in connection with it. We then take the next portion of the dream and repeat the process with *it*. We allow ourselves to be led on by our thoughts regardless of the direction in which they carry us and drift on in this way from one thing to another. But we cherish a confident belief that in the end, without any active intervention on our part, we shall arrive at the dream-thoughts from which the dream originated.

Our critics argue against this along the following lines. There is nothing wonderful in the fact that a single element of the dream should lead us *somewhere*; every idea can be associated with *something*. What *is* remarkable is that such an aimless and arbitrary train of thought should happen to bring us to the dream-thoughts. The probability is that we are deceiving ourselves. We follow a chain of associations from one element, till, for one reason or another, it seems to break off. If we then take up a second element, it is only to be expected that the originally unrestricted character of our associations will be narrowed. For we still have the earlier chain of thoughts in our memory, and for that reason, in analysing the second dream-idea, we are more likely to hit upon associations which have something in common with associations from the first chain. We then delude ourselves into thinking that we have discovered a thought which is a connecting point between two elements of the dream. Since we give ourselves complete liberty to connect thoughts as we please and since in fact the only transitions from one idea to another which we exclude are those which operate in normal thinking, we shall find no difficulty in the long run in concocting out of a number of 'intermediate thoughts' something which we describe as the dream-thoughts and which—though without any guarantee, since we have no other knowledge of what the dream-thoughts are—we allege to be the *psychical substitute* for the dream. But the whole thing is completely

arbitrary; we are merely exploiting chance connections in a manner which gives an effect of ingenuity. In this way anyone who cares to take such useless pains can worry out any interpretation he pleases from any dream.

If we were in fact met by objections such as these, we might

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 531*
527

defend ourselves by appealing to the impression made by our interpretations, to the surprising connections with other elements of the dream which emerge in the course of our pursuing a single one of its ideas, and to the improbability that anything which gives such an exhaustive account of the dream could have been arrived at except by following up psychological connections which had already been laid down. We might also point out in our defence that our procedure in interpreting dreams is identical with the procedure by which we resolve hysterical symptoms; and there the correctness of our method is warranted by the coincident emergence and disappearance of the symptoms, or, to use a simile, the assertions made in the text are borne out by the accompanying illustrations. But we have no reason for evading the problem of how it is possible to reach a pre-existing goal by following the drift of an arbitrary and purposeless chain of thoughts; since, though we may not be able to solve the problem, we can *completely cut* the ground from under it.

For it is demonstrably untrue that we are being carried along a purposeless stream of ideas when, in the process of interpreting a dream, we abandon reflection and allow involuntary ideas to emerge. It can be shown that all that we can ever get rid of are purposive ideas that are *known* to us; as soon as we have done this, *unknown*—or, as we inaccurately say, 'unconscious'—purposive ideas take charge and thereafter determine the course of the involuntary ideas. No influence that we can bring to bear upon our mental processes can ever enable us to think without purposive ideas; nor am I aware of any states of psychological confusion which can do so.¹ Psychiatrists have been

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 532*

¹[Footnote added 1914:] *It was not until later that my attention was drawn to the fact that Eduard von Hartmann takes the same view on this important matter of psychology: 'In discussing the part played by the unconscious in artistic creation, Eduard von Hartmann (1890, 1, Section B, Chapter V) made a clear statement of the law in accordance with which the association of ideas is governed by*

unconscious purposive ideas, though he was unaware of the scope of the law. He set out to prove that "every combination of sensuous presentations, when it is not left purely to chance, but is led to a definite end, requires the help of the Unconscious" (Standard Ed., 1, 245; English translation, 1884, 1, 283), and that the part played by conscious interest is to stimulate the unconscious to select the most appropriate idea among the countless possible ones. It is the unconscious which makes the appropriate selection of a purpose for the interest and this "holds good of the association of ideas in abstract thinking as well as in sensuous imagining and artistic combination" and in the production of jokes [Standard Ed., 1, 247; English translation, 1, 285 f.]. For this reason a limitation of the association of ideas to an exciting idea and an excited idea (in the sense of a pure association psychology) cannot be upheld. Such a limitation could be justified "only if there are conditions in human life in which man is free not only from every conscious purpose, but also from the sway or co-operation of every unconscious interest, every passing mood. This is, however, a condition hardly ever occurring, for even if one in appearance completely abandons his train of thought to accident, or if one abandons oneself entirely to the involuntary dreams of fancy, yet always other leading interests, dominant feelings and moods prevail at one time rather than at another, and these will always exert an influence on the association of ideas." [Standard Ed., 1, 246; English translation, 1, 284.] "In semi-conscious dreams always only such ideas as correspond to the main [unconscious] interest of the moment occur." [Loc. cit.] The emphasis thus laid upon the influence of feelings and moods on the free sequence of thoughts makes it possible to justify the methodological procedure of psycho-analysis completely from the standpoint of Hartmann's psychology.' (Pohorilles, 1913.)—Du Prel (1885, 107) refers to the fact that after we have vainly tried to recall a name, it often comes into our heads again suddenly and without any warning. He concludes from this that unconscious but none the less purposeful thinking has taken place and that its result has suddenly entered consciousness

528

far too ready in this respect to abandon their belief in the connectedness of psychological processes. I know for a fact that trains of thought without purposive ideas no more occur in hysteria and paranoia than they do in the formation or resolution of dreams. It may be that they do not occur in any of the endogenous psychological disorders. Even the deliria of confusional states may have a meaning, if we are to accept Leuret's brilliant suggestion [1834, 131] that they are only unintelligible to us owing to the gaps in them. I myself have formed the same opinion when I have had the opportunity of observing them. Deliria are the work of a censorship which no longer takes the trouble to conceal its operation; instead of collaborating in producing a new version that shall be unobjectionable, it ruthlessly deletes whatever it disapproves of, so

that what remains becomes quite disconnected. This censorship acts exactly like the censorship of newspapers at the Russian frontier, which allows foreign journals to fall into the hands of the readers whom it is its business to protect only after a quantity of passages have been blacked out.

It may be that free play of ideas with a fortuitous chain of

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 533*
529

associations is to be found in destructive organic cerebral processes; what is regarded as such in the psychoneuroses can always be explained as an effect of the censorship's influence upon a train of thought which has been pushed into the foreground by purposive ideas that have remained hidden.¹ It has been regarded as an unfailing sign of an association being uninfluenced by purposive ideas if the associations (or images) in question seem to be interrelated in what is described as a 'superficial' manner—by assonance, verbal ambiguity, temporal coincidence without connection in meaning, or by any association of the kind that we allow in jokes or in play upon words. This characteristic is present in the chains of thought which lead from the elements of a dream to the intermediate thoughts and from these to the dream-thoughts proper; we have seen instances of this—not without astonishment—in many dream analyses. No connection was too loose, no joke too bad, to serve as a bridge from one thought to another. But the true explanation of this easy-going state of things is soon found. *Whenever one psychological element is linked with another by an objectionable or superficial association, there is also a legitimate and deeper link between them which is subjected to the resistance of the censorship.*²

The real reason for the prevalence of superficial associations is not the abandonment of purposive ideas but the pressure of the censorship. Superficial associations replace deep ones if the censorship makes the normal connecting paths impassable. We may picture, by way of analogy, a mountain region, where some general interruption of traffic (owing to floods, for instance) has blocked the main, major roads, but where communications are still maintained over inconvenient and steep footpaths normally used only by the hunter.

Two cases may here be distinguished, though in essence they are the same. In the first of these, the censorship is directed only against the *connection* between two thoughts, which are unobjectionable separately. If so, the two thoughts will enter consciousness in succession; the connection between them will

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 535*

¹[Footnote added 1909:] *This assertion has received striking confirmation from G. G. Jung's analyses in cases of dementia praecox. (Jung, 1907.)*

²[Everywhere else in this work Freud speaks of 'the censorship of the resistance' A later clarification of the relation between the concepts of 'resistance' and 'censorship' will be found in Lecture XXIX of the *New Introductory Lectures* (1933a).]

530

remain concealed, but, instead, a superficial link between them will occur to us, of which we should otherwise never have thought. This link is usually attached to some part of the complex of ideas quite other than that on which the suppressed and essential connection is based. The second case is where the two thoughts are in themselves subject to censorship on account of their content. If so, neither of them appears in its true shape but only in a modified one which replaces it; and the two replacing thoughts are chosen in such a way that they have a superficial association that repeats the essential connection which relates the two thoughts that have been replaced. *In both these cases the pressure of the censorship has resulted in a displacement from a normal and serious association to a superficial and apparently absurd one.*

Since we are aware that displacements of this kind occur, we have no hesitation when we are interpreting dreams in relying upon superficial associations as much as upon others.¹

In the psycho-analysis of neuroses the fullest use is made of these two theorems—that, when conscious purposive ideas are abandoned, concealed purposive ideas assume control of the current of ideas, and that superficial associations are only substitutes by displacement for suppressed deeper ones. Indeed, these theorems have become basic pillars of psycho-analytic technique. When I instruct a patient to abandon reflection of any kind and to tell me whatever comes into his head, I am relying firmly on the presumption that he will not be able to abandon the purposive ideas inherent in the treatment and I feel justified in inferring that what seem to be the most innocent and arbitrary things which he tells me are in fact related to his illness. There is another purposive idea of which the patient

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 536*

¹*The same considerations apply equally, of course, to cases in which the superficial associations appear openly in the content of the dream, as, for instance, in the two dreams of Maury's quoted above on page 59. (Pelérinage — Pelletier — pelle; kilomètre — kilogramme — Gilolo — Lobelia —Lopez—lotto.) My work with neurotic patients has taught me the nature of the memories of which this is a favourite method of representation. They are occasions on which the subject has turned over the pages of encyclopaedias or dictionaries in order (like most people at the inquisitive age of puberty) to satisfy their craving for an answer to the riddles of sex.—[An example of this will be found in the analysis of 'Dora's' second dream (Freud, 1905e, Section III).]*

531

has no suspicion—one relating to myself. The full estimate of the importance of these two theorems, as well as more detailed information about them, fall within the province of an account of the technique of psycho-analysis. Here, then, we have reached one of the frontier posts at which, in accordance with our programme, we must drop the subject of dream-interpretation.¹

There is one true conclusion that we may glean from these objections, namely that we need not suppose that every association that occurs during the work of interpretation had a place in the dream-work during the night. [Cf. pp. 280 and 311.] It is true that in carrying out the interpretation in the waking state we follow a path which leads back from the elements of the dream to the dream-thoughts and that the dream-work followed one in the contrary direction. But it is highly improbable that these paths are passable both ways. It appears, rather, that in the daytime we drive shafts which follow along fresh chains of thought and that these shafts make contact with the intermediate thoughts and the dream-thoughts now at one point and now at another. We can see how in this manner fresh daytime material inserts itself into the interpretative chains. It is probable, too, that the increase in resistance that has set in since the night makes new and more devious détours necessary. The number and nature of the collaterals [see p. 311*n*.] that we spin in this way during the day is of no psychological importance whatever, so long as they lead us to the dream-thoughts of which we are in search.

[*PEP*] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 537*

¹*[Footnote added 1909:] These two theorems, which sounded most implausible at the time they were made, have since been experimentally employed and confirmed by Jung and his pupils in their studies in word-association. [Jung, 1906.—A most interesting argument on the allied topic of the validity of chains of*

association starting from numbers selected 'by chance' (see above, p. 514 f.) is developed by Freud in the long footnote added in 1920 to Chapter XII (A, No. 7) of The Psycho-pathology of Everyday Life (1901b).]

532

Regression

Having now repelled the objections that have been raised against us, or having at least indicated where our defensive weapons lie, we must no longer postpone the task of setting about the psychological investigations for which we have so long been arming ourselves. Let us summarize the principal findings of our enquiry so far as it has gone. Dreams are psychical acts of as much Significance as any others; their motive force is in every instance a wish seeking fulfilment; the fact of their not being recognizable as wishes and their many peculiarities and absurdities are due to the influence of the psychical censorship to which they have been subjected during the process of their formation; apart from the necessity of evading this censorship, other factors which have contributed to their formation are a necessity for the condensation of their psychical material, a regard for the possibility of its being represented in sensory images and—though not invariably—a demand that the structure of the dream shall have a rational and intelligible exterior. Each of these propositions opens a way to fresh psychological postulates and speculations; the mutual relation between the wish which is the dream's motive force and the four conditions to which the dream's formation is subject, as well as the inter-relations between the latter, require to be investigated; and the place of dreams in the nexus of mental life has to be assigned.

It was with a view to reminding us of the problems which have still to be solved that I opened the present chapter with an account of a dream. There was no difficulty in interpreting that dream—the dream of the burning child—even though its interpretation was not given fully in our sense. I raised the question of why the dreamer dreamt it at all instead of waking up, and recognized that one of his motives was a wish to represent his child as still alive. Our further discussions will show us that yet another wish also played a part. [See below, pp. 570-1.] Thus it was in the first instance for the sake of

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 538

533

fulfilling a wish that the process of thought during sleep was transformed into a dream.

If we eliminate the wish-fulfilment, we shall see that only one feature is left to distinguish the two forms of psychical event. The dream-thought would have run: 'I see a glare coming from the room where the dead body is lying. Perhaps a candle has fallen over and my child may be burning.' The dream repeated these reflections unaltered, but it represented them in a situation which was actually present and which could be perceived through the senses like a waking experience. Here we have the most general and the most striking psychological characteristic of the process of dreaming: a thought, and as a rule a thought of something that is wished, is objectified in the dream, is represented as a scene, or, as it seems to us, is experienced.

How, then, are we to explain this characteristic peculiarity of the dream-work, or, to put the question more modestly, how are we to find a place for it in the nexus of psychical processes?

If we look into the matter more closely we shall observe that two almost independent features stand out as characteristic of the form taken by this dream. One is the fact that the thought is represented as an immediate situation with the 'perhaps' omitted, and the other is the fact that the thought is transformed into visual images and speech.

In this particular dream the change made in the thoughts by the conversion of the expectation expressed by them into the present tense may not seem particularly striking. This is because of what can only be described as the unusually subordinate part played in this dream by wish-fulfilment. Consider instead another one, in which the dream-wish was not detached from the waking thoughts that were carried over into sleep—for instance, the dream of Irma's injection [p. 106 ff.]. There the dream-thought that was represented was in the optative: 'If only Otto were responsible for Irma's illness!' The dream repressed the optative and replaced it by a straightforward present: 'Yes, Otto is responsible for Irma's illness.' This, then, is the first of the transformations which is brought about in the dream-thoughts even by a distortionless dream. We need not linger long over this first peculiarity of dreams. We can deal with it by drawing attention to conscious phantasies—to day-dreams—which treat their ideational content in just the same manner.

*[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 538
534*

While Daudet's Monsieur Joyeuse¹ was wandering, out of work, through the streets of Paris (though his daughters believed that he had a job and was sitting

in an office), he was dreaming of developments that might bring him influential help and lead to his finding employment—and he was dreaming in the present tense. Thus dreams make use of the present tense in the same manner and by the same right as day-dreams. The present tense is the one in which wishes are represented as fulfilled.

But dreams differ from day-dreams in their second characteristic: namely, in the fact of their ideational content being transformed from thoughts into sensory images, to which belief is attached and which appear to be experienced. I must add at once that not every dream exhibits this transformation from idea into sensory image. There are dreams which consist only of thoughts but which cannot on that account be denied the essential nature of dreams. My 'Autodidasker' dream—'The day-time phantasy with Professor N.'— [p. 298 ff.] was of that kind; it included scarcely more sensory elements than if I had thought its content in the daytime. And in every dream of any considerable length there are elements which have not, like the rest, been given a sensory form, but which are simply thought or known, in the kind of way in which we are accustomed to think or know things in waking life. It should also be remembered here that it is not only in dreams that such transformations of ideas into sensory images occur: they are also found in hallucinations and visions, which, may appear as independent entities, so to say, in health or as symptoms in the psychoneuroses. In short, the relation which we are examining now is not in any respect an exclusive one. Nevertheless it remains true that this characteristic of dreams, when it is present, strikes us as being their most notable one; so that it would be impossible for us to imagine the dream-world without it. But in order to arrive at an understanding of it we must embark upon a discussion that will take us far afield.

As the starting point for our enquiry, I should like to pick out one from among many remarks made upon the theory of dreaming by those who have written on the subject. In the course of a

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 540*

¹ [In *Le Nabab* (cf. p. 491). A slip made by Freud over this name in his first draft of this sentence is discussed by him in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901b), Chapter VII, towards the end of Section A.]

535

short discussion on the topic of dreams, the great Fechner (1889, 2, 520-1) puts forward the idea that *the scene of action of dreams is different from that of waking*

ideational life. [Cf. above, p. 48.] This is the only hypothesis that makes the special peculiarities of dream-life intelligible.¹

What is presented to us in these words is the idea of *psychical locality*. I shall entirely disregard the fact that the mental apparatus with which we are here concerned is also known to us in the form of an anatomical preparation, and I shall carefully avoid the temptation to determine psychical locality in any anatomical fashion. I shall remain upon psychological ground, and I propose simply to follow the suggestion that we should picture the instrument which carries out our mental functions as resembling a compound microscope or a photographic apparatus, or something of the kind. On that basis, psychical locality will correspond to a point inside the apparatus at which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being. In the microscope and telescope, as we know, these occur in part at ideal points, regions in which no tangible component of the apparatus is situated. I see no necessity to apologize for the imperfections of this or of any similar imagery. Analogies of this kind are only intended to assist us in our attempt to make the complications of mental functioning intelligible by dissecting the function and assigning its different constituents to different component parts of the apparatus. So far as I know, the experiment has not hitherto been made of using this method of dissection in order to investigate the way in which the mental instrument is put together, and I can see no harm in it. We are justified, in my view, in giving free rein to our speculations so long as we retain the coolness of our judgement and do not mistake the scaffolding for the building. And since at our first approach to something unknown all that we need is the assistance of provisional ideas, I shall give preference in the first instance to hypotheses of the crudest and most concrete description.

Accordingly, we will picture the mental apparatus as a compound instrument, to the components of which we will give the

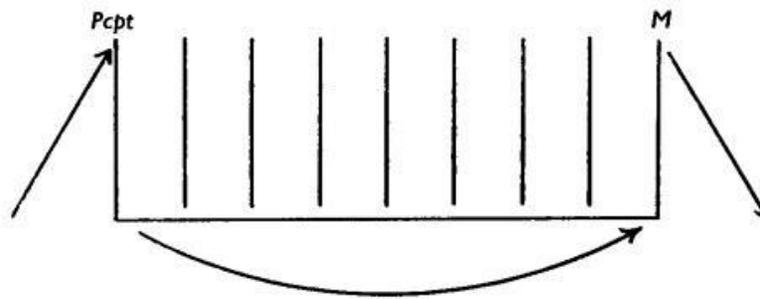
[*PEP*] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 541*

¹[*In a letter to Fliess of February 9, 1898 (Freud, 1950a, Letter 83), Freud writes that this passage in Fechner is the only sensible remark he has found in the literature on dreams.*]

name of 'agencies',¹ or (for the sake of greater clarity) 'systems'. It is to be anticipated, in the next place, that these systems may perhaps stand in a regular spatial relation to one another, in the same kind of way in which the various systems of lenses in a telescope are arranged behind one another.

Strictly speaking, there is no need for the hypothesis that the psychical systems are actually arranged in a *spatial* order. It would be sufficient if a fixed order were established by the fact that in a given psychical process the excitation passes through the systems in a particular *temporal* sequence. In other processes the sequence may perhaps be a different one; that is a possibility that we shall leave open. For the sake of brevity we will in future speak of the components of the apparatus as 'ψ-systems'.

The first thing that strikes us is that this apparatus, compounded of ψ-systems, has a sense or direction. All our psychical activity starts from stimuli (whether internal or external) and ends in innervations.² Accordingly, we shall ascribe a sensory and a motor end to the apparatus. At the sensory end there lies a system which receives perceptions; at the motor end there lies another, which opens the gateway to motor activity. Psychological processes advance in general from the perceptual end to the motor end. Thus the most general schematic picture of the psychical apparatus may be represented thus (Fig. 1):



[^{PEP}] This page can be read in German in *GESAMMELTE WERKE* Vol 2, Page 542

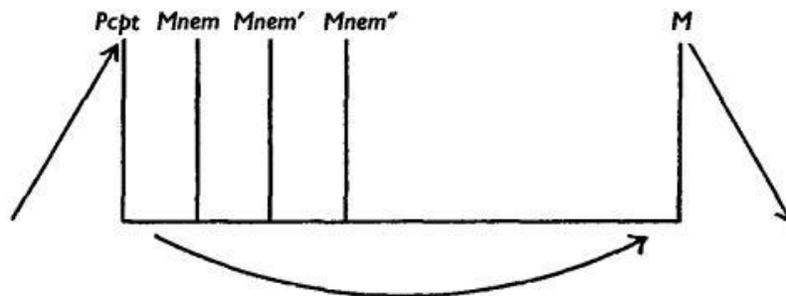
¹[*'Instanzen'*, literally 'instances', in a sense similar to that in which the word occurs in the phrase 'a Court of First Instance'.]

²[*'Innervation'* is a highly ambiguous term. It is very frequently used in a structural sense, to mean the anatomical distribution of nerves in some organism or bodily region. Freud uses it more often (though not invariably) to mean the transmission of energy into a system of nerves, or (as in the present instance) specifically into an efferent system—to indicate, that is to say, a process tending towards discharge.]

This, however, does no more than fulfil a requirement with which we have long been familiar, namely that the psychical apparatus must be constructed like a

reflex apparatus. Reflex processes remain the model of every psychical function.

Next, we have grounds for introducing a first differentiation at the sensory end. A trace is left in our psychical apparatus of the perceptions which impinge upon it. This we may describe as a 'memory-trace'; and to the function relating to it we give the name of 'memory'. If we are in earnest over our plan of attaching psychical processes to systems, memory-traces can only consist in permanent modifications of the elements of the systems. But, as has already been pointed out elsewhere,¹ there are obvious difficulties involved in supposing that one and the same system can accurately retain modifications of its elements and yet remain perpetually open to the reception of fresh occasions for modification. In accordance, therefore, with the principle which governs our experiment, we shall distribute these two functions on to different systems. We shall suppose that a system in the very front of the apparatus receives the perceptual stimuli but retains no trace of them and thus has no memory, while behind it there lies a second system which transforms the momentary excitations of the first system into permanent traces. The schematic picture of our psychical apparatus would then be as follows (Fig. 2):



It is a familiar fact that we retain permanently something more than the mere *content* of the perceptions which impinge

[PEP] This page can be read in German in *GESAMMELTE WERKE* Vol 2, Page 543

¹[By Breuer in a footnote to Section I of his theoretical contributi to Breuer and Freud, 1895, where, among other things, he writes: 'The mirror of a reflecting telescope cannot at the same time be a photographic plate.'][Cf. *Standard Ed.*, 2, 188-9 n., where further references are given.]

upon the system *Pcpt.* Our perceptions are linked with one another in our memory—first and foremost according to simultaneity of occurrence. We speak of this fact as ‘association’. It is clear, then, that, if the *Pcpt.* system has no memory whatever, it cannot retain any associative traces; the separate *Pcpt.* elements would be intolerably obstructed in performing their function if the remnant of an earlier connection were to exercise an influence upon a fresh perception. We must therefore assume the basis of association lies in the mnemonic systems. Association would thus consist in the fact that, as a result of a diminution in resistances and of the laying down of facilitating paths, an excitation is transmitted from a given *Mnem.* element more readily to one *Mnem.* element than to another.

Closer consideration will show the necessity for supposing the existence not of one but of several such *Mnem.* elements, in which one and the same excitation, transmitted by the *Pcpt.* elements, leaves a variety of different permanent records. The first of these *Mnem.* systems will naturally contain the record of association in respect to *simultaneity in time*; while the same perceptual material will be arranged in the later systems in respect to other kinds of coincidence, so that one of these later systems, for instance, will record relations of similarity, and so on with the others. It would of course be a waste of time to try to put the psychical significance of a system of this kind into words. Its character would lie in the intimate details of its relations to the different elements of the raw material of memory, that is—if we may hint at a theory of a more radical kind—in the degrees of conductive resistance which it offered to the passage of excitation from those elements.

At this point I will interpolate a remark of a general nature which may perhaps have important implications. It is the *Pcpt.* system, which is without the capacity to retain modifications and is thus without memory, that provides our consciousness with the whole multiplicity of sensory qualities. On the other hand, our memories—not excepting those which are most deeply stamped on our minds—are in themselves unconscious. They can be made conscious; but there can be no doubt that they can produce all their effects while in an unconscious condition. What we describe as our ‘character’ is based on the memory-traces of our impressions; and, moreover, the impressions which have had the greatest effect on us—those of our

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 544*
539

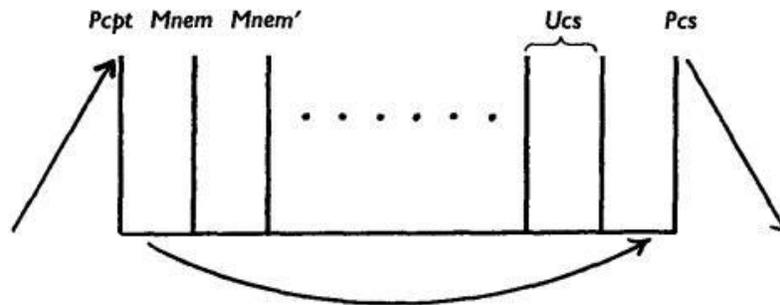
earliest youth—are precisely the ones which scarcely ever become conscious. But if memories become conscious once more, they exhibit no sensory quality or a very slight one in comparison with perceptions. A most promising light would be thrown on the conditions governing the excitation of neurones if it could be confirmed that *in the ψ -systems memory and the quality that characterizes consciousness are mutually exclusive.*¹

The assumptions we have so far put forward as to the construction of the psychical apparatus at its sensory end have been made without reference to dreams or to the psychological information that we have been able to infer from them. Evidence afforded by dreams will, however, help us towards understanding another portion of the apparatus. We have seen [see p. 143 ff.] that we were only able to explain the formation of dreams by venturing upon the hypothesis of there being two psychical agencies, one of which submitted the activity of the other to a criticism which involved its exclusion from consciousness. The critical agency, we concluded, stands in a closer relation to consciousness than the agency criticized: it stands like a screen between the latter and consciousness. Further, we found reasons [p. 489] for identifying the critical agency with the agency which directs our waking life and determines our voluntary, conscious actions. If, in accordance with our assumptions, we replace these agencies by systems, then our last conclusion must lead us to locate the critical system at the motor end of the apparatus. We will now introduce the two systems

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 545*

¹[Footnote added 1925:] *I have since suggested that consciousness actually arises instead of the memory-trace. See my 'Note upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad"' (1925a). [Cf. also Chapter IV of Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920g), where the same point is made.—The whole of the present discussion on memory will be made more intelligible by a study of these two passages from Freud's later writings. But still more light is thrown on it by some of his earlier reflections on the subject revealed in the Fliess correspondence (Freud, 1950a). See, for instance, Section 3 of Part I of the 'Project for a Scientific Psychology' (written in the autumn of 1895) and Letter 52 (written on December 6, 1896). This letter, incidentally, contains what is evidently an early version of the 'schematic picture' represented above as well as the first appearance of the abbreviations by which the various systems are here distinguished. The equivalent English symbols are self-explanatory: 'Cs.' for the 'conscious' system, 'Pcs.' for the 'preconscious', 'Ucs.' for the 'unconscious', 'Pcpt.' for the 'perceptual' and 'Mnem.' for the 'mnemic' systems.]*

into our schematic picture and give them names to express their relation to consciousness (Fig. 3):



We will describe the last of the systems at the motor end as 'the preconscious', to indicate that the excitatory processes occurring in it can enter consciousness without further impediment provided that certain other conditions are fulfilled: for instance, that they reach a certain degree of intensity, that the function which can only be described as 'attention' is distributed in a particular way [see p. 593], and so on. This is at the same time the system which holds the key to voluntary movement. We will describe the system that lies behind it as 'the unconscious', because it has no access to consciousness *except via the preconscious*, in passing through which its excitatory process is obliged to submit to modifications.¹

In which of these systems, then, are we to locate the impetus to the construction of dreams? For simplicity's sake, in the system *Ucs*. It is true that in the course of our future discussion we shall learn that this is not entirely accurate, and that the process of forming dreams is obliged to attach itself to dream-thoughts belonging to the preconscious system [p. 562]. But when we consider the dream-wish, we shall find that the motive force for producing dreams is supplied by the *Ucs*. [p. 561]; and

[*PEP*] This page can be read in German in *GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 546*

¹[Footnote added 1919:] If we attempted to proceed further with this schematic picture, in which the systems are set out in linear succession, we should have to reckon with the fact that the system next beyond the *Pcs.* is the one to which consciousness must be ascribed—in other words, that *Pcpt.* = *Cs.* [See below, p. 615 ff. For a fuller discussion of this see Freud, 1917d.—Freud's later 'schematic

picture' of the mind, first given in The Ego and the Id (1923b), Chapter II, and repeated (with some modifications) in the New Introductory Lectures (1933a), Lecture XXXI, lays more stress on structure than on function.]

541

owing to this latter factor we shall take the unconscious system as the starting-point of dream-formation. Like all other thought-structures, this dream-instigator will make an effort to advance into the *Pcs.* and from there to obtain access to consciousness.

Experience shows us that this path leading through the pre-conscious to consciousness is barred to the dream-thoughts during the daytime by the censorship imposed by resistance. During the night they are able to obtain access to consciousness; but the question arises as to how they do so and thanks to what modification. If what enabled the dream-thoughts to achieve this were the fact that at night there is a lowering of the resistance which guards the frontier between the unconscious and the preconscious, we should have dreams which were in the nature of ideas and which were without the hallucinatory quality in which we are at the moment interested. Thus the lowering of the censorship between the two systems *Ucs.* and *Pcs.* can only explain dreams formed like 'Autodidasker' and not dreams like that of the burning child which we took as the starting-point of our investigations.

The only way in which we can describe what happens in hallucinatory dreams is by saying that the excitation moves in a *retrogressive* direction. Instead of being transmitted towards the *motor* end of the apparatus it moves towards the *sensory* end and finally reaches the perceptual system. If we describe as 'progressive' the direction taken by psychical processes arising from the unconscious during waking life, then we may speak of dreams as having a 'regressive' character.¹

This regression, then, is undoubtedly one of the psychological characteristics of the process of dreaming; but we must remember that it does not occur only in dreams. Intentional

[*PEP*] This page can be read in German in *GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 547*

¹[Footnote added 1914:] *The first hint at the factor of regression is to be found as far back as in Albertus Magnus [the thirteenth century Scholastic writer]. The 'imaginatio', he tells us, constructs dreams out of the stored-up images of sensory objects; and the process is carried out in a reverse direction to that in waking life. (Quoted by Diepgen, 1912, 14.)—Hobbes writes in the Leviathan*

(1651, Pt. I, Chapter 2): 'In sum, our dreams are the reverse of our waking imaginations, the motion, when we are awake, beginning at one end, and when we dream at another.' (Quoted by Havelock Ellis, 1911, 109.)—[Breuer, in Section I of Chapter III of *Breuer and Freud, 1895*, speaks (in connection with hallucinations) of 'a "retrogressive" excitation, emanating from the organ of memory, and acting upon the perceptual apparatus by means of ideas'.]

542

recollection and other constituent processes of our normal thinking involve a retrogressive movement in the psychical apparatus from a complex ideational act back to the raw material of the memory-traces underlying it. In the waking state, however, this backward movement never extends beyond the mnemonic images; it does not succeed in producing a hallucinatory revival of the *perceptual* images. Why is it otherwise in dreams? When we were considering the work of condensation in dreams we were driven to suppose that the intensities attaching to ideas can be completely transferred by the dream-work from one idea to another [p. 330]. It is probably this alteration in the normal psychical procedure which makes possible the cathexis of the system *Pcpt.* in the reverse direction, starting from thoughts, to the pitch of complete sensory vividness.

We must not delude ourselves into exaggerating the importance of these considerations. We have done no more than give a name to an inexplicable phenomenon. We call it 'regression' when in a dream an idea is turned back into the sensory image from which it was originally derived. But even this step requires justification. What is the point of this nomenclature if it teaches us nothing new? I believe the name 'regression' is of help to us in so far as it connects a fact that was already known to us with our schematic picture, in which the mental apparatus was given a sense or direction. And it is at this point that that picture begins to repay us for having constructed it. For an examination of it, without any further reflection, reveals a further characteristic of dream-formation. If we regard the process of dreaming as a regression occurring in our hypothetical mental apparatus, we at once arrive at the explanation of the empirically established fact that all the logical relations belonging to the dream-thoughts disappear during the dream-activity or can only find expression with difficulty [p. 312]. According to our schematic picture, these relations are contained not in the *first Mnem.* systems but in *later* ones; and in case of regression they would necessarily lose any means of expression except in perceptual images. *In regression the fabric of the dream-thoughts is resolved into its raw material.*

What modification is it that renders possible a regression which cannot occur in daytime? We must be content with some conjectures on this point. No doubt it is a question of changes in the cathexes of energy attaching to the different systems,

[*PEP*] This page can be read in German in *GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 548*
543

changes which increase or diminish the facility with which those systems can be passed through by the excitatory process. But in any apparatus of this kind the same results upon the passage of excitations might be produced in more than one way. Our first thoughts will of course be of the state of sleep and the changes in cathexis which it brings about at the sensory end of the apparatus. During the day there is a continuous current from the *Pcpt.* ψ -system flowing in the direction of motor activity; but this current ceases at night and could no longer form an obstacle to a current of excitation flowing in the opposite sense. Here we seem to have the 'shutting-out of the external world', which some authorities regard as the theoretical explanation of the psychological characteristics of dreams. (See p. 51.)

In explaining regression in dreams, however, we must bear in mind the regressions which also occur in pathological waking states; and here the explanation just given leaves us in the lurch. For in those cases regression occurs in spite of a sensory current flowing without interruption in a forward direction. My explanation of hallucinations in hysteria and paranoia and of visions in mentally normal subjects is that they are in fact regressions—that is, thoughts transformed into images—but that the only thoughts that undergo this transformation are those which are intimately linked with memories that have been suppressed or have remained unconscious.

For instance, one of my youngest hysterical patients, a twelve-year-old boy, was prevented from falling asleep by '*green faces with red eyes*' which terrified him. The source of this phenomenon was a suppressed, though at one time conscious, memory of a boy whom he had often seen four years earlier. This boy had presented him with an alarming picture of the consequences of bad habits in children, including masturbation—a habit with which my patient was now reproaching himself in retrospect. His mother had pointed out at the time that the ill-behaved boy had a *greenish face* and *red* (i.e. red-rimmed) *eyes*. Here was the origin of his bogey, whose only purpose, incidentally, was to remind him of another of his mother's predictions—that boys of that sort grow into idiots, can learn nothing at school and die young. My little patient had fulfilled

one part of the prophecy, for he was making no progress at his school, and, as was shown from his account of the involuntary thoughts that occurred to him, he was terrified of the other part.

[*PEP*] This page can be read in German in *GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 549*

544

I may add that after a short time the treatment resulted in his being able to sleep, in his nervousness disappearing and his being awarded a mark of distinction at the end of his school-year.

In the same connection I will give the explanation of a vision that was described to me by another hysterical patient (a woman of forty) as having happened before she fell ill. One morning she opened her eyes and saw her brother in the room, though, as she knew, he was in fact in an insane asylum. Her small son was sleeping in the bed beside her. To save the child from having a *fright* and *falling into convulsions* when he saw his *uncle*, she pulled the *sheet* over his face, whereupon the apparition vanished. This vision was a modified version of a memory from the lady's childhood; and, though it was conscious, it was intimately related to all the unconscious material in her mind. Her nurse had told her that her mother (who had died very young, when my patient was only eighteen months old) had suffered from epileptic or hysterical *convulsions*, which went back to a *fright* caused by her brother (my patient's *uncle*) appearing to her disguised as a ghost with a *sheet* over his head. Thus the vision contained the same elements as the memory: the brother's appearance, the sheet, the fright and its results. But the elements had been arranged in a different context and transferred on to other figures. The obvious motive of the vision, or of the thoughts which it replaced, was her concern lest her little boy might follow in the footsteps of his uncle, whom he greatly resembled physically.

The two instances that I have quoted are neither of them entirely devoid of connection with the state of sleep and for that reason are perhaps not well chosen for what I want them to prove. I will therefore refer the reader to my analysis of a woman suffering from hallucinatory paranoia (Freud, 1896b [Part III]) as well as to the findings in my still unpublished studies on the psychology of the psychoneuroses,¹ for evidence that in such instances of the regressive transformation of thoughts we must not overlook the influence of memories, mostly from childhood, which have been suppressed or have remained unconscious. The thoughts which are connected with a memory of this kind and which are forbidden expression by the censorship are, as it were, attracted

by the memory into regression as being the form of representation in which the memory itself

[PEP] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 550*

¹[*Never published under any such title.*]

545

is couched. I may also recall that one of the facts arrived at in the *Studies on Hysteria* [Breuer and Freud, 1895—e.g. in Breuer's first case history] was that when it was possible to bring infantile scenes (whether they were memories or phantasies) into consciousness, they were seen like hallucinations and lost that characteristic only in the process of being reported. It is moreover a familiar observation that, even in those whose memory is not normally of a visual type, the earliest recollections of childhood retain far into life the quality of sensory vividness.

If we now bear in mind how great a part is played in the dream-thoughts by infantile experiences or by phantasies based upon them, how frequently portions of them re-emerge in the dream-content and how often the dream-wishes themselves are derived from them, we cannot dismiss the probability that in dreams too the transformation of thoughts into visual images may be in part the result of the attraction which memories couched in visual form and eager for revival bring to bear upon thoughts cut off from consciousness and struggling to find expression. On this view a dream might be described as *a substitute for an infantile scene modified by being transferred on to a recent experience*. The infantile scene is unable to bring about its own revival and has to be content with returning as a dream.

This indication of the way in which infantile scenes (or their reproductions as phantasies) function in a sense as models for the content of dreams, removes the necessity for one of the hypotheses put forward by Scherner and his followers in regard to internal sources of stimulation. Scherner [1861] supposes that, when dreams exhibit particularly vivid or particularly copious visual elements, there is present a state of 'visual stimulation', that is, of internal excitation in the organ of vision [cf. p. 227]. We need not dispute this hypothesis, but can content ourselves with assuming that this state of excitation applies merely to the *psychical* perceptual system of the visual organ; we may, however, further point out that the state of excitation has been set up by a *memory*, that it is a *revival* of a visual excitation which was originally an immediate one. I cannot produce any good example from my own experience of an *infantile* memory producing this kind of result. My dreams are in general

less rich in sensory elements than I am led to suppose is the case in other people. But in the case of my most vivid and beautiful dream of the last few years I was easily able to trace back the hallucinatory

*[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 551
546*

clarity of the dream's content to the sensory qualities of recent or fairly recent impressions. On p. 463 ff. I recorded a dream in which the deep blue colour of the water, the brown of the smoke coming from the ship's funnels, and the dark brown and red of the buildings left behind a profound impression on me. This dream, if any, should be traceable to a visual stimulus. What was it that had brought my visual organ into this state of stimulation? A recent impression, which attached itself to a number of earlier ones. The colours which I saw were in the first instance those of a box of toy bricks with which, on the day before the dream, my children had put up a fine building and shown it off for my admiration. The big bricks were of the same dark red and the small ones were of the same blue and brown. This was associated with colour impressions from my last travels in Italy: the beautiful blue of the Isonzo and the lagoons and the brown of the Garso.¹ The beauty of the colours in the dream was only a repetition of something seen in my memory.

Let us bring together what we have found out about the peculiar propensity of dreams to recast their ideational content into sensory images. We have not explained this feature of the dream-work, we have not traced it back to any known psychological laws; but we have rather picked it out as something that suggests unknown implications and we have characterized it with the word 'regressive'. We have put forward the view that in all probability this regression, wherever it may occur, is an effect of a resistance opposing the progress of a thought into consciousness along the normal path, and of a simultaneous attraction exercised upon the thought by the presence of memories possessing great sensory force.² In the case of dreams, regression may perhaps be further facilitated by the cessation of the progressive current which streams in during the daytime from the sense organs; in other forms of regression, the absence

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 552

¹*[The limestone plateau behind Trieste.]*

²*[Footnote added 1914:] In any account of the theory of repression it would have to be laid down that a thought becomes repressed as a result of the combined*

influence upon it of two factors. It is pushed from the one side (by the censorship of the Cs.) and pulled from the other (by the Ucs.), in the same kind of way in which people are conveyed to the top of the Great Pyramid. [Added 1919:] Cf. [the opening pages of] my paper on repression (Freud, 1915d).

547

of this accessory factor must be made up for by a greater intensity of the other motives for regression. Nor must we forget to observe that in these pathological cases of regression as well as in dreams the process of transference of energy must differ from what it is in regressions occurring in normal mental life, since in the former cases that process makes possible a complete hallucinatory cathexis of the perceptual systems. What we have described, in our analysis of the dream-work, as 'regard for representability' might be brought into connection with the *selective attraction* exercised by the visually recollected scenes touched upon by the dream-thoughts.

It is further to be remarked¹ that regression plays a no less important part in the theory of the formation of neurotic symptoms than it does in that of dreams. Three kinds of regression are thus to be distinguished: (a) *topographical* regression, in the sense of the schematic picture of the ψ -systems which we have explained above; (b) *temporal* regression, in so far as what is in question is a harking back to older psychical structures; and (c) *formal* regression, where primitive methods of expression and representation take the place of the usual ones. All these three kinds of regression are, however, one at bottom and occur together as a rule; for what is older in time is more primitive in form and in psychical topography lies nearer to the perceptual end. [Gf. Freud, 1917d, where this sentence is qualified.]

Nor can we leave the subject of regression in dreams² without setting down in words a notion by which we have already repeatedly been struck and which will recur with fresh intensity when we have entered more deeply into the study of the psycho-neuroses: namely that dreaming is on the whole an example of regression to the dreamer's earliest condition, a revival of his childhood, of the instinctual impulses which dominated it and of the methods of expression which were then available to him. Behind this childhood of the individual we are promised a picture of a phylogenetic childhood—a picture of the development of the human race, of which the individual's development is in fact an abbreviated recapitulation influenced by the chance circumstances of life. We can guess how much to the

[^{PEP}] *This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 553*

¹[This paragraph was added in 1914.]

²[This paragraph was added in 1919.]

548

point is Nietzsche's assertion that in dreams 'some primaeval relic of humanity is at work which we can now scarcely reach any longer by a direct path'; and we may expect that the analysis of dreams will lead us to a knowledge of man's archaic heritage, of what is psychically innate in him. Dreams and neuroses seem to have preserved more mental antiquities than we could have imagined possible; so that psycho-analysis may claim a high place among the sciences which are concerned with the reconstruction of the earliest and most obscure periods of the beginnings of the human race.

It may well be that this first portion of our psychological study of dreams will leave us with a sense of dissatisfaction. But we can console ourselves with the thought that we have been obliged to build our way out into the dark. If we are not wholly in error, other lines of approach are bound to lead us into much the same region and the time may then come when we shall find ourselves more at home in it.

[^{PEP}]This page can be read in German in *GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page 554*

549