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Lecture XXIX Revision of the Theory of Dreams

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—If, after an interval of more than fifteen years, I have brought you together again to discuss with you what novelties, and what improvements it may be, the intervening time has introduced into psycho-analysis, it is right and fitting from more than one point of view that we should turn our attention first to the position of the theory of dreams. It occupies a special place in the history of psycho-analysis and marks a turning-point; it was with it that analysis took the step from being a psychotherapeutic procedure to being a depth-psychology. Since then, too, the theory of dreams has remained what is most characteristic and peculiar about the young science, something to which there is no counterpart in the rest of our knowledge, a stretch of new country, which has been reclaimed from popular beliefs and mysticism. The strangeness of the assertions it was obliged to put forward has made it play the part of a shibboleth, the use of which decided who could become a follower of psycho-analysis and to whom it remained for ever incomprehensible. I myself found it a sheet-anchor during those difficult times when the unrecognized facts of the neuroses used to confuse my inexperienced judgement. Whenever I began to have doubts of the correctness of my wavering conclusions, the successful transformation of a senseless and muddled dream into a logical and intelligible mental process in the dreamer would renew my confidence of being on the right track.

It is therefore of special interest to us, in the particular instance of the theory of dreams, on the one hand to follow the vicissitudes through which psycho-analysis has passed during this interval, and on the other hand to learn what advances it has made in being understood and appreciated by the contemporary world. I may tell you at once that you will be disappointed in both these directions.

Let us look through the volumes of the *Internationale Zeitschrift für (ärztliche) Psychoanalyse* [*International Journal of (Medical) Psycho-Analysis*], in which, since 1913, the authoritative writings

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in our field of work have been brought together. In the earlier volumes you will find a recurrent sectional heading 'On Dream-Interpretation', containing numerous contributions on various points in the theory of dreams. But the further you go the rarer do these contributions become, and finally the sectional heading disappears completely. The analysts behave as though they had no more to say about dreams, as though there was nothing more to be added to the theory of dreams. But if you ask how much of dream-interpretation has been accepted by outsiders—by the many psychiatrists and psychotherapists who warm their pot of soup at our fire (incidentally without being very grateful for our hospitality), by what are described as educated people, who are in the habit of assimilating the more striking findings of science, by the literary men and by the public at large—the reply gives little cause for satisfaction. A few formulas have become generally familiar, among them some that we have never put forward—such as the thesis that all dreams are of a sexual nature—but really important things like the fundamental distinction between the manifest content of dreams and the latent dream-thoughts, the realization that the wish-fulfilling function of dreams is not contradicted by anxiety-dreams, the impossibility of interpreting a dream unless one has the dreamer's associations to it at one's disposal, and, above all, the discovery that what is essential in dreams is the process of the dream-work—all this still seems about as foreign to general awareness as it was thirty years ago. I am in a position to say this, since in the course of that period I have received innumerable letters whose writers present their dreams for interpretation or ask for information about the nature of dreams and who declare that they have read my *Interpretation of Dreams*, though in every sentence they betray their lack of understanding of our theory of dreams. But all this shall not deter us from once more giving a connected account of what we know about dreams. You will recall that last time we devoted a

whole number of lectures to showing how we came to understand this hitherto unexplained mental phenomenon.¹

Let us suppose, then, that someone—a patient in analysis,

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¹ [Cf. the whole of Part II of *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1916-17).]

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for instance—tells us one of his dreams. We shall assume that in this way he is making us one of the communications to which he has pledged himself by the fact of having started an analytic treatment. It is, to be sure, a communication made by inappropriate means, for dreams are not in themselves social utterances, not a means of giving information. Nor, indeed, do we understand what the dreamer was trying to say to us, and he himself is equally in the dark. And now we have to make a quick decision. On the one hand, the dream may be, as non-analytic doctors assure us, a sign that the dreamer has slept badly, that not every part of his brain has come to rest equally, that some areas of it, under the influence of unknown stimuli, endeavoured to go on working but were only able to do so in a very incomplete fashion. If that is the case, we shall be right to concern ourselves no further with the product of a nocturnal disturbance which has no psychical value: for what could we expect to derive from investigating it that would be of use for our purposes? Or on the other hand—but it is plain that we have from the first decided otherwise. We have—quite arbitrarily, it must be admitted—made the assumption, adopted as a postulate, that even this unintelligible dream must be a fully valid psychical act, with sense and worth, which we can use in analysis like any other communication. Only the outcome of our experiment can show whether we are right. If we succeed in turning the dream into an utterance of value of that kind, we shall evidently have a prospect of learning something new and of receiving communications of a sort which would otherwise be inaccessible to us.

Now, however, the difficulties of our task and the enigmas of our subject rise before our eyes. How do we propose to transform the dream into a normal communication and how do we explain the fact that some of the patient's utterances have assumed a form that is unintelligible both to him and to us?

As you see, Ladies and Gentlemen, this time I am taking the path not of a genetic but of a dogmatic exposition. Our first step is to establish our new attitude to the problem of dreams by introducing two new concepts and names. What has been called the dream we shall describe as the text of the dream or the *manifest* dream, and what we are looking for, what we suspect, so to say, of lying behind the dream, we shall describe as

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the *latent* dream-thoughts. Having done this, we can express our two tasks as follows. We have to transform the manifest dream into the latent one, and to explain how, in the dreamer's mind, the latter has become the former. The first portion is a *practical* task, for which dream-interpretation is responsible; it calls for a technique. The second portion is a *theoretical* task, whose business it is to explain the hypothetical dream-work; and it can only be a theory. Both of them, the technique of dream-interpretation and the theory of the dream-work, have to be newly created.

With which of the two, then, shall we start? With the technique of dream-interpretation, I think; it will present a more concrete appearance and make a more vivid impression on you.

Well then, the patient has told us a dream, which we are to interpret. We have listened passively, without putting our powers of reflection into action.¹ What do we do next? We decide to concern ourselves as little as possible with what we have heard, with the *manifest* dream. Of course this manifest dream exhibits all sorts of characteristics which are not entirely a matter of indifference to us. It may be coherent,

smoothly constructed like a literary composition, or it may be confused to the point of unintelligibility, almost like a delirium; it may contain absurd elements or jokes and apparently witty conclusions; it may seem to the dreamer clear and sharp or obscure and hazy; its pictures may exhibit the complete sensory strength of perceptions or may be shadowy like an indistinct mist; the most diverse characteristics may be present in the same dream, distributed over various portions of it; the dream, finally, may show an indifferent emotional tone or be accompanied by feelings of the strongest joy or distress. You must not suppose that we think nothing of this endless diversity in manifest dreams. We shall come back to it later and we shall find a great deal in it that we can make use of in our interpretations. But for the moment we will disregard it and follow the main road that leads to the interpretation of dreams. That is to say, we ask the dreamer, too, to free himself from the impression of the

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¹ [Some illuminating remarks on reflection will be found, in a similar connection, in Chapter II of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), *Standard Ed.*, **4**, 101-2.]

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manifest dream, to divert his attention from the dream as a whole on to the separate portions of its content and to report to us in succession everything that occurs to him in relation to each of these portions—what associations present themselves to him if he focuses on each of them separately.

That is a curious technique, is it not?—not the usual way of dealing with a communication or utterance. And no doubt you guess that behind this procedure there are assumptions which have not yet been expressly stated. But let us proceed. In what order are we to get the patient to take up the portions of his dream? There are various possibilities open to us. We can simply follow the chronological order in which they appeared in the account of the dream. That is what may be called the strictest, classical method. Or we can direct the dreamer to begin by looking out for the ‘day’s residues’ in the dream; for experience has taught us that almost every dream includes the remains of a memory or an allusion to some event (or often to several events) of the day before the dream, and, if we follow these connections, we often arrive with one blow at the transition from the apparently far remote dream-world to the real life of the patient. Or, again, we may tell him to start with those elements of the dream’s content which strike him by their special clarity and sensory strength; for we know that he will find it particularly easy to get associations to these. It makes no difference by which of these methods we approach the associations we are in search of.¹

And next, we obtain these associations. What they bring us is of the most various kinds: memories from the day before, the ‘dream-day’, and from times long past, reflections, discussions, with arguments for and against, confessions and enquiries. Some of them the patient pours out; when he comes to others he is held up for a time. Most of them show a clear connection to some element of the dream; no wonder, since those elements were their starting-point. But it also sometimes happens that the patient introduces them with these words: ‘This seems to me to have nothing at all to do with the dream, but I tell it you because it occurs to me.’

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¹ [A slightly different list of these alternative methods is given in ‘Remarks on the Theory and Practice of Dream-Interpretation’ (1923c), *Standard Ed.*, **19**, 109.]

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If one listens to these copious associations, one soon notices that they have more in common with the content of the dream than their starting-points alone. They throw a surprising light on all the different parts of the dream, fill in gaps between them, and make their strange juxtapositions intelligible. In the end one is bound to become clear about the relation between them and the dream’s content. The dream is seen to be an abbreviated selection from the associations, a selection made, it is true, according to rules that we have not yet understood: the elements of the dream are like representatives chosen by election from a mass of

people. There can be no doubt that by our technique we have got hold of something for which the dream is a substitute and in which lies the dream's psychical value, but which no longer exhibits its puzzling peculiarities, its strangeness and its confusion.

Let there be no misunderstanding, however. The associations to the dream are not yet the latent dream-thoughts. The latter are contained in the associations like an alkali in the mother-liquor, but yet not quite completely contained in them. On the one hand, the associations give us far more than we need for formulating the latent dream-thoughts—namely all the explanations, transitions, and connections which the patient's intellect is bound to produce in the course of his approach to the dream-thoughts. On the other hand, an association often comes to a stop precisely before the genuine dream-thought: it has only come near to it and has only had contact with it through allusions. At that point we intervene on our own; we fill in the hints, draw undeniable conclusions, and give explicit utterance to what the patient has only touched on in his associations. This sounds as though we allowed our ingenuity and caprice to play with the material put at our disposal by the dreamer and as though we misused it in order to interpret *into* his utterances what cannot be interpreted *from* them. Nor is it easy to show the legitimacy of our procedure in an abstract description of it. But you have only to carry out a dream-analysis yourselves or study a good account of one in our literature and you will be convinced of the cogent manner in which interpretative work like this proceeds.

If in general and primarily we are dependent, in interpreting dreams, on the dreamer's associations, yet in relation to certain

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elements of the dream's content we adopt a quite independent attitude, chiefly because we have to, because as a rule associations fail to materialize in their case. We noticed at an early stage that it is always in connection with the same elements that this happens; they are not very numerous, and repeated experience has taught us that they are to be regarded and interpreted as *symbols* of something else. As contrasted with the other dream-elements, a fixed meaning may be attributed to them, which, however, need not be unambiguous and whose range is determined by special rules with which we are unfamiliar. Since *we* know how to translate these symbols and the dreamer does not, in spite of having used them himself, it may happen that the sense of a dream may at once become clear to us as soon as we have heard the text of the dream, even before we have made any efforts at interpreting it, while it still remains an enigma to the dreamer himself. But I have said so much to you in my earlier lectures about symbolism, our knowledge of it and the problems it poses us, that I need not repeat it to-day.¹

That, then, is our method of interpreting dreams. The first and justifiable question is: 'Can we interpret *all* dreams by its help?'² And the answer is: 'No, not all; but so many that we feel confident in the serviceability and correctness of the procedure.' 'But why not all?' The answer to this has something important to teach us, which at once introduces us into the psychical determinants of the formation of dreams: 'Because the work of interpreting dreams is carried out against a resistance, which varies between trivial dimensions and invincibility (at least so far as the strength of our present methods reaches).' It is impossible during our work to overlook the manifestations of this resistance. At some points the associations are given without hesitation and the first or second idea that occurs to the patient brings an explanation. At other points there is a stoppage and the patient hesitates before bringing out an association, and, if so, we often have to listen to a long chain of ideas before receiving anything that helps us to understand the dream. We are certainly right in thinking that the longer and more roundabout the chain of associations the stronger the

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1 [See *Introductory Lectures (1916-17)*, Lecture X.]

2 [Freud had recently written a special note on 'The Limits to the Possibility of Interpretation' (**1925i**), *Standard Ed.*, **19, 127.**]

resistance. We can detect the same influence at work in the forgetting of dreams. It happens often enough that a patient, despite all his efforts, cannot remember one of his dreams. But after we have been able in the course of a piece of analytic work to get rid of a difficulty which had been disturbing his relation to the analysis, the forgotten dream suddenly re-emerges. Two other observations are also in place here. It very frequently comes about that, to begin with, a portion of a dream is omitted and added afterwards as an addendum. This is to be regarded as an attempt to forget that portion. Experience shows that it is that particular piece which is the most important; there was a greater resistance, we suppose, in the path of communicating it than the other parts of the dream.¹ Furthermore, we often find that a dreamer endeavours to prevent himself from forgetting his dreams by fixing them in writing immediately after waking up. We can tell him that that is no use. For the resistance from which he has extorted the preservation of the text of the dream will then be displaced on to its associations and will make the manifest dream inaccessible to interpretation.² In view of these facts we need not feel surprised if a further increase in the resistance suppresses the associations altogether and thus brings the interpretation of the dream to nothing.

From all this we infer that the resistance which we come across in the work of interpreting dreams must also have had a share in their origin. We can actually distinguish between dreams that arose under a slight and under a high pressure of resistance.³ But this pressure varies as well from place to place within one and the same dream; it is responsible for the gaps, obscurities and confusions which may interrupt the continuity of even the finest of dreams.

But what is creating the resistance and against what is it aimed? Well, the resistance is the surest sign to us of a conflict. There must be a force here which is seeking to express something and another which is striving to prevent its expression.

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1 [Cf. *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900a), *Standard Ed.*, 5, 518-19.]

2 [Cf. 'The Handling of Dream-Interpretation in Psycho-Analysis' (1911e), *Standard Ed.*, 12, 95-6.]

3 [Cf. Section II of 'Remarks on the Theory and Practice of Dream-Interpretation' (1923c), *Standard Ed.*, 19, 110.]

What comes about in consequence as a manifest dream may combine all the decisions into which this struggle between two trends has been condensed. At one point one of these forces may have succeeded in putting through what it wanted to say, while at another point it is the opposing agency which has managed to blot out the intended communication completely or to replace it by something that reveals not a trace of it. The commonest and most characteristic cases of dream-construction are those in which the conflict has ended in a compromise, so that the communicating agency has, it is true, been able to say what it wanted but not in the way it wanted—only in a softened down, distorted and unrecognized form. If, then, dreams do not give a faithful picture of the dream-thoughts and if the work of interpretation is required in order to bridge the gap between them, that is the outcome of the opposing, inhibiting and restricting agency which we have inferred from our perception of the resistance while we interpret dreams. So long as we studied dreams as isolated phenomena independent of the psychical structures akin to them, we named this agency the *ensor*¹ of dreams.

You have long been aware that this censorship is not an institution peculiar to dream-life. You know that the conflict between the two psychical agencies, which we—inaccurately—describe as the 'unconscious repressed' and the 'conscious', dominates our whole mental life and that the resistance against the interpretation of dreams, the sign of the dream-censorship, is nothing other than the resistance due to repression by which the two agencies are separated. You know too that the conflict between these two agencies may under certain conditions produce other psychical structures which, like dreams, are the outcome of compromises; and you will not expect me to repeat to you here everything that was contained in my introduction to the theory of the neuroses in order to demonstrate to you what we know of the

determinants of the formation of such compromises. You have realized that the dream is a pathological product, the first member of the class which includes hysterical

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¹ [This is one of the very rare occasions on which Freud uses the personified form 'Zensor' instead of the impersonal 'Zensur' (censorship). See an Editor's footnote in *Introductory Lectures*, XXVI, *Standard Ed.*, **16**, **429**.]

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symptoms, obsessions and delusions,¹ but that it is distinguished from the others by its transitoriness and by its occurrence under conditions which are part of normal life. For let us bear firmly in mind that, as was already pointed out by Aristotle, dream-life is the way in which our mind works during the state of sleep.² The state of sleep involves a turning-away from the real external world, and there we have the necessary condition for the development of a psychosis. The most careful study of the severe psychoses will not reveal to us a single feature that is more characteristic of those pathological conditions. In psychoses, however, the turning-away from reality is brought about in two kinds of way: either by the unconscious repressed becoming excessively strong so that it overwhelms the conscious, which is attached to reality,³ or because reality has become so intolerably distressing that the threatened ego throws itself into the arms of the unconscious instinctual forces in a desperate revolt. The harmless dream-psychosis is the result of a withdrawal from the external world which is consciously willed and only temporary, and it disappears when relations to the external world are resumed. During the isolation of the sleeping individual an alteration in the distribution of his psychical energy also sets in; a part of the expenditure on repression, which is normally required in order to hold the unconscious down, can be saved, for if the unconscious makes use of its relative liberation for active purposes, it finds its path to motility closed and the only path open to it is the harmless one leading to hallucinatory satisfaction. Now, therefore, a dream can be formed; but the fact of the dream-censorship shows that even during sleep enough of the resistance due to repression is retained.

Here we are presented with a means of answering the question of whether dreams have a function too, whether they are entrusted with any useful achievement. The condition of rest free from stimulus, which the state of sleep wishes to establish,

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¹ [This part of the sentence is repeated almost word for word from the second sentence in Freud's preface to the first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (**1900a**), *Standard Ed.*, **4**, **xxiii**.]

² [*The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Standard Ed.*, **4**, **2**.]

³ [The notion occurs already in one of Freud's very earliest psychological papers, his first one on 'The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence' (**1894a**), *Standard Ed.*, **3**, **55**.]

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is threatened from three directions: in a relatively accidental manner by external stimuli during sleep, and by interests of the previous day which cannot be broken off, and in an unavoidable manner by unsated repressed instinctual impulses which are on the watch for an opportunity of finding expression. In consequence of the diminishing of repressions at night there would be a risk that the rest afforded by sleep would be interrupted whenever an instigation from outside or from inside succeeded in linking up with an unconscious instinctual source. The process of dreaming allows the product of a collaboration of this kind to find an outlet in a harmless hallucinatory experience and in that way assures a continuation of sleep. The fact that a dream occasionally awakens the sleeper, to the accompaniment of a generation of anxiety, is no contradiction of this function but rather, perhaps, a signal that the watchman regards the situation as too dangerous and no longer feels able to control it. And very often then, while we are still asleep, a consolation occurs to us which seeks to prevent our waking up: 'But after all it's only a dream!'

This was what I wanted to say to you, Ladies and Gentlemen, about dream-interpretation, whose task it is to lead the way from the manifest dream to the latent dream-thoughts. When this has been achieved, interest in a dream, so far as practical analysis is concerned, is for the most part at an end. We add the communication we have received in the form of a dream to the rest of the patient's communications and proceed with the analysis. We, however, have an interest in dwelling a little longer on the dream. We are tempted to study the process by which the latent dream-thoughts were transformed into the manifest dream. We call this the 'dream-work'. As you will recall, I described it in such detail in my earlier lectures¹ that I can restrict my present survey to the most concise summary.

The process of the dream-work, then, is something entirely new and strange, nothing resembling which was known before. It has given us our first glimpse of the processes which take place in the unconscious system and has shown us that they are quite other than what we know from our conscious thinking and are bound to appear to the latter preposterous and incorrect.

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¹ [*Introductory Lectures, XI.*]

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The importance of this finding was then increased by the discovery that in the construction of neurotic symptoms the same mechanisms (we do not venture to say 'processes of thought') are operative as those which have transformed the latent dream-thoughts into the manifest dream.

In what follows I shall not be able to avoid a schematic method of exposition. Let us assume that in a particular case we have before us all the latent thoughts, charged with a greater or less amount of affect, by which the manifest dream has been replaced after its interpretation has been completed. We shall then be struck by one difference among these latent thoughts, and that difference will take us a long way. Almost all these dream-thoughts are recognized by the dreamer or acknowledged by him; he admits that he has thought this, now or at some other time, or that he might have thought it. There is only one single thought that he refuses to accept; it is strange to him or even perhaps repellent; he may possibly reject it with passionate feeling. It now becomes evident to us that the other thoughts are portions of a conscious, or, more accurately, a preconscious train of thinking. They might have been thought in waking life too, and indeed they were probably formed during the previous day. This one repudiated thought, however, or, properly speaking, this one impulse, is a child of night; it belongs to the dreamer's unconscious and on that account it is repudiated and rejected by him. It had to wait for the nightly relaxation of repression in order to arrive at any kind of expression. And in any case this expression is a weakened, distorted and disguised one; without our work of dream-interpretation we should not have found it. This unconscious impulse has to thank its link with the other, unobjectionable, dream-thoughts for the opportunity of slipping past the barrier of the censorship in an inconspicuous disguise. On the other hand, the preconscious dream-thoughts have to thank this same link for the power to occupy mental life during sleep as well. For there is no doubt about it: this unconscious impulse is the true creator of the dream; it is what produces the psychical energy for the dream's construction. Like any other instinctual impulse, it cannot strive for anything other than its own satisfaction; and our experience in interpreting dreams shows us too that that is the sense of all dreaming. In every dream an instinctual wish has to be represented

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as fulfilled. The shutting-off of mental life from reality at night and the regression to primitive mechanisms which this makes possible enable this wished-for instinctual satisfaction to be experienced in a hallucinatory manner as occurring in the present. As a result of this same regression, ideas are transformed in the dream into visual pictures: the latent dream-thoughts, that is to say, are dramatized and illustrated.

This piece of the dream-work gives us information about some of the most striking and peculiar features of dreams. I will repeat the course of events in dream-formation. As an introduction: the wish to sleep and intentional turning away from the external world. Next, two consequences of this for the mental apparatus: first, the possibility for older and more primitive methods of working to emerge in it—regression; secondly, the lowering of the resistance due to repression which weighs down upon the unconscious. As a result of this last factor the possibility arises for the formation of a dream and this is taken advantage of by the precipitating causes, the internal and external stimuli which have become active. The dream which originates in this way is already a compromise-structure. It has a double function; on the one hand it is ego-syntonic,¹ since, by getting rid of the stimuli which are interfering with sleep, it serves the wish to sleep; on the other hand it allows a repressed instinctual impulse to obtain the satisfaction that is possible in these circumstances, in the form of the hallucinated fulfilment of a wish. The whole process of forming a dream which is permitted by the sleeping ego is, however, subject to the condition of the censorship, which is exercised by the residue of the repression still in operation. I cannot present the process more simply: it is not more simple. But I can proceed now with my description of the dream-work.

Let us go back once more to the latent dream-thoughts. Their most powerful element is the repressed instinctual impulse which has created in them an expression for itself on the basis of the presence of chance stimuli and by transference on to the day's residues—though an expression that is toned down and disguised. Like every instinctual impulse, it too presses for satisfaction by action; but its path to motility is blocked by the physiological regulations implied in the state of sleep; it is

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1 [In conformity with the ego.]

compelled to take the backwards course in the direction of perception and to be content with a hallucinated satisfaction. The latent dream-thoughts are thus transformed into a collection of sensory images and visual scenes. It is as they travel on this course that what seems to us so novel and so strange occurs to them. All the linguistic instruments by which we express the subtler relations of thought—the conjunctions and prepositions, the changes in declension and conjugation—are dropped, because there are no means of representing them; just as in a primitive language without any grammar, only the raw material of thought is expressed and abstract terms are taken back to the concrete ones that are at their basis. What is left over after this may well appear disconnected. The copious employment of symbols, which have become alien to conscious thinking, for representing certain objects and processes is in harmony alike with the archaic regression in the mental apparatus and with the demands of the censorship.

But other changes made in the elements of the dream-thoughts go far beyond this. Such of those elements as allow any point of contact to be found between them are *condensed* into new unities. In the process of transforming the thoughts into pictures, preference is unmistakably given to such as permit of this putting-together, this condensation; it is as though a force were at work which was subjecting the material to compression and concentration. As a result of condensation, one element in the manifest dream may correspond to numerous elements in the latent dream-thoughts; but, conversely too, one element in the dream-thoughts may be represented by several images in the dream.

Still more remarkable is the other process—*displacement* or shifting of accent—which in conscious thinking we come across only as faulty reasoning or as means for a joke. The different ideas in the dream-thoughts are, indeed, not all of equal value; they are cathected with quotas of affect of varying magnitude and are correspondingly judged to be important and deserving of interest to a greater or less degree. In the dream-work these ideas are separated from the affects attaching to them. The affects are dealt with independently; they may be displaced on to something else, they may be retained, they may undergo alterations, or they may not appear in the dream at all. The

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importance of the ideas that have been stripped of their affect returns in the dream as sensory strength in the dream-pictures; but we observe that this accent has passed over from important elements to indifferent ones. Thus something that played only a minor part in the dream-thoughts seems to be pushed into the foreground in the dream as the main thing, while, on the contrary, what was the essence of the dream-thoughts finds only passing and indistinct representation in the dream. No other part of the dream-work is so much responsible for making the dream strange and incomprehensible to the dreamer. Displacement is the principal means used in the *dream-distortion* to which the dream-thoughts must submit under the influence of the censorship.

After these influences have been brought to bear upon the dream-thoughts the dream is almost complete. A further, somewhat variable, factor also comes into play—known as ‘secondary revision’—after the dream has been presented before consciousness as an object of perception. At that point we treat it as we are in general accustomed to treat the contents of our perception: we fill in gaps and introduce connections, and in doing so are often guilty of gross misunderstandings. But this activity, which might be described as a rationalizing one and which at best provides the dream with a smooth facade that cannot fit its true content, may also be omitted or only be expressed to a very modest degree—in which case the dream will display all its rents and cracks openly. It must not be forgotten, on the other hand, that the dream-work does not always operate with equal energy either; it often restricts itself to certain portions of the dream-thoughts only and others of them are allowed to appear in the dream unaltered. In such cases an impression is given of the dream having carried out the most delicate and complex intellectual operations, of its having speculated, made jokes, arrived at decisions and solved problems, whereas all this is a product of our normal mental activity, may have been performed equally well during the day before the dream as during the night, has nothing to do with the dream-work and brings nothing to light that is characteristic of dreams. Nor is it superfluous to insist once more on the contrast within the dream-thoughts themselves between the unconscious instinctual impulse and the day's residues. While the latter exhibit all the

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multiplicity of our mental acts, the former, which becomes the motive force proper of the forming of the dream, finds its outlet invariably in the fulfilment of a wish.

I could have told you all this fifteen years ago, and indeed I believe I did in fact tell it you then. And now let me bring together such changes and new discoveries as may have been made during the interval. I have said already that I am afraid you will find that it amounts to very little, and you will fail to understand why I obliged you to listen to the same thing twice over, and obliged myself to say it. But fifteen years have passed meanwhile and I hope that this will be my easiest way of reestablishing contact with you. Moreover, these are such fundamental things, of such decisive importance for understanding psycho-analysis, that one may be glad to hear them a second time, and it is in itself worth knowing that they have remained so much the same for fifteen years.

In the literature of this period you will of course find a large quantity of confirmatory material and of presentation of details, of which I intend only to give you samples. I shall also, incidentally, be able to tell you a few things that were in fact already known earlier. What is in question is principally the symbolism in dreams and the other methods of representation in them. Now listen to this. Only quite a short while ago the medical faculty in an American University refused to allow psycho-analysis the status of a science, on the ground that it did not admit of any experimental proof. They might have raised the same objection to astronomy; indeed, experimentation with the heavenly bodies is particularly difficult. There one has to fall back on observation. Nevertheless, some Viennese investigators have actually made a beginning with experimental confirmation of our dream symbolism. As long ago as in 1912 a Dr. Schrötter found that if instructions to dream of sexual matters are given to deeply hypnotized subjects, then in the dream that is thus provoked the sexual material emerges with its place taken by the symbols that are familiar to us. For

instance, a woman was told to dream of sexual intercourse with a female friend. In her dream this friend appeared with a travelling-bag on which was pasted the label 'Ladies Only'. Still more impressive experiments were carried out by Betlheim and

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Hartmann in 1924. They worked with patients suffering from what is known as the Korsakoff confusional psychosis. They told these patients stories of a grossly sexual kind and observed the distortions which appeared when the patients were instructed to reproduce what they had been told. Once more there emerged the symbols for sexual organs and sexual intercourse that are familiar to us—among them the symbol of the staircase which, as the writers justly remark, could never have been reached by a conscious wish to distort.¹

In a very interesting series of experiments, Herbert Silberer [**1909** and **1912**] has shown that one can catch the dream-work red-handed, as it were, in the act of turning abstract thoughts into visual pictures. If he tried to force himself to do intellectual work while he was in a state of fatigue and drowsiness, the thought would often vanish and be replaced by a vision, which was obviously a substitute for it.

Here is a simple example. 'I thought', says Silberer, 'of having to revise an uneven passage in an essay.' The vision: 'I saw myself planing a piece of wood.' It often happened during these experiments that the content of the vision was not the thought that was being dealt with but his own subjective state while he was making the effort—the state instead of the object. This is described by Silberer as a 'functional phenomenon'. An example will show you at once what is meant. The author was endeavouring to compare the opinions of two philosophers on a particular question. But in his sleepy condition one of these opinions kept on escaping him and finally he had a vision that he was asking for information from a disobliging secretary who was bent over his writing-table and who began by disregarding him and then gave him a disagreeable and uncomplying look. The conditions under which the experiments were made probably themselves explain why the vision that was induced represented so often an event of self-observation.²

We have not yet finished with symbols. There are some which we believed we recognized but which nevertheless worried

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¹ [Longer descriptions of these experiments will be found in Chapter VI (E) of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (**1900a**), *Standard Ed.*, **5**, **384**.]

² [Freud gave a very much fuller account of Silberer's experiments, with a great many quotations, in some passages added in 1914 to *The Interpretation of Dreams* (**1900a**), *Standard Ed.*, **5**, **344-5** and **503-6**.]

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us because we could not explain how *this* particular symbol had come to have *that* particular meaning. In such cases confirmations from elsewhere—from philology, folklore, mythology or ritual—were bound to be especially welcome. An instance of this sort is the symbol of an overcoat or cloak [German '*Mantel*']. We have said that in a woman's dreams this stands for a man.¹ I hope it will impress you when you hear that Theodor Reik (**1920**) gives us this information: 'During the extremely ancient bridal ceremonial of the Bedouins, the bridegroom covers the bride with a special cloak known as "Aba" and speaks the following ritual words: "Henceforth none save I shall cover thee!"' (Quoted from Robert Eisler [**1910**, **2**, **599** f.]). We have also found several fresh symbols, at least two of which I will tell you of. According to Abraham (**1922**) a spider in dreams is a symbol of the mother, but of the *phallic* mother, of whom we are afraid; so that the fear of spiders expresses dread of mother-incest and horror of the female genitals. You know, perhaps, that the mythological creation, Medusa's head, can be traced back to the same *motif* of fright at castration.² The other symbol I want to talk to you about is that of the *bridge*, which has been explained by Ferenczi (**1921** and **1922**). First it means the male organ, which unites the two parents in sexual intercourse;

but afterwards it develops further meanings which are derived from this first one. In so far as it is thanks to the male organ that we are able to come into the world at all, out of the amniotic fluid, a bridge becomes the crossing from the other world (the unborn state, the womb) to this world (life); and, since men also picture death as a return to the womb (to the water), a bridge also acquires the meaning of something that leads to death, and finally, at a further remove from its original sense, it stands for transitions or changes in condition generally. It tallies with this, accordingly, if a woman who has not overcome her wish to be a man has frequent dreams of bridges that are too short to reach the further shore.

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¹ [The symbol is referred to in the *Introductory Lectures, Standard Ed.*, **15**, **155** and **157**, but the fact that this applies to women's dreams is only mentioned among some 'Observations and Examples' published earlier (**Freud, 1913h**), *Standard Ed.*, **13**, **196**.]

² [Cf. a posthumously published note by Freud on the subject (**1940c [1922]**).]

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In the manifest content of dreams we very often find pictures and situations recalling familiar themes in fairy tales, legends and myths. The interpretation of such dreams thus throws a light on the original interests which created these themes, though we must at the same time not forget, of course, the change in meaning by which this material has been affected in the course of time. Our work of interpretation uncovers, so to say, the raw material, which must often enough be described as sexual in the widest sense, but has found the most varied application in later adaptations. Derivations of this kind are apt to bring down on us the wrath of all non-analytically schooled workers, as though we were seeking to deny or undervalue everything that was later erected on the original basis. Nevertheless, such discoveries are instructive and interesting. The same is true of tracing back the origin of particular themes in plastic art, as, for instance, when M. J. Eisler (**1919**), following indications in his patients' dreams, gave an analytic interpretation of the youth playing with a little boy represented in the Hermes of Praxiteles. And lastly I cannot resist pointing out how often light is thrown by the interpretation of dreams on mythological themes in particular. Thus, for instance, the legend of the Labyrinth can be recognized as a representation of anal birth: the twisting paths are the bowels and Ariadne's thread is the umbilical cord.

The methods of representation employed by the dream-work—fascinating material, scarcely capable of exhaustion—have been made more and more familiar to us by closer study. I will give you a few examples of them. Thus, for instance, dreams represent the relation of frequency by a multiplication of similar things. Here is a young girl's remarkable dream. She dreamt she came into a great hall and found some one in it sitting on a chair; this was repeated six or eight times or more, but each time it was her father. This is easy to understand when we discover, from accessory details in the interpretation, that this room stood for the womb. The dream then becomes equivalent to the phantasy, familiarly found in girls, of having met their father already during their intra-uterine life when he visited the womb while their mother was pregnant. You should not be confused by the fact that something is reversed in the dream—that her father's 'coming-in' is displaced on to herself; incidentally,

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this has a special meaning of its own as well. The multiplication of the figure of the father can only express the fact that the event in question occurred repeatedly. After all, it must be allowed that the dream is not taking very much on itself in expressing frequency by multiplicity.¹ It has only needed to go back to the original significance of the former word; to-day it means to us a repetition in time, but it is derived from an accumulation in space. In general, indeed, where it is possible, the dream-work changes temporal relations into spatial ones and represents them as such. In a dream, for instance, one may see a scene between two people who look very small and a long way off, as though one were seeing them through the wrong end of

a pair of opera-glasses. Here, both the smallness and the remoteness in space have the same significance: what is meant is remoteness in *time* and we are to understand that the scene is from the remote past.

Again, you may remember that in my earlier lectures I already told you (and illustrated the fact by examples) that we had learnt to make use for our interpretations even of the purely *formal* features of the manifest dream—that is, to transform them into material coming from the latent dream-thoughts.² As you already know, all dreams that are dreamt in a single night belong in a single context. But it is not a matter of indifference whether these dreams appear to the dreamer as a continuum or whether he divides them into several parts and into how many. The number of such parts often corresponds to an equal number of separate focal points in the structural formation of the latent dream-thoughts or to contending trends in the dreamer's mental life, each of which finds a dominant, even though never an exclusive, expression in one particular part of the dream. A short introductory dream and a longer main dream following it often stand in the relation of protasis and apodosis [conditional and consequential clauses], of which a very clear instance will be found in the old lectures.³ A dream

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1 [*'Häufigkeit'* and *'Häufung'* in German. Both words are derived from *'Haufen'*—a 'heap'.]

2 [Cf. *Introductory Lectures*, XI, *Standard Ed.*, **15**, **177**. See also *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Standard Ed.*, **4**, **329** ff.]

3 [*Introductory Lectures*, XII, *Standard Ed.*, **15**, **186**. For all of this see also *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *Standard Ed.*, **4**, **314** ff. and **332** ff.]

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which is described by the dreamer as 'somehow interpolated' will actually correspond to a dependent clause in the dream-thoughts. Franz Alexander (**1925**) has shown in a study on pairs of dreams that it not infrequently happens that two dreams in one night share the carrying-out of the dream's task by producing a wish-fulfilment in two stages if they are taken together, though each dream separately would not effect that result. Suppose, for instance, that the dream-wish had as its content some illicit action in regard to a particular person. Then in the first dream the person will appear undisguised, but the action will be only timidly hinted at. The second dream will behave differently. The action will be named without disguise, but the person will either be made unrecognizable or replaced by someone indifferent. This, you will admit, gives one an impression of actual cunning. Another and similar relation between the two members of a pair of dreams is found where one represents a punishment and the other the sinful wish-fulfilment. It amounts to this: 'if one accepts the punishment for it, one can go on to allow oneself the forbidden thing.'

I cannot detain you any longer over such minor discoveries or over the discussions relating to the employment of dream-interpretation in the work of analysis. I feel sure you are impatient to hear what changes have been made in our fundamental views on the nature and significance of dreams. I have already warned you that precisely on this there is little to report to you. The most disputed point in the whole theory was no doubt the assertion that all dreams are the fulfilments of wishes. The inevitable and ever recurring objection raised by the layman that there are nevertheless so many anxiety-dreams was, I think I may say, completely disposed of in my earlier lectures.¹ With the division into wishful dreams, anxiety-dreams and punishment dreams, we have kept our theory intact.

Punishment-dreams, too, are fulfilments of wishes, though not of wishes of the instinctual impulses but of those of the critical, censoring and punishing agency in the mind. If we have a pure punishment-dream before us, an easy mental operation will enable us to restore the wishful dream to which the punishment-dream was the correct rejoinder and which, owing

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1 [See *Introductory Lectures*, XIV.]

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to this repudiation, was replaced as the manifest dream. As you know, Ladies and Gentlemen, the study of dreams was what first helped us to understand the neuroses, and you will find it natural that our knowledge of the neuroses was later able to influence our view of dreams. As you will hear,¹ we have been obliged to postulate the existence in the mind of a special critical and prohibiting agency which we have named the 'super-ego'. Since recognizing that the censorship of dreams is also a function of this agency, we have been led to examine the part played by the super-ego in the construction of dreams more carefully.

Only two serious difficulties have arisen against the wish-fulfilment theory of dreams. A discussion of them leads far afield and has not yet, indeed, brought us to any wholly satisfying conclusion.

The first of these difficulties is presented in the fact that people who have experienced a shock, a severe psychological trauma—such as happened so often during the war and such as affords the basis for traumatic hysteria—are regularly taken back in their dreams into the traumatic situation. According to our hypotheses about the function of dreams this should not occur. What wishful impulse could be satisfied by harking back in this way to this exceedingly distressing traumatic experience? It is hard to guess.

We meet with the second of these facts almost every day in the course of our analytic work; and it does not imply such an important objection as the other does. One of the tasks of psycho-analysis, as you know, is to lift the veil of amnesia which hides the earliest years of childhood and to bring to conscious memory the manifestations of early infantile sexual life which are contained in them. Now these first sexual experiences of a child are linked to painful impressions of anxiety, prohibition, disappointment and punishment. We can understand their having been repressed; but, that being so, we cannot understand how it is that they have such free access to dream-life, that they provide the pattern for so many dream-phantasies and that dreams are filled with reproductions of these scenes from childhood and with allusions to them. It must be admitted that their unpleasurable character and the dream-work's wish-fulfilling

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¹ [In Lecture XXXI below.]

purpose seem far from mutually compatible. But it may be that in this case we are magnifying the difficulty. After all, these same infantile experiences have attached to them all the imperishable, unfulfilled instinctual wishes which throughout life provide the energy for the construction of dreams, and to which we may no doubt credit the possibility, in their mighty uprush, of forcing to the surface, along with the rest, the material of distressing events. And on the other hand the manner and form in which this material is reproduced shows unmistakably the efforts of the dream-work directed to denying the unpleasure by means of distortion and to transforming disappointment into attainment.

With the traumatic neuroses things are different. In their case the dreams regularly end in the generation of anxiety. We should not, I think, be afraid to admit that here the function of the dream has failed. I will not invoke the saying that the exception proves the rule: its wisdom seems to me most questionable. But no doubt the exception does not overturn the rule. If, for the sake of studying it, we isolate one particular psychological function, such as dreaming, from the psychological machinery as a whole, we make it possible to discover the laws that are peculiar to it; but when we insert it once more into the general context we must be prepared to discover that these findings are obscured or impaired by collision with other forces. We say that a dream is the fulfilment of a wish; but if you want to take these latter objections into account, you can say nevertheless that a dream is an *attempt* at the fulfilment of a wish. No one who can properly appreciate the dynamics of the mind will suppose that you have said anything different by this. In certain circumstances a dream is only able to put its intention into effect very incompletely, or must abandon it entirely. Unconscious fixation to a trauma seems to be foremost among these obstacles to the function of dreaming. While the sleeper is obliged to dream, because the relaxation of repression at night allows the upward pressure of the traumatic fixation to become active, there is a failure in the functioning of his dream-work, which would like to transform the memory-traces of the traumatic event into the fulfilment of a wish. In these circumstances it will happen that one cannot sleep, that one gives up sleep from dread of the failure of the function of dreaming. Traumatic neuroses are

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here offering us an extreme case; but we must admit that childhood experiences, too, are of a traumatic nature, and we need not be surprised if comparatively trivial interferences with the function of dreams may arise under other conditions as well.¹

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¹ [The topic of the last three paragraphs was first raised by Freud in Chapters II and III of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (**1920g**). Further allusions to it will be found in Lecture XXXII, p. **106** below.]