The Herzen State Pedagogical University

# “The interpretation of dreams”

# (The interpretation of dreams by Sigmund Freud)

Course Project

In English

2nd year student

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Introduction.

"The Interpretation of Dreams" provides plenty of Freud's dreams in his own interpretation, among which the famous dream of Irma's injection, which he considers a key issue in understanding the mysteries of dream life. It opens Chapter II ("The Method Of Interpreting Dreams: An Analysis Of A Specimen Dream") and provides material for an analysis covering several pages ahead. Just as Freud himself maintained, the analysis of the dream is not complete but it was here that Freud for the first time asserted that dreams are the disguised fulfilment of unconscious wishes. The explanation of the dream is quite simple: it tries to hide Freud's lack of satisfaction with the treatment given to a patient of his, Irma, and throw the guilt of partial failure upon others, exonerate Freud of other professional errors it also hints at. Dream interpretation also provides a dream psychology and many other issues. The volume is extremely inventive and rich in information, and, in its author's view, it is his most important work.

**Chapter 1. How this book start.**

Freud was both a medical doctor and a philosopher. As a doctor, he was interested in charting how the human mind affected the body, particularly in forms of mental illness, such as neurosis and hysteria, and in finding ways to cure those mental illnesses. As a philosopher, Freud was interested in looking at the relationship between mental functioning and certain basic structures of civilization, such as religious beliefs. Freud believed, and many people after him believe, that his theories about how the mind worked uncovered some basic truths about how an individual self is formed, and how culture and civilization operate.

In 1897 Sigmund Freud began his famous course of self-analysis. He had already noticed that dreams played an important role in his analysis of neurotic and "hysterical" patients. As he encouraged them to free-associate, that is, talk about whatever came into their minds, they often referred to their dreams, which would set off other associations and often illuminate other important connections in their past experience. Freud also had noticed that hallucinations in psychotic patients were very much like dreams. Based on these observations, Freud began to believe that sleeping dreams were nearly always, like day-dreams, wish fulfillment.

Freud had always been an active dreamer, and much of his self-analysis focused on dreams, convincing him conclusively in the wish-fulfillment theory. Within a few months of beginning his self-analysis, he decided to write a book about dreams. He looked into the literature and was pleased to see that no one had proposed his idea before. In fact, most people believed dreams were just nonsense. It took Freud about two years to write *The Interpretation of Dreams,* finishing it in September 1897. It was published late in the year and released in 1900. Freud was paid about $209.

The book explained the double level of dreams: the actual dream with its "manifest content," and the dream's true if hidden meaning, or "latent content." The idea of dream as wish-fulfillment was explained, and he introduced the theory that sexuality was an important part of childhood, a shocking idea at the time. He also outlined a sort of universal language of dreams, by which they might be interpreted.

Most people now agree that *The Interpretation of Dreams* was Freud's most important work, but it took eight years to sell the 600 copies printed in 1900. In the first year and a half, no scientific journal reviewed it and few other periodicals mentioned it. It was largely ignored, though in psychological journals it received crushing reviews. One critic warned that "uncritical minds would be delighted to join in this play with ideas and would end up in complete mysticism and chaotic arbitrariness."

In 1910, however, Freud's overall work was becoming better known and a second edition was printed. There would be six more in Freud's lifetime, the last in 1929. He changed very little in the book, only adding illustrations, elaborating certain ideas, and adding to the portions on symbolism. The book was translated into English and Russian in 1913, and into six more languages by 1938. Though he was a prolific writer, *The Interpretation of Dreams* remained Freud's most original work. Despite the initial cold reception, Freud himself knew it was a breakthrough. "Insight such as this falls to one's lot but once in a lifetime," he wrote.

**Chapter 2. The dream theory.**

According to Freud (in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*), dreams are symbolic fulfillments of wishes that can't be fulfilled because they've been repressed. Often these wishes can't even be expressed directly in consciousness, because they are forbidden, so they come out in dreams--but in strange ways, in ways that often hide or disguise the true wish behind the dream.

Freud believed that dreams acted as a form of fantasy, a defense mechanism against the unacceptable urges of the id.  Fantasy allows the individual to act out events in the imagination, which can satiate the urges of the id which are repressed.  Freud theorized that dreams were a subconscious manifestation of these repressed urges, and that they served mainly to satisfy sexual and aggressive tendencies.  The interpretation of dreams has come to be one of the aspects of Freud's studies which are most popularized, as he took the importance of dreams far more seriously than many of those who came before him or studied after him, even students of his own science: psychoanalysis.  
Freud recognized that the interpretation of dreams was a very difficult task.  Many barriers to clear insights into dreams exist, and many elements of contamination may render the analysis of the dream as being incorrect, or make the dream impossible to analyze at all.  One of the biggest problems was remembering the dream in detail.  As dreams take place on a totally subconscious level, there is a good chance that aspects of dreams will be muddled or forgotten completely, aspects which may have had a significant impact on the analysis of the dream.  He also realized that a the patient might fabricate the missing pieces of the dream, which would render it ingenuine and result in an inaccurate interpretation.  Freud stated that the dream must be accepted as total fact if the dream is to be analyzed, which seems contrary to his typical practice of constantly questioning the validity of patients' statements.  
Another significant barrier to interpretation of dreams is the fact that there is often no textbook diagnosis available.  This is to say that dreams of comprised of symbolism, and that what an object symbolizes for the individual varies from person to person.  Therefore, the analyst must rely on the patient to provide significant amounts of background information in order to determine what objects symbolize.  Of course, another obvious problem is that the meaning of the symbol may be repressed as well, or stem from a  repressed event, and therefore the patient can offer no explanation of the symbol.  Freud himself admitted in his works that he often encountered problems with patients not divulging enough background information, and that aspects of dreams were left uninterpreted.  
Freud still offered some symbols as constants, however, and felt that all people incorporated these symbols and their meanings into dreams.However, the emphasis on sexual imagery is a majority of this text, ranging form symbolism of the genitals and other erogenous zones, to symbolism of sexual acts such as intercourse and orgasm.  This is perhaps one of his most assaulted theories, as it not only states that there is a constant (or law) among all individuals that  "object a = meaning a," but also that there is such an absurd amount of these sexual symbols that almost every dream could be boiled down to nothing more than an expression of sexuality.  Though sexuality was certainly a present theme in nearly all Freud's works, modern analysts do not seem to find such a gross amount of sexual content in dreams.

Dreams use two main mechanisms to disguise forbidden wishes: CONDENSATION and DISPLACEMENT. Condensation is when a whole set of images is packed into a single image or statement, when a complex meaning is condensed into a simpler one. Condensation corresponds to METAPHOR in language, where one thing is condensed into another ("love is a rose, and you'd better not pick it"--this metaphor condenses all the qualities of a rose, including smell and thorns, into a single image). Displacement is where the meaning of one image or symbol gets pushed onto something associated with it, which then displaces the original image. Displacement corresponds to the mechanism of METONYMY in language, where one thing is replaced by something corresponding to it. (An example of metonymy is when you evoke an image of a whole thing by naming a part of it--when you say "the crown" when you mean the king or royalty, for example, or you say "twenty sails" when you mean twenty ships. You displace the idea of the whole thing onto a part associated with that thing). You might think of condensation and metaphor as being like Saussure's syntagmatic relations, which happen in a chain (x is y is z), and displacement and metonymy being like Saussure's associative relations.

Conclusion.

This work was, by his own assessment, Sigmund Freud's greatest. In the process of showing how seemingly meaningless fragments of dreams suggest the whole range of personal issues in the dreamer's present and past life, Freud lays out the basis for a new psychology and therapy. And anyone can use this book to know more about his life.