

III A Dream is the Fulfilment of a Wish

WHEN, after passing through a narrow defile, we suddenly emerge upon a piece of high ground, where the path divides and the finest prospects open up on every side, we may pause for a moment and consider in which direction we shall first turn our steps.¹ Such is the case with us, now that we have surmounted the first interpretation of a dream. We find ourselves in the full daylight of a sudden discovery. Dreams are not to be likened to the unregulated sounds that rise from a musical instrument struck by the blow of some external force instead of by a player's hand [cf. p. 78]; they are not meaningless, they are not absurd; they do not imply that one portion of our store of ideas is asleep while another portion is beginning to wake. On the contrary, they are psychical phenomena of complete validity—fulfilments of wishes; they can be inserted into the chain of intelligible waking mental acts; they are constructed by a highly complicated activity of the mind.

But no sooner have we begun to rejoice at this discovery than we are assailed by a flood of questions. If, as we are told by dream-interpretation, a dream represents a fulfilled wish, what is the origin of the remarkable and puzzling form in which the wish-fulfilment is expressed? What alteration have the dream-thoughts undergone before being changed into the manifest dream which we remember when we wake up? How does that alteration take place? What is the source of the material that has been modified into the dream? What is the source of the

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page [127](#)

¹ [In a letter to Fliess of August 6, 1899 (Freud, 1950a, Letter 114), Freud describes the opening chapters of this book as follows: ‘The whole thing is planned on the model of an imaginary walk. First comes the dark wood of the authorities (who cannot see the trees), where there is no clear view and it is easy to go astray. Then there is a cavernous defile through which I lead my readers—my specimen dream with its peculiarities, its details, its indiscretions and its bad jokes—and then, all at once, the high ground and the open prospect and the question: “Which way do you want to go?”’]

- 122 -

many peculiarities that are to be observed in the dream-thoughts—such, for instance, as the fact that they may be mutually contradictory? (Cf. the analogy of the borrowed kettle on p. 120.) Can a dream tell us anything new about our internal psychical processes? Can its content correct opinions we have held during the day?

I propose that for the moment we should leave all these questions on one side and pursue our way further along one particular path. We have learnt that a dream can represent a wish as fulfilled. Our first concern must be to enquire whether this is a universal characteristic of dreams or whether it merely happened to be the content of the particular dream (the dream of Irma's injection) which was the first that we analysed. For even if we are prepared to find that every dream has a meaning and a psychical value, the possibility must remain open of this meaning not being the same in every dream. Our first dream was the fulfilment of a wish; a second one might turn out to be a fulfilled fear; the content of a third might be a reflection; while a fourth might merely reproduce a memory. Shall we find other wishful dreams besides this one? or are there perhaps no dreams but wishful ones?

It is easy to prove that dreams often reveal themselves without any disguise as fulfilments of wishes; so that it may seem surprising that the language of dreams was not understood long ago. For instance, there is a dream that I can produce in myself as often as I like—experimentally, as it were. If I eat anchovies or olives or any other highly salted food in the evening, I develop thirst during the night which wakes me up. But my waking is preceded by a dream; and this always has the same content, namely, that I am drinking. I dream I am swallowing down water in great gulps, and it has the delicious taste that nothing can equal but a cool drink when one is parched with thirst. Then I wake up and have to have a real drink. This simple dream is occasioned by the thirst which I become aware of when I wake. The thirst gives rise to a wish to drink, and the dream shows me that wish fulfilled. In doing so it is performing a function—which it was easy to divine. I am a good sleeper and not accustomed to be woken by any physical need. If I can succeed in appeasing my thirst by *dreaming* that I am drinking, then I need not wake up in order to quench it. This, then, is a

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page [128](#)

- 123 -

dream of convenience. Dreaming has taken the place of action, as it often does elsewhere in life. Unluckily my need for water to quench my thirst cannot be satisfied by a dream in the same way as my thirst for revenge against my friend Otto and Dr. M.; but the good intention is there in both cases. Not long ago this same dream of mine showed some modification. I had felt thirsty even before I fell asleep, and I had emptied a glass of water that stood on the table beside my bed. A few hours later during the night I had a fresh attack of thirst, and this had inconvenient results. In order to provide myself with some water I should have had to get up and fetch the glass standing on the table by my wife's bed. I therefore had an appropriate dream that my wife was giving me a drink out of a vase; this vase was an Etruscan cinerary urn which I had brought back from a journey to Italy and had since given away. But the water in it tasted so salty (evidently because of the ashes in the urn) that I woke up. It will be noticed how conveniently everything was arranged in this dream. Since its only purpose was to fulfil a wish, it could be completely egoistical. A love of comfort and convenience is not really compatible with consideration for other people. The introduction of the cinerary urn was probably yet another wish-fulfilment. I was sorry that the vase was no longer in my possession—just as the glass of water on my wife's table was out of my reach. The urn with its ashes fitted in, too, with the salty taste in my mouth which had now grown stronger and which I knew was bound to wake me.¹

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page [129](#)

¹ Weygandt (1893, 41) was aware of the occurrence of thirst dreams, for he writes: 'The sensation of thirst is perceived with greater precision than any other; it always gives rise to an idea of its being quenched. The manner in which the thirst is represented as being quenched in the dream varies, and derives its special form from some near-by memory. Another general feature in these cases is that immediately after the idea of the thirst being quenched there follows a disappointment over the small effect produced by the imaginary refreshment.' Weygandt, however, overlooks the fact that this reaction of a dream to a stimulus is one which holds good universally. Other people who are attacked by thirst in the night may wake up without having had a dream; but that is no objection to my experiment. It merely shows that they are worse sleepers than I am.—[Added 1914:] Compare in this connection Isaiah xxix, 8: 'It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite.'

- 124 -

Dreams of convenience like these were very frequent in my youth. Having made it a practice as far back as I can remember to work late into the night, I always found it difficult to wake early. I used then to have a dream of being out of bed and standing by the washing-stand; after a while I was no longer able to disguise from myself the fact that I was really still in bed, but in the meantime I had had a little more sleep. A slothful dream of this kind, which was expressed in a particularly amusing and elegant form, has been reported to me by a young medical colleague who seems to share my liking for sleep. The landlady of his lodgings in the neighbourhood of the hospital had strict instructions to wake him in time every morning but found it no easy job to carry them out. One morning sleep seemed peculiarly sweet. The landlady called through the door: 'Wake up, Herr Pepi! it's time to go to the hospital!' In response to this he had a dream that he was lying in bed in a room in the hospital, and that there was a card over the bed on which was written: 'Pepi H., medical student, age 22.' While he was dreaming, he said to himself 'As I'm already *in* the hospital, there's no need for me to go there'—and turned over and went on sleeping. In this way he openly confessed the motive for his dream.¹

Here is another dream in which once again the stimulus produced its effect during actual sleep. One of my women patients, who had been obliged to undergo an operation on her jaw which had taken an unfavourable course, was ordered by her doctors to wear a cooling apparatus on the side of her face day and night. But as soon as she fell asleep she used to throw it off. One day, after she had once more thrown the apparatus on the floor, I was asked to speak to her seriously about it. 'This time I really couldn't help it,' she answered. 'It was because of a dream I had in the night. I dreamt I was in a box at the opera and very much enjoying the performance. But Herr Karl Meyer was in the nursing-home and complaining bitterly of pains in his jaw. So I told myself that as I hadn't any pain I didn't need the apparatus; and I threw it away.' The dream of this poor sufferer seems almost like a concrete representation of a phrase that sometimes forces its way on to people's lips in unpleasant

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page [130](#)

¹ [This dream was reported by Freud in a letter to Fliess, dated March 4, 1895 (Freud, **1950a**, Letter 22)—the earliest recorded hint at the wish-fulfilment theory.]

- 125 -

situations: 'I must say I could think of something more agreeable than this.' The dream gives a picture of this more agreeable thing. The Herr Karl Meyer on to whom the dreamer transplanted her pains was the most indifferent young man of her acquaintance that she could call to mind.

The wish-fulfilment can be detected equally easily in some other dreams which I have collected from normal people. A friend of mine, who knows my theory of dreams and has told his wife of it, said to me one day: 'My wife has asked me to tell you that she had a dream yesterday that she was having her period. You can guess what that means.' I could indeed guess it. The fact that this young married woman dreamt that she was having her period meant that she had missed her period. I could well believe that she would have been glad to go on enjoying her freedom a little longer before shouldering the burden of motherhood. It was a neat way of announcing her first pregnancy. Another friend of mine wrote and told me that, not long before, his wife had dreamt that she had noticed some milk stains on the front of her vest. This too was an announcement of pregnancy, but not of a first one. The young mother was wishing that she might have more nourishment to give her second child than she had had for her first.

A young woman had been cut off from society for weeks on end while she nursed her child through an infectious illness. After the child's recovery, she had a dream of being at a party at which, among others, she met Alphonse Daudet, Paul Bourget, and Marcel Prévost; they were all most affable to her and highly amusing. All of the authors resembled their portraits, except Marcel Prévost, of whom she had never seen a picture; and he looked like ... the disinfection officer who had fumigated the sick-room the day before and who had been her first visitor for so long. Thus it seems possible to give a complete translation of the dream: 'It's about time for something more amusing than this perpetual sick-nursing.'

These examples will perhaps be enough to show that dreams which can only be understood as fulfilments of wishes and which bear their meaning upon their faces without disguise are to be found under the most frequent and various conditions. They are mostly short and simple dreams, which afford a pleasant contrast to the confused and exuberant compositions that have in the main attracted the attention of the authorities. Nevertheless,

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page **131**

- 126 -

it will repay us to pause for a moment over these simple dreams. We may expect to find the very simplest forms of dreams in *children*, since there can be no doubt that their psychical productions are less complicated than those of adults. Child psychology, in my opinion, is destined to perform the same useful services for adult psychology that the investigation of the structure or development of the lower animals has performed for research into the structure of the higher classes of animals. Few deliberate efforts have hitherto been made to make use of child psychology for this purpose.

The dreams of young children are frequently ¹ pure wish-fulfilments and are in that case ² quite uninteresting compared with the dreams of adults. They raise no problems for solution; but on the other hand they are of inestimable importance in proving that, in their essential nature, dreams represent fulfilments of wishes. I have been able to collect a few instances of such dreams from material provided by my own children.

I have to thank an excursion which we made from Ausee to the lovely village of Hallstatt ³ in the summer of 1896 for two dreams: one of these was dreamt by my daughter, who was then eight and a half, and the other by her brother of five and a quarter. I must explain by way of preamble that we had been spending the summer on a hillside near Ausee, from which, in fine weather, we enjoyed a splendid view of the Dachstein. The Simony Hütte could be clearly distinguished through a telescope. The children made repeated attempts at seeing it through the telescope—I cannot say with what success. Before our excursion I had told the children that Hallstatt lay at the foot of the Dachstein. They very much looked forward to the day. From Hallstatt we walked up the Echerntal, which delighted the children with its succession of changing landscapes. One of them, however, the five-year-old boy, gradually became fretful. Each time a new

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page [132](#)

1 [This word was added in 1911. The following comment upon this qualifying adverb appears in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3 (1925), 21: 'Experience has shown that distorted dreams, which stand in need of interpretation, are already found in children of four or five; and this is in full agreement with our theoretical views on the determining conditions of distortion in dreams.']

2 [Before 1911: 'for that reason'.]

3 [In the Salzkammergut district of Upper Austria.—'Echerntal' (below) is misprinted 'Escherntal' in all the German editions.]

- 127 -

mountain came into view he asked if that was the Dachstein and I had to say 'No, only one of the foothills.' After he had asked the question several times, he fell completely silent; and he refused point-blank to come with us up the steep path to the waterfall. I thought he was tired. But next morning he came to me with a radiant face and said: 'Last night I dreamt we were at the Simony Hütte.' I understood him then. When I had spoken about the Dachstein, he had expected to climb the mountain in the course of our excursion to Hallstatt and to find himself at close quarters with the hut which there had been so much talk about in connection with the telescope. But when he found that he was being fobbed off with foothills and a waterfall, he felt disappointed and out of spirits. The dream was a compensation. I tried to discover its details, but they were scanty: 'You have to climb up steps for six hours'—which was what he had been told.

The same excursion stirred up wishes in the eight-and-a-half-year-old girl as well—wishes which had to be satisfied in a dream. We had taken our neighbour's twelve-year-old son with us to Hallstatt. He was already a full-blown gallant, and there were signs that he had engaged the young lady's affections. Next morning she told me the following dream: 'Just fancy! I had a dream that Emil was one of the family and called you "Father" and "Mother" and slept with us in the big room like the boys. Then Mother came in and threw a handful of big bars of chocolate, wrapped up in blue and green paper, under our beds.' Her brothers, who have evidently not inherited a faculty for understanding dreams, followed the lead of the authorities and declared that the dream was nonsense. The girl herself defended one part of the dream at least; and it throws light on the theory of the neuroses to learn *which* part. 'Of course it's nonsense Emil being one of the family; but the part about the bars of chocolate isn't.' It had been precisely on that point that I had been in the dark, but the girl's mother now gave me the explanation. On their way home from the station the children had stopped in front of a slot-machine from which they were accustomed to obtain bars of chocolate of that very kind, wrapped in shiny metallic paper. They had wanted to get some; but their mother rightly decided that the day had already fulfilled enough wishes and left this one over to be fulfilled by the dream. I myself had not observed the incident. But the part

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page [133](#)

- 128 -

of the dream which had been proscribed by my daughter was immediately clear to me. I myself had heard our well-behaved guest telling the children on the walk to wait till Father and Mother caught up with them. The little girl's dream turned this temporary kinship into permanent adoption. Her affection was not yet able to picture any other forms of companionship than those which were represented in the dream and which were based on her relation to her brothers. It was of course impossible to discover without questioning her why the bars of chocolate were thrown under the beds.

A friend of mine has reported a dream to me which was very much like my son's. The dreamer was an eight-year-old girl. Her father had started off with several children on a walk to Dornbach,¹ with the idea of visiting the Rohrer Hütte. As it was getting late, however, he had turned back, promising the children to make up for the disappointment another time. On their way home they had passed the sign-post that marks the path up to the Hameau. The children had then asked to be taken up to the Hameau; but once again for the same reason they had to be consoled with the promise of another day. Next morning the eight-year-old girl came to her father and said in satisfied tones: 'Daddy, I dreamt last night that you went with us to the Rohrer Hütte and the Hameau.' In her impatience she had anticipated the fulfilment of her father's promises.

Here is an equally straightforward dream, provoked by the beauty of the scenery at Aussce in another of my daughters, who was at that time three and a quarter. She had crossed the lake for the first time, and the crossing had been too short for her: when we reached the landing-stage she had not wanted to leave the boat and had wept

bitterly. Next morning she said: 'Last night I went on the lake.' Let us hope that her dream-crossing had been of a more satisfying length.

My eldest boy, then eight years old, already had dreams of his phantasies coming true: he dreamt that he was driving in a chariot with Achilles and that Diomedes was the charioteer. As may be guessed, he had been excited the day before by a book on the legends of Greece which had been given to his elder sister.

If I may include words spoken by children in their sleep under the heading of dreams, I can at this point quote one of the most

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page [134](#)

1 [In the hills just outside Vienna.]

- 129 -

youthful dreams in my whole collection. My youngest daughter, then nineteen months old, had had an attack of vomiting one morning and had consequently been kept without food all day. During the night after this day of starvation she was heard calling out excitedly in her sleep: 'Anna Fweud, stwawbewwies, wild stwawbewwies, omblet, pudden!' At that time she was in the habit of using her own name to express the idea of taking possession of something. The menu included pretty well everything that must have seemed to her to make up a desirable meal. The fact that strawberries appeared in it in two varieties was a demonstration against the domestic health regulations. It was based upon the circumstance, which she had no doubt observed, that her nurse had attributed her indisposition to a surfeit of strawberries. She was thus retaliating in her dream against this unwelcome verdict.¹

Though we think highly of the happiness of childhood because it is still innocent of sexual desires, we should not forget what a fruitful source of disappointment and renunciation, and consequently what a stimulus to dreaming, may be provided by the other of the two great vital instincts.² Here is another instance of this. My nephew, aged 22 months, had been entrusted with the duty of congratulating me on my birthday and of presenting me with a basket of cherries, which are still scarcely in season at that time of year. He seems to have found the task a hard

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page [135](#)

1 The same feat was accomplished shortly afterwards by a dream produced by this little girl's grandmother—their combined ages came to some seventy years. She had been obliged to go without food for a whole day on account of a disturbance due to a floating kidney. During the following night, no doubt imagining herself back in the heyday of her girlhood, she dreamt that she had been 'asked out' to both of the principal meals and been served at both with the most appetizing delicacies.—[The little girl's dream had been reported to Fliess not long after its occurrence (Freud, [1950a](#), Letter 73 of October 31, 1897).]

2 [Footnote added 1911:] A closer study of the mental life of children has taught us, to be sure, that sexual instinctual forces, in infantile form, play a large enough part, and one that has been too long overlooked, in the psychical activity of children. Closer study, too, has given us grounds for feeling some doubt in regard to the happiness of childhood as it has been constructed by adults in retrospect. Cf. my *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* ([1905d](#)).—[The remarkable inconsistency between this sentence in the text and several other passages (e.g. on p. [256](#) ff. below) is commented on in the editor's preface to the last-mentioned work in the seventh volume of the Standard Edition.]

[According to a communication from Ernest Jones, the present footnote was added on a representation from Jung.]

- 130 -

one, for he kept on repeating 'Chewwies in it' but could not be induced to hand the present over. However, he found a means of compensation. He had been in the habit every morning of telling his mother that he had a dream of the 'white soldier'—a Guards officer in his white cloak whom he had once gazed at admiringly in the street. On the day after his birthday sacrifice he awoke with a cheerful piece of news, which could only have originated from a dream: 'Hermann eaten all the chewwies!'¹

I do not myself know what animals dream of. But a proverb, to which my attention was drawn by one of my students, does

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page [136](#)

¹ [*Footnote added 1911:*] The fact should be mentioned that children soon begin to have more complicated and less transparent dreams, and that, on the other hand, adults in certain circumstances often have dreams of a similarly simple, infantile character. The wealth of unexpected material that may occur in the dreams of children of four or five is shown by examples in my ‘Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy’ (1909b) and in Jung (1910a).—[*Added 1914:*] For analytical interpretations of children’s dreams see also von Hug-Hellmuth (1911 and 1913), Putnam (1912), van Raalte (1912), Spielrein (1913) and Tausk (1913). Children’s dreams are also reported by Bianchieri (1912), Busemann (1909 and 1910), Doglia and Bianchieri (1910-11) and, in particular, Wiggam (1909), who lays stress on their trend towards wish-fulfilment.—[*Added 1911:*] On the other hand, dreams of an infantile type seem to occur in adults with special frequency when they find themselves in unusual external circumstances. Thus Otto Nordenskjöld (1904, 1, 336 f.) writes as follows of the members of his expedition while they were wintering in the Antarctic: ‘The direction taken by our innermost thoughts was very clearly shown by our dreams, which were never more vivid or numerous than at this time. Even those of us who otherwise dreamt but rarely had long stories to tell in the morning when we exchanged our latest experiences in this world of the imagination. They were all concerned with the outside world which was now so remote from us, though they were often adapted to our actual circumstances. One of my companions had a particularly characteristic dream of being back in his school class-room, where it was his task to skin miniature seals which had been specially prepared for instructional purposes. Eating and drinking, however, were the pivot round which our dreams most often revolved. One of us, who had a special gift for attending large luncheon parties during the night, was proud if he was able to report in the morning that he had “got through a three-course dinner”. Another of us dreamt of tobacco, of whole mountains of tobacco; while a third dreamt of a ship in full sail coming in across open water. Yet another dream is worth repeating. The postman brought round the mail and gave a long explanation of why we had had to wait so long for it: he had delivered it at the wrong address and had only succeeded in recovering it with great difficulty. We dreamt, of course, of still more impossible things. But there was a most striking lack of imaginativeness shown by almost all the dreams that I dreamt myself or heard described. It would certainly be of great psychological interest if all these dreams could be recorded. And it will easily be understood how much we longed for sleep, since it could offer each one of us everything that he most eagerly desired.’ [This passage is much abbreviated in the English translation of Nordenskjöld’s book (1905, 290).—*Added 1914:*] According to Du Prel (1885, 231), ‘Mungo Park, when he was almost dying of thirst on one of his African journeys, dreamt unceasingly of the well-watered valleys and meadows of his home. Similarly, Baron Trenck suffering torments of hunger while he was a prisoner in the fortress at Magdeburg, dreamt of being surrounded by sumptuous meals; and George Back, who took part in Franklin’s first expedition, when he was almost dying of starvation as a result of his fearful privations, dreamt constantly and regularly of copious meals.’

- 131 -

claim to know. ‘What’, asks the proverb, ‘do geese dream of?’ And it replies: ‘Of maize.’¹ The whole theory that dreams are wish-fulfilments is contained in these two phrases.²

It will be seen that we might have arrived at our theory of the hidden meaning of dreams most rapidly merely by following

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page [137](#)

¹ [*Footnote added 1911:*] A Hungarian proverb quoted by Ferenczi (1910) goes further and declares that ‘pigs dream of acorns and geese dream of maize’.—[*Added 1914:*] A Jewish proverb runs: ‘What do hens dream of?—Of millet’.—(Bernstein and Segel, 1908, 116.)

² [*Footnote added 1914:*] I am far from seeking to maintain that I am the first writer to have had the idea of deriving dreams from wishes. (Cf. the opening sentences of my next chapter.) Those who attach any importance to anticipations of this kind may go back to classical antiquity and quote Herophilus, a physician who lived under the first Ptolemy. According to Büchschütz (1868, 33), he distinguished three sorts of dreams: those which are sent by the gods, those which are natural and arise when the mind forms a picture of something that is agreeable to it and will come about, and those which are of a mixed nature and which arise of their own accord from the emergence of pictures in which we see what we wish for. J. Stärcke (1913, [248]) has drawn attention to a dream in Scherner’s collection which that writer himself describes as the fulfilment of a wish. Scherner (1861, 239) writes: ‘The dreamer’s imagination fulfilled her waking wish so promptly, simply because that wish was emotionally active in her.’ Scherner classes this dream among ‘dreams of mood’; alongside it he places ‘dreams of erotic yearning’ in men and women, and ‘dreams of illtemper’. There is clearly no question of Scherner attributing any more importance to wishes in the instigation of dreams than to any other waking mental state: still less is there any question of his having related wishes to the essential nature of dreaming.

- 132 -

linguistic usage. It is true that common language sometimes speaks of dreams with contempt. (The phrase ‘*Träume sind Schäume* [Dreams are froth]’ seems intended to support the scientific estimate of dreams.) But, on the whole, ordinary usage treats dreams above all as the blessed fulfillers of wishes. If ever we find our expectation surpassed by the event, we exclaim in our delight: ‘I should never have imagined such a thing even in my wildest dreams.’¹

[PEP] This page can be read in German in GESAMMELTE WERKE Vol 2, Page [138](#)

¹ [Children's dreams (including many of those recorded in this chapter) and dreams of an infantile type are discussed in Lecture VIII of Freud's *Introductory Lectures* (1916-17) and more briefly in Section III of his short study *On Dreams* (1901a) (*Standard Ed.*, 5, [643](#) f.).]