

THE DREAM: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE SUBJECT

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For Freud, there are dreams which ‘really mean what they say...’.¹ This is the case when they have not been distorted by censorship. Nevertheless, the rule is that the manifest content of the dream is nothing but a ‘facade’,² and that, whether in a dream ‘it shows’³ sometimes to the point of blinding, above all, a dream is a want-to-say [*..il veut dire*, can also read: *it means*]. If there is a want-to-say, it does not say, it is not said. So, the dream’s latent content is more important for Freud, than the manifest content.⁴ The Freudian answer to the dream’s enigma is that it expresses the fulfillment of an unconscious wish. The dream would therefore understand an interpretation of desire.

That the dream is a want-to-say, and does not say, raises, in the transference, the question of the subject’s resistance to saying, as well as the resistance of an impossible-to-say. In the three types of dream that Freud reports — wish-fulfillment, anxiety and trauma — it is especially the latter which explains that wanting-to-say is also connected to an obscure point,⁵ as he calls it, which refers to the real — at the same time to the source of the dream-work and its interpretation, and the stumbling block to its deciphering. Hence the real manifests its presence in any dream where it is shown that a statement only functions in relation to an impossible-to-say.

Besides, ‘it wants-to-say’ remains marked for the subject by the impossibility of stating what in the dream ‘I’ wants-to-say — as Lacan makes precise, “the dream-wish is not assumed by the subject who says ‘I’ in speaking”.⁶

If the dream were strictly a wish-fulfillment, there would be nothing left but to continue to dream. Indeed, satisfaction in the dream is nothing but a satisfaction by substitution: the drive is satisfied in it by substitution in so far as it is represented in it.

Freud raises the same issue in regard to the symptom, which is also a substitute satisfaction of an unconscious desire, a compromise formation. Although he establishes a difference between the dream and the symptom in relation to the preconscious and the censorship, he emphasises that they have a common structure which replies to the laws of the unconscious.⁷ He will be another parentage for them, this time causal, in the fantasy.

For Freud, the dream shows that there is a remainder to be satisfied, therefore, a dissatisfaction. This is really what he calls ‘the unconscious desire’.

The dream, the subject’s interpretation

The dream reactivates that which escapes forgetting and at the same time brings a work to bear on its elements, a secondary elaboration. As an effect of this secondary elaboration, “the dreams have already been interpreted once before being submitted to our waking interpretation”.⁸ A text results from this, that of the dream, which is, therefore, in itself an interpretation. Moreover, the dreamer adopts a position in relation to his dream: he exercises an interpretation of the interpretation. When Freud says that the dream is ‘the fulfillment of a wish’,⁹ he is also making an interpretation of the interpretation which is the dream itself.

In *The Direction of the Treatment*, Lacan emphasises that Freud is proposing 'the dream as a metaphor of desire'.¹⁰ Something has passed into meaning [*sens*] in the dream, and, from this passage, results what Freud has called desire. But, as Lacan takes it up again: it is about a 'desire to have an unsatisfied desire'.¹¹ It is a *Wunsch*, a wish, about which Lacan says that there are wishes '[...] pious, nostalgic, contradictory, farcical'.¹² The desire that Freud isolates in the dream reveals the dimension of lack: of the subject's want-to-be [*manque-à-être*] which presents itself as a want-to-enjoy [*manque-à-jouir*].¹³ Lacan takes up the well-known dream of the 'beautiful butcher's wife' in order to show how a desire refers to another desire, how the dream carries desire to a geometrically progressive power.¹⁴ In this reference of one desire to another, Lacan distinguishes — in *The Direction of the Treatment* and in *Radiophonie* — two dimensions to this desire of desire which is ordered according to the laws which link the signifying chain: metonymic combination producing displacement and metaphoric substitution with its effect of condensation.¹⁵

Dream and transference

That there is an effect of meaning in dreams, that their text reveals the tropes of the structure of language (metaphor, metonymy) does not mean that the dream is unconscious. Lacan is formal on this point: 'The dream is not the unconscious but [...] the royal road'.¹⁶

This must lead neither to overinvesting the dream nor to making it a point that cannot be bypassed in the treatment. Freud already insisted on emphasising — that dreams of convenience only verify that desire is desire of the Other, for instance, that which the analyst is supposed to be — that it is the same with 'accommodating dreams' or 'confirming dreams' which, he says, 'limp behind the analysis'.¹⁷ These dreams can take over and reproduce whatever can be subjectivised of the analyst's interpretation. They put into the foreground the question of suggestion and of transference-love.

This love, if it is an effect of transference, is also, by virtue of its deceptive dimension, its face of resistance. Lacan underscores this paradox of transference; and at the same time it is an obstacle to the work. In other words, it is necessary for interpretation, and it closes the subject off from the effect of the interpretation.¹⁸ This question is raised especially for the dream in the treatment. Indeed, the dream, if it is an indicator of resistance, is also revealing of the place in the treatment given to the analyst by the analysand. In this sense, any dream in the treatment is a transference dream. What comes from the unconscious by way of the dream must not be overinvested but, as Lacan recommends, must be read — by the letter. I am citing from *Encore*: "A dream does not introduce any unfathomable experience, any mystery, it is read in what is said about it, and one could go further by taking its equivocations in the most anagrammatic sense of the word".¹⁹

The start of a treatment

A young woman wanted to meet an analyst because she suffered from a repetition of failures in her relations with men. She has a lot to say about them, a lot to complain about. She puts so much of herself in these relationships that the problem must come from them. She knows herself very well, and it is not for that, for knowing herself, that she is coming, but to complain about men. This is what she will have me understand. She also made the possibility of 'entry into transference' very doubtful. She will develop it over several sessions. Should I interrupt her on a statement [*dire*] that escaped her and about which she said 'dissatisfied', she becomes uneasy about her analysis: she does not experience what one says of transference, namely love for her analyst.

With this dream, she is not sure that it is this one; nevertheless, she believes that this one says that she is in analysis. On the other hand, this dream disturbs her. She is 'embarrassed' about making a mistake about the proper name of the author, she says, to which the text of the dream refers. Besides, this author who appears there is not at all of her literary taste, and she wants me to know this, for she would not like me to have such an idea of her, for me to see her in a certain way. She is at a scene and reciting a text she does not recognise. It says things about her life in which she recognises herself and other things that she does not know. Which is more true? Which of these two versions is she? Persons enter and leave the scene furtively in order to limit, to correct, to prohibit the expression of her text. It seems to her that these persons sometimes borrow the faces of her parents.

Nearby, at an angle, a person kept himself sitting. It is thanks to, and from this person, that the text came to her. To her surprise, inscribed in neat and distinct letters is the name of the author who, at the same time, is listening attentively to her recital: 'SACHAN GUITRY'. Interrupting the session on this point triggers laughter in her, and she comes up with this interpretation which just appears in her thoughts: *Sachant, Guy trie* [knowing about things, Guy is going to sort them out].

The dream shows that the analysand is here in the work-of-saying, the work-of-saying which encounters obstacles raised by the subject itself in the transference relation. It is the very difficulty of free association.

She came for what she called "a repetition of failures in her relations with men". As I said, she thought that she knew herself. Only this one point, although a point of suffering, is to be tackled, and which appears as a point of non-knowledge, or rather as question: who is she? From the author in the dream her own message returned to her in an inverse form from the Other of transference. There, too, emerges a question for her about knowledge. There, where she thinks she has entered the analysis because love for the analyst turned up in her, it is a question about knowledge and supposition of knowledge which is clearly expressed. On this point, in effect, transference was established.

A subject which comes to speak to an Other, supposes it has knowledge, even a know-how concerning its complaint; this is a point that Jacques-Alain Miller has developed.²⁰ The subject transfers onto another a knowledge about its question. But, in order to become an analysable symptom, it is necessary that the symptom as a complaint be put into a form in the field of the Other, that is, completed with transference. It is in this operation of transference that the supposition of knowledge is situated. One can make this point valid for the dream as well.

Dream and interpretation

Lacan in his summary of the Seminar on *Ethics*, indicates clearly what the analyst must formally take into account in the dream: "Nothing comes from the unconscious by way of the dream but incoherent meaning that it fabricates in order to clothe what it articulates like a phrase".²¹ That is to say, what comes is already an interpretation — 'wild', Lacan adds. This interpretation is not worth any more than the reasoned interpretation that the analyst might substitute for it: "The rebus of the deciphered dream shows a gap in meaning, and it is in nothing else that it connotes a desire".²² For Lacan, the desire of the dream is nothing else but the desire to have meaning. Here, the act of the analyst might find a place. In this way, then, the dream like the symptom demands to be completed by the analyst. This is precisely not to interpret the dream. On the contrary, to the demand for interpretation which the dream is, to the call in the transference for the analyst to deliver an interpretation, the latter can only reply as he would to any statement made by the analysand. 'A dream is a dream': with this phrase Lacan exposes in *The Direction*

of the Treatment the banalisation of the dream, indeed the contemptuous attitude of some analysts to it.²³ On the other hand, the dream is not a 'choice morsel' of the analysis from which the analyst in excelling himself would deliver the hidden meaning to the analysand. The cleverness of this type of interpretation only reveals the analyst's position of mastery.

The text of the dream as such must be put to work. It does not need the analyst's 'clarifying interpretation'. Any reply to it would add an external interpretation to the subject, a saying on top of the analysand's saying, from meaning to meaning. This orientation ends up in an effect of suggestion, suggesting to the analysand a meaning to his dream, a meaning that he can make his own but which locks away for him the effect of division that the dream might reveal.

To dream, to remember, to comment, to forget, to transform, are already interpretations of the subject that the analyst by his act is going to *disinterpret*. This has to be understood as what by the analyst's act is not going to add meaning to meaning but to produce a new knowledge. Therefore, to *disinterpret* supposes interpretation such that one has to understand it on the basis of the interpretation that Lacan gives us.

If in stating certain dreams the analyst devotes himself to his silence, this is not what regulates his act exclusively. Here, the question of scansion is raised, to which Lacan in *Function and Field of Speech and Language* attributes the value of interpretation. The scansion that the act requires has nothing to do with a predetermined temporality nor with the time that would be necessary to recount the whole dream or all the dreams of the same night. The analysand might apply himself to such a recital and show his good will in putting to work what seems to him to reply to the expectation of the analyst. In this sense, the moment of scansion is not subordinated to the time of the narration of the dream, and it does not determine the space of the session. It does not confine the analyst in a position of not being able to intervene or of keeping silent.

If the interpretation here is silent, elsewhere it necessitates that the analyst speak, that he produce a statement. That is how it goes for the dream when it is a matter of underlining a point, of putting the elements of the dream into a tension with the analysand's associations, of accenting forgetting, of bringing together a part of the dream with significant moments of the analysand's life. It is not a matter of adding up meaning, but, by managing scansion, of adding equivocation to open the subject up to a questioning in the direction of a desire to know, a desire to know which pushes the subject beyond the *jouissance* of remembering to a construction in analysis. Freud had already noted this: remembering does not limit repetition. The latter is a return of the real which insists on returning to the same place on the basis of what has made a trace of the original trauma. The dream is the support of remembering as a memory linked to traces.

The act is a cut in relation to the effect's of meaning. It goes against what a dream-interpretation might produce: the addition of meaning to meaning. Thus, the analyst will not oppose to the dream a 'reasoned' interpretation but will orient by his act the work of deciphering the text of the dream.

Translated by Richard Klein

1. S. Freud, *Some Additional Notes upon Dream-Interpretation as a Whole*, 1925, SE XIX: 132.
2. *Ibid.*

3. J. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, transl. A. Sheridan, Tavistock/Routledge, 1977.
4. S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900, SE V.
5. *Ibid.*
6. J. Lacan, *The Direction of Treatment and the Principles of its Power in Ecrits: A Selection*, transl. A. Sheridan, 1977.
7. S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *op. cit.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. J. Lacan, *The Direction of Treatment and the Principles of its Power*, *op. cit.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. J. Lacan, *Radiophonie* in *Scilicet* 2/3, Paris, Seuil, 1970, p.69.
16. J. Lacan, *The Direction of Treatment and the Principles of its Power*, *op. cit.*
17. S. Freud, *Remarks on the Theory and Practice of Dream-Interpretation*, 1923, SE XIX.
18. J. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, *op. cit.*
19. J. Lacan, *Seminar XX: Encore*, transl. B. Fink, Norton, 1998, p.
20. J.-A. Miller, *Reflexions sur l'enveloppe formelle du symptome* in *Actes de l'Ecole de la Cause freudienne*, No.9, Paris, 1986, pp.67-71.
21. J. Lacan, *Compte rendu du Seminaire d l'ethique* in *Ornicar?* No.28, Paris, Navarin, 1984, p.17.
22. *Ibid.*
23. J. Lacan, *The Direction of Treatment and the Principles of its Power*, *op. cit.*

This text was originally published in *La Cause freudienne* No 34, 1996

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