



It is here that Freud discusses the Oedipal Complex – how our first sexual attraction is toward the parent of the opposite sex to ourselves and therefore we desire to remove one parent from the scene so as to take their place. While we are children the full implications of this desire are obscure to us – but as we grow older the taboo associated with this desire helps suppress our recognition of these desires, or repress them, rather – but only from the conscious mind. The subconscious mind still remembers what we might prefer to forget and so uses these images, as the first images of our awakening desires, as potent images in our dreams. The meaning of the image may not be anything like that we want to kill our father and have sex with our mother – it might actually refer to an awakening of sexual interest in someone else we have only recently met – but the dream uses this ‘primal’ image as something to help it make sense of our current world and desires, even if the image then goes on to confuse the hell out of us.

The Interpretation of Dreams deals mostly with what the title would imply; it is an examination of the dream world according to Freud, one might say. Freud uses the subject of dreams as a base to build on, using dream analysis and interpretation as tools for his (at the time developing) psychoanalytical theory. It could be said that this is the book in which the author introduces his views and theory related to the unconscious mind.

Freud often quotes the extensive research that has already been done in the field of the analysis of dreams but points out that all of the work so far has been inconclusive and in essence raised more questions than it answered. In this work Freud does his best to definitively answer the questions that we still had about interpreting our dreams.

There is an asinine pastime of bloating one's self-importance by \"proving\" that Freud was wrong about something. Such disputation regresses behind what it flatters itself as surpassing and rancorously promulgates nothing but its own failure to comprehend the subject matter. Don't fall for it. All fetishistic factmongering aside, any page of Freud is sufficient to establish that he was and remains incomparably brilliant. The depth and range, scope and penetration are inimitable. His work is almost convulsively interesting. This is not slavish idolatry, it is appreciation of an irreplaceable and inexhaustible legacy too commonly travestied, one that labored under the keenest self-consciousness of the limitations of merely beginning something that others would have to continue, if they dared. For all his positivist pretenses, Freud never presents as conclusive that which is incipient and exploratory. Psychoanalysis is not a finished Thing, it is an infinite Act, and *The Interpretation of Dreams* is its opening fanfare.

The book elides any definition: it partakes of nearly every genre theretofore extant, from the scholarly journal to the feverish confessional. It does become tedious and repetitive in the insistent effort to convince by accumulating anecdotes. The entire first chapter does little else than demonstrate Freud's familiarity with the existing literature on dreams; he is not improvising in a vacuum. The final two chapters, the sixth and seventh, comprise nearly half the bulk of the text, and it is here finally where \"Freud becomes Freud,\" everything else thus far being largely preparatory. The barrier between our waking rational censorious consciousness and our lurking undisciplined indomitable unconsciousness does not hold. No better invitation and conclusion could there be than Freud's now famous and summative fighting words:

The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind.

Freud also never stops to think that most of the dreams he is studying are from patients of neurosis. Freud's approach seems to be also limited by strong self-confirmatory bias in several other ways. Moreover, they are fail-proof because everything that might disprove them is super-ego suppressing it. All dreams are wish-fulfillment and if you had a dream about a wish you don't recognize, it is a wish you are suppressing. You just can't disprove such a theory.

Freud's treatment of unconsciousness and subconsciousness mind is really different and opens up a long way to explore something new in this field. His ideas provided a fresh new world to explore the opportunity. Before his writings, the unconsciousness mind was just an image that can not be explained by any scientific explanation.

As Noam Chomsky has pointed out, the work of advertising is to destroy markets, which are defined in classical economics as the meeting place of rational sellers and buyers of products at a price that is mutually agreeable. Bernay's application of his uncles theories to manipulate buyers' decisions, puts the buyers at a considerable disadvantage relative to the sellers, as consumers can no longer compare products on their merits on the one hand, as the products have been imbued with many irrational properties, and the considerable costs of all these deceptions is simply added to the price that the consumer must pay.

As products cannot be compared on their actual merits, the competition that occurs in real markets is removed; this not only only retards product improvement by sellers, who no longer compete on the actual efficacy of their products, but it cuts loose the pricing of products from the cost of making them, again because real competition is eliminated, and consumer's decision are, by definition, irrational.

To return to Freud's book, although it is fascinating reading it is rather feeble scientifically, a problem always faced by visionary prophets whose predispositions often get in the way of a more dispassionate approach. Although Freud and his 'sex symbols' have long been the butt of public derision, their influence on the mid-20th century cannot be easily dismissed, despite their merit as 'science'.

Imagine I have a picture-puzzle (a rebus) in front of me: a house with a boat on the roof, then a single letter, then a running figure with an apostrophe for a head, and so on. I could drop into a critical stance and say that such a combination and its components are nonsense. A boat does not belong on the roof of a house, and a person without a head cannot run; also, the person is bigger than the house, and if the whole thing is intended to represent landscape, the individual letters do not fit in since they do not occur in nature. Obviously, the correct assessment of the rebus emerges only if I raise no such objection to the overall thing and the details thereof but try to replace each image by a syllable or a word that may, by some link or other, be represented by the image. The words assembled in this way are no longer meaningless; in fact, they can produce the most beautiful and most meaningful poetic aphorism., Well, a dream is a picture-puzzle like that, and our precursors in the field of dream-interpretation made the mistake of judging the rebus as a pictorial composition. As such, it struck them as nonsensical and valueless.

In our dream-interpretation hitherto we have so often come across the element of absurdity in dream-content that we are loath to put off any longer investigating where it comes from and what it might mean. Remember, the absurdity of dreams was one of the main arguments put forward by those who, rejecting a positive appraisal of dreams, see them as nothing but the meaningless product of a reduced, fragmented level of mental activity. I begin with a number of examples in which the absurdity of the dream-content is only apparent; on closer examination of the meaning of the dream, it vanishes completely.

I do not claim to have uncovered the meaning of this dream in its entirety or that my interpretation of it is complete.

I am aware of the problems this causes the reader, yet I see no way of avoiding them.

Freud has many thoughts on dreams.

Are they all true?

?

Does he claim them to be?

No.

But they are definitely interesting.

Freud begins with a current survey of the literature on dreams, which he discusses whilst offering some of his own thoughts, before jumping in to his own theories which have arisen through his years of administering psychoanalytical treatment.

His central idea is that dreams serve as wish-fulfilment. And from here, he goes into a range of topics, ideas, and theories: dream-distortion, the material and sources of dream (trivial events from preceding days, childhood memories, the importance of association . . .), somatic sources of dream (external sensory, internal sensory, internal physical, purely physical), typical dreams, the process(es) of dream-work (compression, displacement, representation, speech, absurdity . . .) finishing with some (relatively complex) further processes.

I personally found many of his theories plausible. Take one theory for a dream which many of us have no doubt experienced: we are about to (re)sit an exam. Freud proposes that this dream only occurs for people who have passed the exam in question, and that the purpose of the dream is to relieve stress about an upcoming event towards which the dreamer is harbouring anxiety, by reminding them that they have nothing to worry about:

"Don't worry about tomorrow, think how anxious you were before your exam, and nothing happened to you."

Reasonable, no?

Whilst reading, I did not attempt to apply any of this to my own dreams. However, this may be something I will not be able to avoid doing . . .

Also, in all people an interest in dreaming is known to increase substantially the number of dreams remembered on waking.

Although Freud does warn his reader:

Let me put forward at this point something that I need to say about interpreting dreams and that may possibly give some guidance to any reader wishing to verify my contentions by working on his own dreams. No one should expect the interpretation of his dreams to fall into his lap effortlessly.

In order to understand absolutely everything on Freud's theory, one has to know all the functions and origins of the human psyche, as the author explains. Only after one is familiar with the relations and purposes of consciousness, the pre- and the unconscious; the id, the ego and the superego; his self-developed "psychical apparatus"; the origins of arousal and psychical charges; etc. etc. and etc.; can one fully grasp the concept and full meaning of dream. The Interpretation of Dream is far from complete, as it excludes (thankfully) a lot information about the psyche that Freud would only later voice in subsequent publications.

Which leads me to my main point. The highlight of The Interpretation of Dream is not, strangely enough, the phenomenon of dream itself; this book is amazing due to the light it has shed on the human psyche as a whole. As a matter of fact, when I finished Freud's "masterpiece", it felt like the author merely used the dream as a macguffin in order to give us the perfect introduction of the human mind and its functions (see also The Joke and its Relation to the Unconscious). Freud was able to explain the phenomenon of dream via observations on his hysterical and neurotic patients (believe it or not), and it is indeed amazing how clearly hysteria and dream relate to each other. You could say that dream is in fact a variation of hysteria (or vice versa, I'm not sure). Via dream and neurosis, Freud was able to penetrate the workings of thought, and give the reader a more comprehensible view not only on the mind, but also on many other philosophical problems.

The Interpretation of Dream is thus the perfect introduction to Freud's works, despite its length. Not only does he give us a rough (albeit complicated) draft on the workings of our minds; he also introduces certain theories for the first time (notably the infamous Oedipus Complex), and gives us a foretaste of his subsequent works. Yes, it is a difficult read, and it deserves many re-reads to be fully understood (especially the seventh and last chapter, "On the Psychology of Dream-Processes). This book will, however, change your perspectives not only on dreams, but also, more importantly, on your actions, thoughts, social relations, mind and self. This is a book which will, if its theory does prove true, give you a better understanding of yourself.

Dreams happen in the mind; they are "psychical acts" just as important as other psychical acts.

All dreams are motivated by the desire to fulfill one or more wishes.

The dream's form is shaped by four factors:

- a) Displacement: the need to evade censorship.
- b) Considerations of representability: the dream-work's preference for representing thoughts as images.
- c) Condensation: the need to reduce numerous thoughts down into a few images.
- d) Secondary revision: a demand the dream be easy to understand.

Freud offers three possible sources for the wishes fulfilled in dreams:

1. A wish that came up during the day but could not be satisfied "for external reasons." (For example, a child wanted candy but a parent forbade it.)
2. A wish that came up during the day but was repressed.
3. A wish with "no connection to daytime life" that emerges in the "suppressed part of the mind."

Five kinds of "thought-impulses that persist in sleep":

1. Something unfinished in the day because of some external blockage.
2. Something not dealt with because of an internal lack, such as a mental problem the dreamer failed to solve.
3. Something "rejected and suppressed during daytime."
4. Something in the unconscious set in motion by the events of the day.
5. Something not dealt with during the day because it is trivial.

In punishment dreams, there are two conflicting wishes. The first is an unconscious, repressed wish. The second is a conscious wish to be punished for fulfilling the first wish.

Are people responsible for their dreams? Readers might wonder if unconscious wishes can lead to "other things" besides dreams. He then says a certain Roman emperor was wrong to convict a man who had dreamed of killing the emperor. Freud gives two different reasons why the emperor was wrong. A dream is not an act, as many before Freud have said. The second reason is more important for Freud: a dream about an emperor is seldom about the emperor. Freud concludes his look at the ethics of dreams by saying dreams at least give us a view of the underside of ourselves—"the much trampled soil from which our virtue springs."

Freud proceeded anyway, abandoning the dominant Cartesian dispositionalist approach to mind which was impossible to square with evidence from his clinical practice. He identified some of the mind's unconscious congenital patterns, principles and biases, the structuration of which, even today, has a persuasive insight and authority. From his studies a picture of the unconscious, our mind's subterranean locus of dangerous repressed feelings & libidinal drives, was given shape. Freud didn't 'invent the unconscious', as some claim, but he did formalize the rag-and-bone shop beneath our consciousness into its most resonant account. As Wittgenstein said of Freud, 'There is an inducement to say, 'Yes, of course, it must be like that.'

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In this system dreams matter because they are the 'royal road' to the unconscious. The strangeness of our dreams is an encrypted profundity. Even if we could digitally map or listen to people's dreams (and I understand this technology is in some stage of development), if we accept the materiality of the unconscious, as most modern neuroscientists do in some shape or another, we could not say prima facie the origin or meaning of the dream work, of its organization and symbology. This is where free association comes in. Our own perspective on our dreams, the particular language we are compelled toward, the associations, affects and memories our dreams spontaneously conjure, will, under the guiding hand of a skilled analyst, produce a strong picture of our unconscious preoccupations, repressions and disturbances. Freud's meticulousness in developing dream interpretation is entrancing to read. There is much more here than vapid sexual determinism born from century-old analysis of hysterical rich ladies. This book should incite all its readers to begin keeping a dream diary. It did to me.

So is it true? Does it meet the criteria of epistemic naturalism? Can it be legitimated beyond the murky subjectivity of hermeneutics and talking therapy? If such things matter to you, there is a growing body of neuropsychanalysis which tests Freud's claims against emergent knowledge in neuroscience. Look up Mark Solms. I'm not sure if this is the best way to read Freud, in spite of Freud himself, as codification into scientific fact is what he desired. But it does seem to be important to people; everyone wants to credit or discredit Freud by materialist standards. Knock yourselves out, I guess.

Whatever your vantage point, we still have so much to learn from Freud. No matter how many times you read him, he is always dead interesting.

Our dreams are distorted (or censored) in various ways. So for example, we dream about bad things happening to other persons and/or ourselves, how can this be an instance of wish fulfillment? Well, that's because the wish is too unacceptable to the dream-censorship, so the actual wish is symbolized by some other content - a disguise so to speak. So when a patient of Freud dreams that she is happy about the death of her sister's second child, Freud analyzes this manifest dream-content and 'uncovers' that when the sister's first child dies, the patient met a secret lover at her nephew's funeral. She dreams she's happy about her second nephew's death, because this is truly a wish to see her lover again, at the funeral.

This last example is illustrative of Freud's approach to the interpretation of dreams. His whole dataset (of course, he didn't use this word) is comprised of clinical examples of dreams of his patients; the dreams of important historical figures, as told by poets and writers; and Freud's own dreams. Of course this is very un-scientific. But in a sense, so is his whole approach to interpreting dreams. He analyzes his own dream about a 'botanical monograph' by freely associating about the word 'botanical'. He comes up with Professor Gärtner (=gardener); Gärtner's 'blooming' wife; a patient called Flora; a story about a lady who forgot to buy flowers; his own favourite flower the artichoke; a previous treatise he wrote on the coca plant (Freud was a fervent consumer of cocaine); etc. And so he 'uncovers' the latent dream-content - the true wish he wanted to see fulfilled in his dream.

This all makes for interesting reading, but it doesn't make for much scientific insight. In the second part of the book (the two last - very long chapters) I completely lost track of it all. Especially the last chapter, in which Freud purportedly offers a scientific(partial) proto-theory of consciousness as an explanatory model for psychological mechanisms that work on dreams, is totally ridiculous.

Equally ridiculous is his theory about how sex is the causal factor in almost all cases of hysteria and the hidden meaning dreaming. We dream about killing our fathers because as children, we (as men) longed for sexual access to our mothers but were hindered by our fathers. Almost everything that Freud detects in cases of hysteria (cf. *Studies on Hysteria* [1895] by Breuer and Freud) and in dream-content relates to sex. A person dreaming about being arrested by police offers after stepping out of a cab (i.e. the manifest dream-content), dreams about a failed 'coitus interruptus' and a forced abortion. Dreams of exhibition - dreams in which an anonymous crowd sees us in our Adam's costume - harken back to our childhood, when some relative saw us naked, we felt shame about this fact, and our consciousness repressed this regretful experience.

Anyway, after reading *Studies on Hysteria*, *The Interpretation of Dreams* basically follows the exact same thought process (i.e. the interplay between consciousness and unconsciousness, mediated by a censor) and the exact same method (i.e. psychoanalysis), which leads Freud to the exact same conclusions (i.e. morally unacceptable wishes that have to symbolically expressed). The psychoanalyst is the only one capable of discovering the true content (the latent dream-content) by (1) guiding the patient through the process of free association and critical questioning and (2) interpreting these words in a way that makes sense in light of the patient's personal history, especially his or her early childhood history. All of these 'findings' are based on anecdotal evidence gathered in his clinical practice; on his analysis of his own dreams; and on the analysis of ancient, heroic figures in myths and historical works.

In his obituary on Freud (1939), Jung calls this work 'epoch-making' and 'probably the boldest attempt that has ever been made to master the riddles of the unconscious psyche upon the apparently firm ground of empiricism. For us, then young psychiatrists, it was... a source of illumination, while for our older colleagues it was an object of mockery' (p. 147, fn. 2).

These words of praise should not be taken lightly, for as any student of the history of Psychology knows, Freud and

Jung did not always see eye to eye. And thus begins the review.

There can be no doubt that [The Interpretation of Dreams](#) is the inception point for an understanding of the Freudian psychoanalytic method. Within these pages, Freud has bestowed a viewpoint reliant upon formal methodology allowing for factual conclusions founded on formal principles. These principles *viz.* **personal reaction, individual motivation, and inherent self-conflict** are the essence of individuality. The principles allow for the interpretive methodology to work over vastly diverse categories. The result is that none of these various modes invalidate the interpretive principles.

It is utterly stupefying how anyone, who has actually read this work, cannot find value in its presentation. Yet, daily, the grumblings in Psychological circles are deafening. "Freud was wrong!" "Sigmund who?" "Well, Freud 'thought' 'x,' and obviously, he was wrong!" On these all too common occasions, I often find myself asking the agitator, "What works of Freud have you read?" When I bring up the "Interpretation of Dreams," I receive the iconoclastic eye-roll. Often, this is accompanied by the misunderstood quotation "The dream is the fulfillment of a wish". The agitator then laughs as if they had a deep understanding of this idea.

Hence, let us all be clear on what it means in saying, "The dream is the fulfillment of a wish". It means that someone has failed to read the explanation of that criticism offered by Freud in [Chapter IV: Distortion in Dreams](#). Once an analysis of disagreeable dreams has been explained and all aspects have been taken into consideration, that lovely quote now materializes as "The dream is the (disguised) fulfillment [sic] of a (suppressed, repressed) wish" (p. 167). Additionally, as noted by Freud, "We may mention here the simplification and modification of this fundamental formula, propounded by Otto Rank: 'On the basis and with the help of repressed infantile sexual material, the dream regularly represents as fulfilled actual, and as a rule also erotic, wishes, in a disguised symbolic form.'" (fn. p. 167).

So it seems that reading, and understanding what it is you have read, play keen roles in ensuring you are actually familiar with the information before ridiculing it.

Freud was downtrodden at how little impact this text had upon the psychiatric profession. However, Freud knew that the material was difficult and that it was not an easy read, nor theory. Part of this is due to the multiple uses of analogies, allusions to music, literary references, and analysis from his personal dreams. Notwithstanding, this is part of the qualification that merits this work so "epoch-making". Case in point, it is very hard to describe the **Ψ-system** of [Chapter VII: The Psychology of Dreams](#) with anything remotely accessible to the human understanding. This is often the case in conceptualizations of nonmaterial objects. Yet, Freud still makes due with the tools at hand to enhance the thought of the reader.

One of the more tenuous contentions from this work is the assertion that dreams correspond readily to the dreamers present and past life experiences; however, before the true meaning can come to fruition, the meaning must be understood by the use of free association. This idea is in direct contrast with the familiar current ideation of understanding dreams through the use of symbols. The symbols are then used as a type of key that could universally unlock all dream doors; if one only had a "dream dictionary". Freud rightly explained that symbols are not universal and symptoms of the individual are what unlock the desire for wish-fulfillment.

Through the use of four elements that Freud identified in dreams *viz.* **condensation** (the reduction of images and/or thoughts to their essence), **dramatization** (the actual plot that unfolds in the dream work), **displacement** (the clearing away of censorship from one's own passions), and **secondary revision**, **> (the actual remembrance of the dream material upon awakening) he was able to classify and pull the latent content from the manifest parts of the dream.**

An interesting aspect that Freud discusses is recurrent or repetitive dreams. In [Chapter VI: The Dream-Work](#), Freud confesses that he has never experienced a recurrent dream, but goes on to provide evidence from a fellow colleague who consistently dreams of seeing a yellow lion (p. 197). It is here that Freud argues for an innocent explanation in recurring dreams. Through his understanding of the colleague's past, and through conversation, it is discovered that the colleague's mother had explained to him that one of his favorite toys in early childhood was, in fact, a yellow lion. In many respects, this would indeed seem to prove a fascinating argument against Freud's assertion that no dreams are innocent. (And here is an interesting counterpoint for those who make fantastical claims of reading Freud, and disagreeing with him!)

Let us not be discouraged! A fascinating research study conducted by Cartwright, et al, in 1979 ("The Nature and Function of Repetitive Dreams") seems to indicate the Freud was correct, and that nearly 2/3rds of adults self-

reported having recurring dreams throughout their life. Additionally, in another study, conducted in 1991 ("Imagination, Cognition, and Personality") shows an amazing 9 out of 10 people that have recurring dreams from their childhood report these dreams as unpleasant or of a threatening nature. So it seems that Freud was on to something after all.

Ultimately, you take what you can from Freud's work and *The Interpretation of Dreams* is an often forgotten masterpiece that deserves to be recognized as one of the finest masterpieces ever written. I highly suggest buying the "Coffee Table" version, which is edited by [Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson](#) and includes riveting pictures coupled with interpretative essays.