THE STANDARD EDITION
OF THE COMPLETE PSYCHOLOGICAL WORKS OF
SIGMUND FREUD

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wishful states. These have in common the fact that they both involve a raising of $Q_f$ tension in $\psi$—brought about in the case of an affect by sudden release and in that of a wish by summation. Both states are of the greatest importance for the passage of $[quantity]$ in $\psi$, for they leave behind them motives for it which are of a compulsive kind. The wishful state results in a positive attraction towards the object wished-for, or, more precisely, towards its mnemonic image; $^1$ the experience of pain leads to a repulsion, a disinclination to keeping the hostile mnemonic image cathedect. Here we have primary wishful attraction and primary defence [fending off].

Wishful attraction can easily be explained by the assumption that the cathexis of the friendly mnemonic image $^2$ in a state of desire greatly exceeds in $Q_f$ the cathexis which occurs when there is a mere perception, so that a particularly good facilitation leads from the $\psi$ nucleus to the corresponding neurone of the pallium.

It is harder to explain primary defence or repression—the fact that a hostile mnemonic image is regularly $^3$ abandoned by its cathexis as soon as possible. Nevertheless, the explanation should lie in the fact that the primary experiences of pain were brought about by reflex defence. The emergence of another object under the influence of the hostile one was the signal for the fact that the experience of pain was at an end, and the $\psi$ system, taught biologically, seeks to reproduce the state in $\psi$ which marked the cessation of the pain. With the expression taught biologically we have introduced a new basis of explanation, which should have independent validity, even though it does not exclude, but rather calls for, a recourse to mechanical principles (quantitative factors). $^4$ In the instance before us it may easily be the increase of $Q_f$, invariably occurring with the cathexis of a hostile memory, which forces an increased activity of discharge and thus a flowing away from the memory as well.

[14] Introduction of the 'Ego'

In fact, however, with the hypotheses of wishful attraction and of the inclination to repression we have already touched on a state of $\psi$ which has not yet been discussed. For these two processes indicate that an organization has been formed in $\psi$, whose presence interferes with passages [of quantity] which on the first occasion occurred in a particular way [i.e. accompanied by satisfaction or pain]. This organization is called the 'ego'. It can easily be depicted if we consider that the regularly repeated reception of endogenous $Q_f$ in certain neurones (of the nucleus) and the facilitating effect proceeding thence will produce a group of neurones which is constantly cathedect [pp. 317 and 399] and thus corresponds to the vehicle of the store required by the secondary function [p. 297]. Thus the ego is to be defined as the totality of the $\psi$ cathexes, at the given time, in which a permanent component is distinguished from a changing one [p. 328 below]. It is easy to see that the facilitations between $\psi$ neurones are a part of the ego's possessions, as representing possibilities, if the ego is altered, for determining its extent in the next few moments.

While it must be the endeavour of this ego to give off its cathexes by the method of satisfaction, this cannot happen in any other way than by its influencing the repetition of experiences of pain and of affects, and by the following method, which is described generally as inhibition.

A $Q_f$ which breaks into a neurone from anywhere will proceed in the direction of the contact-barrier with the largest facilitation and will set up a current in that direction. To put this more accurately: the $Q_f$ current will divide up in the direction of the various contact-barriers in inverse ratio to their resistance; and, in that case, where a contact-barrier is impinged upon by a quotient which is inferior to its [the contact-barrier's] resistance, nothing will in practice pass through there. This relation may easily turn out differently in the case of each $Q_f$ in the neurone, for quotations may then arise which are superior to the threshold at other contact-barriers as well. Thus the course taken is dependent on $Q_f$ and the relation of the facilitations. We have, however, come to know the third powerful factor [p. 319]. If an adjoining neurone is simultaneously cathedect, this acts like a temporary facilitation of the contact-barrier lying between the two, and modifies the course of the current, which would otherwise have been directed towards the one facilitated contact-barrier. A side-cathexis thus acts as an inhibition of the course of $Q_f$. Let us picture the ego as a network of cathedect neurones well facilitated in relation to one another, thus: [see Fig. 14]. If we suppose that a $Q_f$ enters a neurone $a$ from outside ($\phi$), then, if it were uninfluenced, it would pass to neurone $b$; but it is so much influenced by the side-cathexis $a$—$\phi$ that it gives off only a quotient to $b$ and may even perhaps
not reach b at all. Therefore, if an ego exists, it must inhibit psychical primary processes.

[Fig. 14]

Inhibition of this kind is, however, a decided advantage to ψ. Let us suppose that a is a hostile mnemonic image and b a key-neurone to unpleasantness [p. 320]. Then, if a is awakened, primarily unpleasantness would be released, which would perhaps be pointless and is so in any case [if released] to its full amount. With an inhibitory action from x the release of unpleasantness will turn out very slight and the nervous system will be spared the development and discharge of Q without any other damage. It is easy now to imagine how, with the help of a mechanism which draws the ego's attention to the imminent fresh cathectic of the hostile mnemonic image, the ego can succeed in inhibiting the passage [of quantity] from a mnemonic image to a release of unpleasantness by a copious side-cathexis which can be strengthened according to need. Indeed, if we suppose that the original Q as release of unpleasantness is taken up by the ego itself, we shall have in itself the source of the expenditure which is required by the inhibiting side-cathexis from the ego. In that case, the stronger the unpleasantness, the stronger will be the primary defence.

[15] Primary and Secondary Process in ψ

It follows from what has developed so far, that the ego in ψ, which we can treat as regards its trends like the nervous system as a whole, will, when the processes in ψ are uninfluenced, be made helpless and suffer injury under two conditions.

That is to say, this will happen in the first place if, while it is

1 ['Attention' is discussed on p. 360 ff. below.]
2 [This fundamental distinction makes its first appearance at the end of this section. Some discussion of it will be found in Appendix C, p. 392 below.]
3 ['Gesamtnervensystem', written out in full in the MS. (Cf. p. 296, n. 2.)]

in a wishful state, it newly cathected the memory of an object and then sets discharge in action; in that case satisfaction must fail to occur, because the object is not real but is present only as an imaginary idea. ψ is not in a position, to begin with, to make this distinction, since it can only work on the basis of the sequence of analogous states between its neurones. Thus it requires a criterion from elsewhere in order to distinguish between perception and idea.

On the other hand, ψ is in need of an indication that will draw its attention to the re-cathexis of a hostile memory image and enable it to obviate, by means of side-cathexis, the consequent release of unpleasantness. If ψ is able to put this inhibition into operation soon enough, the release of unpleasantness, and at the same time the defence, will be slight; otherwise there will be immense unpleasantness and excessive primary defence.

Both wishful cathectic and release of unpleasantness, where the memory in question is cath ected anew, can be biologically detrimental. This is true of a wishful cathectic whenever it exceeds a certain amount and so acts as an enticement to discharge; and it is true of a release of unpleasantness, at least whenever the cathectic of the hostile mnemonic image results not from the external world but from ψ itself (by association). Here once again, then, it is a question of an indication to distinguish between a perception and a memory (idea).

It is probably the ω neurones which furnish this indication: the indication of reality. In the case of every external perception, a qualitative excitation occurs in ω [p. 309], which in the first instance, however, has no significance for ψ. It must be added that the ω excitation leads to ω discharge, and information of this, as of every discharge [p. 318], reaches ψ. The information of the discharge from ω is thus the indication of quality or of reality for ψ. If the wished-for object is abundantly cathected, so that it is activated in a hallucinatory manner, the same indication of discharge or of reality follows too as in the case of external perception. In this instance the criterion fails. But if the wishful
Sigmund Freud

THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS

Translated from the German and edited by James Strachey

Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo

A DISCUS BOOK/PUBLISHED BY AVON BOOKS
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second (post-1900) list (as may be gathered from Freud’s own remarks in his various prefaces) could not really keep pace with the production of analytic or quasi-analytic writings on the subject. Furthermore, quite a number of works quoted by Freud in the text were not to be found in either list. It seems probable that, from the third edition onwards, Otto Rank became chiefly responsible for these bibliographies.

(2)

HISTORICAL

The publication of Freud’s correspondence with Fliess enables us to follow the composition of The Interpretation of Dreams in some detail. In his ‘History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement’ (1914d), Freud wrote, looking back upon his leisurely rate of publication in earlier days: ‘The Interpretation of Dreams, for instance, was finished in all essentials at the beginning of 1896 but was not written down until the summer of 1899.’ Again, in the introductory remarks to his paper on the psychological consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes (1925f), he wrote: ‘My Interpretation of Dreams and my “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” [1905e] . . . were suppressed by me—if not for the nine years enjoined by Horace—at all events for four or five years before I allowed them to be published.’ We are now in a position to amplify and in certain respects to correct these later recollections, on the basis of the author’s contemporary evidence.

Apart from a number of scattered references to the subject—which, in his correspondence, go back at least as early as 1882—the first important published evidence of Freud’s interest in dreams occurs in the course of a long footnote to the first of his case histories (that of Frau Emmy von N., under the date of May 15) in Breuer and Freud’s Studies on Hysteria (1895). He is discussing the fact that neurotic patients seem to be under a necessity to bring into association with one another any ideas that happen to be simultaneously present in their minds. He goes on: ‘Not long ago I was able to convince myself of the strength of this compulsion towards association from some observations made in a different field. For several weeks

I found myself obliged to exchange my usual bed for a harder one, in which I had more numerous or more vivid dreams, or in which it may be, I was unable to reach the normal depth of sleep. In the first quarter of an hour after waking I remembered all the dreams I had had during the night, and I took the trouble to write them down and try to solve them. I succeeded in tracing all these dreams back to two factors: (1) to the necessity for working out any ideas which I had only dwelt upon cursorily during the day—which had only been touched upon and not finally dealt with; and (2) to the compulsion to link together any ideas that might be present in the same state of consciousness. The senseless and contradictory character of the dreams could be traced back to the uncontrolled ascendency of this latter factor.’

This passage cannot unfortunately be exactly dated. The preface to the volume was written in April 1895. A letter of June 22, 1894 (Letter 19), seems to imply that the case histories were already finished then, and this was quite certainly so by March 4, 1895. Freud’s letter of that date (Letter 22) is of particular interest, as giving the first hint of the theory of wish-fulfillment: in the course of it he quotes the story of the medical student’s ‘dream of convenience’ which is included on p. 158 of the present volume. It was not, however, until July 24, 1895, that the analysis of his own dream of Irma’s injection—the specimen dream of Chapter II—established that theory definitely in Freud’s mind. (See Letter 137 of June, 1900.) In September of this same year (1895) Freud wrote the first part of his ‘Project for a Scientific Psychology’ (published as an Appendix to the Fliess correspondence) and Sections 19, 20 and 21 of this ‘Project’ constitute a first approach to a coherent theory of dreams. It already includes many important elements which re-appear in the present work, such as (1) the wish-fulfilling character of dreams, (2) their hallucinatory character, (3) the regressive functioning of the mind in hallucinations and dreams (this had already been indicated by Breuer in his theoretical contribution to Studies on Hysteria), (4) the fact that the state of sleep involves motor paralysis, (5) the nature of the mechanism of displacement in dreams and (6) the similarity between the mechanisms of dreams and of neurotic symptoms. More than all this, however, the ‘Project’ gives a clear indication of what is probably the most momentous of the discoveries
given to the world in *The Interpretation of Dreams*—the distinction between the two different modes of mental functioning, the Primary and Secondary Processes.

This, however, is far from exhausting the importance of the 'Project' and of the letters to Fließ written in connection with it towards the end of 1895. It is no exaggeration to say that much of the seventh Chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and, indeed, of Freud's later 'metapsychological' studies, has only become fully intelligible since the publication of the 'Project'.

Students of Freud's theoretical writings have been aware that even in his profoundest psychological speculations little or no discussion is to be found upon some of the most fundamental of the concepts of which he makes use: such concepts, for instance, as 'mental energy,' 'sums of excitation,' 'cathectic,' 'quantity,' 'quality,' 'intensity,' and so on. Almost the only explicit approach to a discussion of these concepts among Freud's published works is the penultimate sentence of his first paper on the 'Neuro-Psychoses of Defence' (1894a), in which he lays down a hypothesis that 'in mental functions something is to be distinguished—a charge of affect or sum of excitation—which possesses all the characteristics of a quantity (though we have no means of measuring it), which is capable of increase, diminution, displacement and discharge, and which is spread over the memory-traces of ideas somewhat as an electric charge is spread over the surface of a body.' The paucity of explanation of such basic notions in Freud's later writings suggests that he was taking it for granted that they were as much a matter of course to his readers as they were to himself; and we owe it as a debt of gratitude to the posthumously published correspondence with Fließ that it throws so much light precisely upon these obscurities.

It is, of course, impossible to enter here into any detailed discussion of the subject, and the reader must be referred to the volume itself (Freud, 1950a) and to Dr. Kris's illuminating introduction to it. The crux of the position can, however, be indicated quite simply. The essence of Freud's 'Project' lay in the notion of combining into a single whole two theories of different origin. The first of these was derived ultimately from the physiological school of Helmholtz, of which Freud's teacher, the physiologist Brücke, was a principal member. According to this theory, neurophysiology, and consequently psychology, was governed by purely *chemico-physical* laws. Such, for instance, was the 'law of constancy,' frequently mentioned both by Freud and Breuer and expressed in these terms in 1892 (in a posthumously published draft, Breuer and Freud, 1940): 'The nervous system endeavours to keep constant something in its functional condition that may be described as the “sum of excitation.”' The greater part of the theoretical contribution made by Breuer (another disciple of the Helmholz school) to the *Studies on Hysteria* was an elaborate construction along these lines. The second main theory called into play by Freud in his 'Project' was the *anatomical doctrine of the neurone*, which was becoming accepted by neuro-anatomists at the end of the eighties. (The term 'neurone' was only introduced, by Waldeyer, in 1891.) This doctrine laid it down that the functional unit of the central nervous system was a distinct cell, having no direct anatomical continuity with adjacent cells. The opening sentences of the 'Project' show clearly how its basis lay in a combination of these two theories. Its aim, wrote Freud, was 'to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determined states of specifiable material particles.' He went on to postulate that these 'material particles' were the neurones and that what distinguished their being in a state of activity from their being in a state of rest was a 'quantity' which was 'subject to the general laws of motion.' Thus a neurone might either be 'empty' or 'filled with a certain quantity,' that is 'cathedred.' 'Nervous excitation' was to be interpreted as a 'quantity' flowing through a system of neurones, and such a current might either be resisted or facilitated according to the state of the 'contact-barriers' between the neurones. (It was only later, in 1897, that the term 'synapse' was introduced by Foster and Sherrington.) The functioning of the whole nervous system was subject to a general principle of 'inertia,' according to which neurones always tend to get rid of any 'quantity' with which they may be filled—a principle correlative with the principle of 'constancy.' Using these and similar concepts as

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1 Bennfeldt's paper on 'Freud's Earliest Theories' (1944) is also of great interest in this connection.
his bricks, Freud constructed a highly complicated and extraordinarily ingenious working model of the mind as a piece of neurological machinery.

A principal part was played in Freud's scheme by a hypothetical division of the neurones into three classes or systems, differentiated according to their modes of functioning. Of these the first two were concerned respectively with external stimuli and internal excitations. Both of these operated on a purely quantitative basis; that is to say, their actions were wholly determined by the magnitude of the nervous excitations impinging on them. The third system was correlated with the qualitative differences which distinguish conscious sensations and feelings. This division of the neurones into three systems was the basis of elaborate physiological explanations of such things as the working of memory, the perception of reality, the process of thought, and also the phenomena of dreaming and of neurotic disorder.

But obscurities and difficulties began to accumulate and, during the months after writing the 'Project,' Freud was continually emending his theories. As time passed, his interest was gradually diverted from neurological and theoretical on to psychological and clinical problems, and he eventually abandoned the entire scheme. And when some years later, in the seventh chapter of the present book, he took the theoretical problem up once more—though he certainly never gave up his belief that ultimately a physical groundwork for psychology would be established—the neuro-physiological basis was ostensibly dropped. Nevertheless—and this is why the 'Project' is of importance to readers of The Interpretation of Dreams—much of the general pattern of the earlier scheme, and many of its elements, were carried over into the new one. The systems of neurones were replaced by psychical systems or agencies; a hypothetical 'cathectic' of psychical energy took the place of the physical 'quantity'; the principle of inertia became the basis of the pleasure (or, as Freud here called it, the unpleasure) principle. Moreover, some of the detailed accounts of psychical processes given in the seventh chapter owe much to their physiological forerunners and can be more easily understood by reference to them. This applies, for instance, to the description of the laying down of memory-traces in the 'mnemonic systems,' to the discussion of the nature of wishes and of the different ways of satisfying them, and to the stress laid upon the part played by verbal thought-processes in the making of adjustments to the demands of reality.

All of this is enough largely to justify Freud's assertion that The Interpretation of Dreams was finished in all essentials at the beginning of 1896. Nevertheless, we are now in a position to add some qualifications. Thus, the existence of the Oedipus complex was only established during the summer and autumn of 1897 (Letters 64 to 71); and though this was not in itself a direct contribution to the theory of dreams, it nevertheless played a large part in emphasizing the infantile roots of the unconscious wishes underlying dreams. Of more obvious theoretical importance was the discovery of the omnipresence in dreams of the wish to sleep. This was announced by Freud as late as on June 9, 1899 (Letter 108). Again, the first hint at the process of 'secondary revision' seems to have been given in a letter of July 7, 1897 (Letter 66). The similarity in structure between dreams and neurotic symptoms had, as we have seen, already been remarked on in the 'Project' in 1895, and was alluded to at intervals up to the autumn of 1897. Curiously enough, however, it seems thereafter to have been forgotten; for it is announced on January 3, 1899 (Letter 101), as a new discovery and as an explanation of why the book had so long remained unfinished.

The Fliess correspondence enables us to follow the actual process of composition in some detail. The idea of writing the book is first mentioned by Freud in May 1897, but quickly put on one side, probably because his interest began to be centred at that time on his self-analysis, which was to lead during the summer to his discovery of the Oedipus complex. At the end of the year the book was taken up once more, and in the early months of 1898 a first draft of the whole work seems to have been completed, with the exception of the first chapter. Work upon it came to a standstill in June of that year and was not resumed after the summer vacation. On October 23, 1898 (Letter 99), Freud writes that the book 'remains stationary, unchanged; I have no motive for preparing it for publication, and the

1 This must be what is alluded to in a passage on p. 515 of the present work, in which Freud remarks that he had 'postponed the printing of the finished manuscript for more than a year.' Actually the first chapter had still to be written.
gap in the psychology [i.e. Chapter VII] as well as the gap left by removing the completely analysed sample dream are obstacles to my finishing it which I have not yet overcome.' There was a pause of many months, till suddenly, and, as Freud himself writes, 'for no particular reason,' the book began to stir again towards the end of May 1899. Thereafter it proceeded rapidly. The first chapter, dealing with the literature, which had always been a bugbear to Freud, was finished in June and the first pages sent to the printer. The revision of the middle chapters was completed by the end of August, and the last, psychological, chapter was entirely re-written and the final pages despatched early in September.

Both the manuscript and the proofs were regularly submitted by Freud to Fliess for his criticism. He seems to have had considerable influence on the final shape of the book, and to have been responsible for the omission (evidently on grounds of discretion) of an analysis of one important dream of Freud's own (cf. p. xix). But the severest criticisms came from the author himself, and these were directed principally against the style and literary form. 'I think,' he wrote on September 21, 1899 (Letter 119), when the book was finished, 'my self-criticism was not entirely unjustified. Somewhere hidden within me I too have some fragmentary sense of form, some appreciation of beauty as a species of perfection; and the involved sentences of my book on dreams, bolstered up on indirect phrases and with sidelong glances at their subject-matter, have gravely affronted some ideal within me. And I am scarcely wrong in regarding this lack of form as a sign of an incomplete mastery of the material.'

But in spite of these self-criticisms, and in spite of the depression which followed the almost total neglect of the book by the outside world—only 351 copies were sold in the first six years after publication—The Interpretation of Dreams was always regarded by Freud as his most important work: 'in sight such as this,' as he wrote in his preface to the third English edition, 'falls to one's lot but once in a lifetime.'

(3)

THE PRESENT ENGLISH EDITION

The present translation is based on the eighth (1930) German edition, the last published during its author's life. At the same time, it differs from all previous editions (both German and English) in an important respect, for it is in the nature of a 'Variorum' edition. An effort has been made to indicate, with dates, every alteration of substance introduced into the book since its first issue. Wherever material has been dropped or greatly modified in later editions, the cancelled passage or earlier version is given in a footnote. The only exception is that Rank's two appendices to Chapter VI have been omitted. The question of their inclusion was seriously considered; but it was decided against doing so. The essays are entirely self-contained and have no direct connections with Freud's book; they would have filled another fifty pages or so; and they would be particularly unenlightening to English readers, since they deal in the main with German literature and German mythology.

The bibliographies have been entirely recast. The first of these contains a list of every work actually referred to in the text or footnotes. This bibliography is also arranged to serve as an Author Index. The second bibliography contains all the works in the German pre-1900 list not actually quoted by Freud. It has seemed worth while to print this, since no other comparably full bibliography of the older literature on dreams is easily accessible. Writings after 1900, apart from those actually quoted and consequently included in the first bibliography, have been disregarded. A warning must, however, be issued in regard to both my lists. Investigation has shown a very high proportion of errors in the German bibliographies. These have been corrected whenever possible; but quite a number of the entries have proved to be untraceable in London, and these (which are distinguished by an asterisk) must be regarded as suspect.

Editorial additions are printed in square brackets. Many readers will no doubt be irritated by the number of references and other explanatory notes. The references, however, are essentially to Freud's own writings, and very few will be found to other authors (apart, of course, from references made by Freud himself). In any case, the fact must be faced that The Interpretation of Dreams is one of the major classics of scientific literature and that the time has come to treat it as such. It is the editor's hope and belief that actually the references, and more particularly the cross-references to other parts of the work itself, will make it easier for serious students to follow the intricacies of the material. Readers in search of mere entertainment—if
there are any such—must steel themselves to disregard these parentheses.

A word must be added upon the translation itself. Great attention has had, of course, to be paid to the details of the wording of the text of dreams. Where the English rendering strikes the reader as unusually stiff, he may assume that the stiffness has been imposed by some verbal necessity determined by the interpretation that is to follow. Where there are inconsistencies between different versions of the text of the same dream, he may assume that there are parallel inconsistencies in the original. These verbal difficulties culminate in the fairly frequent instances in which an interpretation depends entirely upon a pun. There are three methods of dealing with such situations. The translator can omit the dream entirely, or he can replace it by another parallel dream, whether derived from his own experience or fabricated ad hoc. These two methods have been the ones adopted in the main in the earlier translations of the book. But there are serious objections to them. We must once more remember that we are dealing with a scientific classic. What we want to hear about are the examples chosen by Freud—not by someone else. Accordingly the present translator has adopted the pedantic and tiresome third alternative of keeping the original German pun and laboriously explaining it in a square bracket or footnote. Any amusement that might be got out of it completely evaporates in the process. But that, unfortunately, is a sacrifice that has to be made.

Help in the laborious task of proof-reading has been generously given (among others) by Mrs. R. S. Partridge and Dr. C. F. Rycroft. Mrs. Partridge is also largely responsible for the index. The revision of the bibliographies has in the main been carried out by Mr. G. Talland.

Finally, the editor's thanks are due to Dr. Ernest Jones for his constant advice and encouragement. The first volume of his Freud biography will be found to throw invaluable light on the background of this work as a whole, as well as on many of its details.

Preface to the First Edition

I have attempted in this volume to give an account of the interpretation of dreams; and in doing so I have not, I believe, trespassed beyond the sphere of interest covered by neuro-pathology. For psychological investigation shows that the dream is the first member of a class of abnormal psychological phenomena of which further members, such as hysterical phobias, obsessions and delusions, are bound for practical reasons to be a matter of concern to physicians. As will be seen in the sequel, dreams can make no such claim to practical importance; but their theoretical value as a paradigm is on the other hand proportionately greater. Anyone who has failed to explain the origin of dream-images can scarcely hope to understand phobias, obsessions or delusions or to bring a therapeutic influence to bear on them.

But the same correlation that is responsible for the importance of the subject must also bear the blame for the deficiencies of the present work. The broken threads which so frequently interrupt my presentation are nothing less than the many points of contact between the problem of the formation of dreams and the more comprehensive problems of psycho-pathology. These cannot be treated here, but, if time and strength allow and further material comes to hand, will form the subject of later communications.

The difficulties of presentation have been further increased by the peculiarities of the material which I have had to use to illustrate the interpreting of dreams. It will become plain in the course of the work itself why it is that none of the dreams already reported in the literature of the subject or collected from unknown sources could be of any use for my purposes. The only dreams open to my choice were my own and those of my patients undergoing psychoanalytic treatment. But I was precluded from using the latter material by the fact that in its case the dreams-
Preface to the First Edition

processes were subject to an undesirable complication owing to the added presence of neurotic features. But if I was to report my own dreams, it inevitably followed that I should have to reveal to the public gaze more of the intimacies of my mental life than I liked, or than is normally necessary for any writer who is a man of science and not a poet. Such was the painful but unavoidable necessity; and I have submitted to it rather than totally abandon the possibility of giving the evidence for my psychological findings. Naturally, however, I have been unable to resist the temptation of taking the edge off some of my indiscretions by omissions and substitutions. But whenever this has happened, the value of my instances has been very definitely diminished. I can only express a hope that readers of this book will put themselves in my difficult situation and treat me with indulgence, and further, that anyone who finds any sort of reference to himself in my dreams may be willing to grant me the right of freedom of thought—in my dream-life, if nowhere else.

Preface to the Second Edition

If within ten years of the publication of this book (which is very far from being an easy one to read) a second edition is called for, this is not due to the interest taken in it by the professional circles to whom my original preface was addressed. My psychiatric colleagues seem to have taken no trouble to overcome the initial bewilderment created by my new approach to dreams. The professional philosophers have become accustomed to polishing off the problems of dream-life (which they treat as a mere appendix to conscious states) in a few sentences—and usually in the same one; and they have evidently failed to notice that we have something here from which a number of inferences can be drawn that are bound to transform our psychological theories. The attitude adopted by reviewers in the scientific periodicals could only lead one to suppose that my work was doomed to be sunk into complete silence; while the small group of gallant supporters, who practise medical psycho-analysis under my guidance and who follow my example in interpreting dreams and make use of their interpretations in treating neurotics, would never have exhausted the first edition of the book. Thus it is that I feel indebted to a wider circle of educated and curious-minded readers, whose interest has led me to take up once more after nine years this difficult, but in many respects fundamental, work.

I am glad to say that I have found little to change in it. Here and there I have inserted some new material, added some fresh points of detail derived from my increased experience, and at some few points recast my statements. But the essence of what I have written about dreams and their interpretation, as well as about the psychological theorems to be deduced from them—all this remains unaltered: subjectively at all events, it has stood the test of time. Anyone who is acquainted with my other writings
Preface to the Second Edition

(on the etiology and mechanism of the psycho-neuroses) will know that I have never put forward inconclusive opinions as though they were established facts, and that I have always sought to modify my statements so that they may keep in step with my advancing knowledge. In the sphere of my dream-life I have been able to leave my original assertions unchanged. During the long years in which I have been working at the problems of the neuroses I have often been in doubt and sometimes been shaken in my convictions. At such times it has always been the Interpretation of Dreams that has given me back my certainty. It is thus a sure instinct which has led my many scientific opponents to refuse to follow me more especially in my researches upon dreams.

An equal durability and power to withstand any far-reaching alterations during the process of revision has been shown by the material of the book, consisting as it does of dreams of my own which have for the most part been overtaken or made valueless by the march of events and by which I illustrated the rules of dream-interpretation. For this book has a further subjective significance for me personally—a significance which I only grasped after I had completed it. It was, I found, a portion of my own self-analysis, my reaction to my father’s death—that is to say, to the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man’s life. Having discovered that this was so, I felt unable to obliterate the traces of the experience. To my readers, however, it will be a matter of indifference upon what particular material they learn to appreciate the importance of dreams and how to interpret them. Wherever I have found it impossible to incorporate some essential addition into the original context, I have indicated its more recent date by enclosing it in square brackets.

BETHTESGADEN, Summer 1908

1 [Freud’s father had died in 1896. Some account of his feelings at the time will be found in his letter to Fliess of November 2, 1896. (Freud 1950i, Letter 50.)]

Preface to the Third Edition

Nine years elapsed between the first and second editions of this book, but after scarcely more than a single year a third edition has become necessary. This new turn of events may please me; but just as formerly I was unwilling to regard the neglect of my book by readers as evidence of its worthlessness, so I cannot claim that the interest which is now being taken in it is a proof of its excellence.

Even the Interpretation of Dreams has not been left untouched by the advance of scientific knowledge. When I wrote it in 1899, my theory of sexuality was not yet in existence and the analysis of the more complicated forms of psycho-neurosis was only just beginning. It was my hope that dream-interpretation would help to make possible the psychological analysis of neuroses; since then a deeper understanding of neuroses has reacted in turn upon our view of dreams. The theory of dream-interpretation has itself developed further in a direction on which insufficient stress had been laid in the first edition of this book. My own experience, as well as the works of Wilhelm Stekel and others, have since taught me to form a truer estimate of the extent and importance of symbolism in dreams (or rather in unconscious thinking). Thus in the course of these years much has accumulated which demands attention. I have endeavoured to take these innovations into account by making numerous interpolations in the text and by additional footnotes. If these additions threaten at times to burst the whole framework of the book or if I have not everywhere succeeded in bringing the original text up to the level of our present knowledge, I must ask the reader’s indulgence for these deficiencies; they are the results and signs of the present increasingly rapid development of our science. I may even venture to prophesy in what other directions later editions of this book—if any should be needed—will differ from the present one. They will have on the one hand to
afford closer contact with the copious material presented in imaginative writing, in myths, in linguistic usage and in folklore; while on the other hand they will have to deal in greater detail than has here been possible with the relations of dreams to neuroses and mental diseases.

Herr Otto Rank has given me valuable assistance in selecting the additional matter and has been entirely responsible for correcting the proofs. I owe my thanks to him and to many others for their contributions and corrections.

Vienna, Spring 1911

Preface to the Fourth Edition


On this occasion Dr. Otto Rank has not only corrected the proofs but has also contributed two self-contained chapters to the text—the appendices to Chapter VI.

Vienna, June 1914

Preface to the Fifth Edition

Interest in the Interpretation of Dreams has not flagged even during the World War, and while it is still in progress a new edition has become necessary. It has not been possible, however, to notice fully publications since 1914: neither Dr. Rank nor I have any knowledge of foreign works since that date.

A Hungarian translation, prepared by Dr. Hollós and Dr. Ferenczi, is on the point of appearing. In 1916–17 my Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis were published in Vienna by Hugo Heller. The central section of these, comprising eleven lectures, is devoted to an account of dreams which aims at being more elementary and at being in closer contact with the theory of the neuroses than the present work. On the whole it is in the nature of an epitome of the Interpretation of Dreams, though at certain points it enters into greater detail.

I have not been able to bring myself to embark upon any fundamental revision of this book, which might bring it up to the level of our present psycho-analytic views but would on the other hand destroy its historic character. I think, however, that after an existence of nearly twenty years it has accomplished its task.

Budapest-Steinbruch, July 1918

Preface to the Sixth Edition

Owing to the difficulties in which the book trade is placed at present, this new edition has long been in demand, and the preceding edition has, for the first time, been reprinted.