

## Freud's Secret:

### *The Interpretation of Dreams* was a Gothic Novel

Robert J.C. Young

I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth, by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two. I say two, because the state of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. Others will follow, others will outstrip me on the same lines; and I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens.

'Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case', *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886)

It was to be fourteen years before a little-known novelist fulfilled the prediction of Dr Jekyll's final confession by publishing what was to become the most famous case history in gothic fiction: the autobiography of a man whose psyche was made up of nothing more than 'a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens'. The close of the nineteenth-century witnessed a resurgence of Gothic novels and stories which particularly emphasized forms of psychological terror—examples include Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, James' *The Turn of the Screw*, and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. It has now become commonplace to provide 'Freudian' interpretations of Gothic fantasy novels, but few have recognized that this exercise is

essentially tautological. This is because Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) was in fact itself a Gothic novel. Freud took the increasing psychological preoccupation of the gothic novel to its logical conclusion: instead of portraying the psychological through a fictional narrative, he wrote a novel that pretended to be a real work of scientific psychology. In choosing to focus on dreams, however, he assumed that even without the apparent trappings of fiction the novel would be recognized for what it was.

But what differentiates *The Interpretation of Dreams* from all other gothic novels is that its elaborate self-presentation as a scientific case history was so successful that few readers ever realized that they were being taken in; few got as far as asking themselves the question posed by the narrator of Rider Haggard's *She* (1887): 'was I merely the victim of a gigantic and most elaborate hoax?'. The scientific realism of Freud's case study is so thorough and appears to be so authentic that few have ever penetrated the secret of a book ostensibly dedicated to dream analysis. Freud himself in his prefaces already suggests its evident autobiographical content — that its self-analysis formed a reaction to his father's death and that he had thus very fittingly placed Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* at its centre. This fictional confession is, of course, deliberately designed to lurk behind the analysis so as to provide a deliberate decoy for the suspicious reader. Within the text Freud himself hints at this pitfall: just because you have a coherent interpretation, he says, do not assume that you have wrapped up the whole thing—there may be another:

It is only with the greatest difficulty that the beginner in the business of interpreting dreams can be persuaded that his task is not at an end when he has a complete interpretation in his hands—an interpretation which makes

sense, is coherent and throws light upon every element of the dream's content. For the same dream may perhaps have another interpretation as well, an 'over-interpretation', which has escaped him.

Reader beware.

Most famous gothic novels, such as *Frankenstein* or *Dracula*, have measured their success by the degree to which their central characters have been incorporated into the popular mythology of Western culture. Though it could be argued that 'Dr Freud' has become as pervasive a mythological figure, and has certainly become a legend of sorts in popular culture, *The Interpretation of Dreams* has succeeded in going one stage further: the reality-effect that it generated has been so powerful that, rather in the manner that distraught viewers send flowers to the funerals of characters in TV soap-operas, all over the Western world plausible followers of Freud have ever since been taking money off gullible neurotics by offering them the opportunity to have their own dreams analysed in the manner of the book. Freud himself encouraged this amusing effect by claiming to practise a therapy which he called 'psychoanalysis', and followed the *Interpretation of Dreams* with further apparently theoretical texts on the subject. During his lifetime, Freud was always particularly tickled by attacks from psychiatrists and philosophers who sought to 'disprove' the claims of psychoanalysis—who little realized how much they had already been taken in by seeking to disprove it. He loved to taunt his critics with comments such as 'this is merely due to our being obliged to operate with the scientific terms, that is to say, with the figurative language, peculiar to psychology'.<sup>1</sup> Since his psychoanalysis never in fact claimed a scientific method, being rather a practice of literary interpretation, it was of course disprovable, but could never be disproved beyond

the observation that its method was not scientific — and could therefore never be proved. Freud's humorous spoof has only been bettered in recent years by the French writer and 'psychoanalyst', Jacques Lacan, who began by working within the orthodox psychoanalytic institution and gradually discovered that the more impenetrable he made his language, the more obscure his writings, and the more he insulted his audience, the greater the reverence in which he was held. When the International Psychoanalytic Association finally came to realize that they had a jester in their ranks, they expelled him. But Lacan's response was to found a new school, the *Ecole freudienne*, which immediately became even more influential and continues to prosper.

Who was this Freud, who pulled off such a fictional coup, unparalleled in literary history? Some have argued that not only was *The Interpretation of Dreams* a hoax, but that 'Sigmund Freud' was itself a pseudonym. Several of the works now ascribed to him, such as *The Moses of Michelangelo* (1914) were originally published anonymously. This, however, is typical of the genre: anonymity or publication under a pseudonym forms the rule rather than the exception for gothic fiction as a whole. Freud seems to be suggesting the possibility that he was not writing his own works by his constant allusions to the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy, and by his emphatically-stated conversion after reading a book by the implausibly named J. Thomas Looney to the idea that in fact Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, was the author of Shakespeare's plays. Here Freud tested his readers' gullibility to the limit by adding the following footnote at the end of his biographical interpretation of *Hamlet* in *The Interpretation of Dreams*: 'Incidentally, I have in the meantime ceased to believe that the author of Shakespeare's works was the man from

Stratford'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Freud's claim that his professional calling came after reading Goethe's essay on Nature, which was in fact by Tobler and included only by 'paramnesia' in Goethe's works, seems to hint in a subtler way at the same inauthenticity. In 1921, the fraudulent hoax of 'Freud' seemed about to be revealed in the scandal that followed the publication of *A Young Girl's Diary* (1921), a volume which had been edited by Dr Hermine Hug-Hellmuth, the first child psychoanalyst. The book is prefaced with a letter by Freud who describes it as:

a gem. Never before, I believe, has anything been written enabling us to see so clearly into the soul of a young girl, belonging to our social and cultural stratum, during the years of puberal development.... Above all, we are shown how the mystery of the sexual life first presses itself vaguely on the attention, and then takes entire possession of the growing intelligence, so that the child suffers under the load of secret knowledge but gradually becomes enabled to shoulder the burden.<sup>3</sup>

However, doubts were soon voiced about the authenticity of this volume, and some suggested that the diary was in fact written by Dr Hug-Hellmuth herself, or even Freud. For his part, Freud refers to Hug-Hellmuth in *The Interpretation of Dreams* only once, after the following sentence: 'The stricter the censorship, the more far-reaching will be the disguise and the more ingenious too may be the means employed for putting the reader on the scent of the true meaning'. Her scandalous murder in 1924 by her own nephew whom she had been psychoanalyzing only increased speculation about her relation to the founder of psychoanalysis (to say nothing of the use of psychoanalysis as a form of therapy).

When *The Interpretation of Dreams* was first published some conjectured that it may have been written by the well-known French psychologist M. Foucault. But the publication in 1906 of Foucault's own volume, *Le rêve: études et observations* discounted this theory (Freud then cheekily cited this text in the 1914 edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*). The most likely candidate appears to have been Arthur Schnitzler, best known for his collection of short stories *Vienna 1900: Games with Love and Death*. Schnitzler, whose father was a prominent throat specialist, and whose brother was a distinguished Viennese surgeon, himself qualified as a doctor in 1885. He was deeply interested in psychiatry, and is known to have experimented with hypnosis. From the first, scholars have pointed to the curious way that Schnitzler's writings appear to have anticipated many of Freud's ideas—without considering that he may in fact have been Freud himself. Some have speculated that while he published his fictional work, famous for challenging contemporary bourgeois morality, under his own name, he published his 'psychological' literary texts under the name of his contemporary — Sigmund Freud — a practice in which Dr Freud was allegedly happy to collude in. It is even possible that Schnitzler and Freud collaborated together in the writing of the books. Schnitzler is known to have reviewed Freud's 1893 translation of Charcot's *Leçons du Mardi*, and more significantly, intervened on his behalf in a review of the third edition of *Ueber Morphiumsucht (On Morphia Addiction, 1887)*, in which Erlenmeyer attacked Freud's notorious enthusiasm for cocaine.<sup>4</sup> In the end, however, the problem with the pseudonym theory comes down to the fact that there is no absolutely conclusive evidence to substantiate it. Scholars continue to ask, however, how a small-time, apparently pedestrian doctor could have conjured up the

extraordinary range of literary and imaginative resources to write a work such as *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

For there certainly was a 'Sigmund Freud' living at this time and practicing as a Viennese physician. His medical career was more or less discredited after his widely publicized infatuation with, and addiction to, cocaine led to the protracted death of his friend Fleischl. In the absence of substantive evidence to the contrary, it seems that it was this same Freud who thereafter, while continuing to practise as a general practitioner as far as he could, devoted most of his energies to his fictional works. It is clear that increasingly Freud began to regard the two selves as having completely separate personalities. In the course of a discussion of the forgetting of names, for example, Freud openly alludes to the other 'Sigmund Freud', suggesting that his identity as a writer may differ from that of the academically-minded doctor who narrates the books in the first person.

One cannot help having a slightly disagreeable feeling when one comes across one's own name in a stranger. Recently I was very sharply aware of it when a *Herr S. Freud* presented himself to me in my consulting hour.

A few years later, Freud could not resist adding: 'However, I must record the assurance of one of my critics that in this respect his feelings are the opposite of mine.<sup>5</sup> Administering to his patients everyday with complete respectability, by night Freud's alter ego led the literary life of a famous psychiatrist dabbling in the fantasmatics of metapsychology, revelling, as the *Interpretation of Dreams* shows, in gothic horror and stories of sexual perversions, indulging in megalomaniac delusions of grandeur, and obsessed by megalomaniac identification fantasies with three of the

greatest soldiers-cum-dictators in European history before Hitler: Hannibal, Cromwell and Napoleon.

## Freud and the Gothic

Freud himself, as is to be expected, devotes much attention to Gothic fiction in his writings. His general literary provenance can be detected in a number of ways. In the first place, most of the apparently analytic concepts developed by Freud are derived from literature—the Oedipus complex, sadism, masochism, narcissism—and Freud frequently reveals his literary identity by ‘proving’ his arguments by reference to literary examples. This, of course, immediately distinguishes the ‘science’ of psychoanalysis from all other sciences, human or physical. Apart from the daring autobiographical essay ‘Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming’, Freud’s later writings were increasingly more overtly concerned with literary text (Jensen’s *Gradiva*, Goethe’s *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, Schreber’s *Memoirs*, Rabelais), with fairy tales or with cultural and anthropological issues (for example, *Moses and Monotheism*, *Totem and Taboo*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). Freud’s literary provenance is most explicitly apparent in his other major Gothic work, ‘The Uncanny’, an essay which, like *The Interpretation of Dreams*, also lures the reader in by claiming at the beginning to be a scientific, psychoanalytic investigation of a paranormal effect (though here Freud jokes: ‘I should not be surprised to hear that psychoanalysis, which is concerned with laying bare these hidden forces, has itself become uncanny to many people for that very reason’).<sup>6</sup> The essay quickly moves into an analysis of Hoffmann’s ‘fantastic narratives’, by means of which it starts to produce uncanny effects of



its own. Freud ends by confessing that the uncanny is predominantly produced by fiction rather than actual experience, and continues with a critical examination of how the writer achieves this deceitful trick: a technique at which he is only too adept himself.<sup>7</sup>

In some of his so-called 'case-histories', in a typical realist gesture, Freud cunningly anticipates the reader's reaction to their clearly fictitious, novelistic nature by emphasizing his own scientific priorities:

I am aware that—in this city at least—there are many physicians who (revolting though it may seem) choose to read a case history of this kind not as a contribution to the psychopathology of the neuroses, but as a *roman à clef* designed for their private delectation. I can assure readers of this species that every case history which I have occasion to publish in the future will be secured against their perspicacity by similar guarantees of secrecy....<sup>8</sup>

This kind of disavowal of any literary dimension or pretension is wholly typical of the gothic narrator, and thus immediately betrays its literary provenance. The literary critic Steven Marcus came closest to locating the secret of Freud when he analysed the Dora case history as a piece of fiction. Marcus argued persuasively that its distinctiveness lay in the fact that Freud's text contained not only a novel, but also simultaneously its own interpretation. However, the technique of including a self-interpretation contained within a literary text was already well developed by the Romantic period, and is characteristic in particular of the method of De Quincey in his dream books:

I the child had the feelings, I the man decipher them. In the child lay the handwriting mysterious to *him*; in me the interpretation and the comment.<sup>9</sup>

It is striking that in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud represses all reference to his greatest literary precursor, the Romantic gothic writer Thomas De Quincey, or to the remarkable *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* and *Suspiria de Profundis*, which together constitute the first example of the genre of autobiography through dream analyses. It was De Quincey who invented the term 'sub-conscious', which even today people often employ when thinking that they are making a 'Freudian' analysis. While Freud cites R.L. Stevenson's chapter on dreams in *Across the Plain* (1892) in his extensive bibliography, De Quincey's work is nowhere mentioned, despite the dreams of hellish torture machines, deep shafts (for Freud, lined in leather), and such like, that are so closely associated with De Quincey's writings. Freud does not even refer to him in his short essay 'A Note on the Mystic Writing-Pad' which is so clearly indebted to De Quincey's famous chapter on 'The Palimpsest' in *Suspiria de Profundis*. This extraordinary omission marks what, after Macherey, we could call a symptomatic absence, signalled by a footnote in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in which Freud prints, *in spaced type*, a quotation from James Sully's essay, 'The Dream as Revelation': 'like some palimpsest, the dream discloses beneath its worthless surface-characters traces of an old and precious communication'. In the essay which Freud cites, Sully himself had cited De Quincey on the action of memory in dreaming only a few pages earlier.<sup>10</sup> Reference to De Quincey surfaces only once in the entire corpus of Freud's writings—in the safety of *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, where he cites De Quincey's witty portmanteau word, 'anecdotage'. Doubtless Freud repressed all other explicit reference to his major literary forbear not because of the anxiety of influence but rather because in his

other life, which he lead with all semblance of normality, he had once almost exposed the Mr Hyde within him through his notorious predilection for cocaine, the ramifications of which are alluded to in 'Irma's Injection', the model dream in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The association with the opium-eater was too close for comfort.

## Techniques of the Gothic Novel

Despite its camouflaging self-presentation as a work of psychiatry, *The Interpretation of Dreams* nevertheless fulfills many of the typical formal criteria of Gothic novels, which are for the most part designed to place the reader in a position of intellectual uncertainty. These characteristically involve 'scientific' investigations of paranormal phenomena, which incorporate autobiographical journals or diaries. Other standard gothic features of Freud's text include the narrator's almost obsessive involvement in the quest to reveal the hidden meaning of dreams, the appearance of forms of pastiche and self-mocking humour, and the shifting narrative voices that make up the fabric of Freud's narrative. In the manner of Beckford's *Vathek*, *The Interpretation of Dreams* was first published in German before it was translated into English, the version by which it is now best known. It was subsequently encrusted and elaborated with a typically gothic, parodic scholarly apparatus of ever increasing footnotes, revisions, and citations of discussions of itself. Freud commented himself that his interpolations and footnotes to the text 'threaten at times to burst the whole framework of the book'—though of course such devices are the very means through which it is held together.

The formal characteristics of its gothic provenance are indeed striking. Although the Victorian gothic novel tended to abandon the machinery of castles, locked rooms, staircases, ghosts and disguises, all these elements occur in Freud's novel. The presentation of the analysis as part of a scientific discourse represents a characteristic move in the gothic tradition which began with the first work of science-fiction, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). Whereas the eighteenth-century gothic writer relied on the evocation of the medieval past or the exotic orient as a means for projecting the reality of the impossible world of the supernatural, the fantastic and the uncanny, nineteenth-century writers typically sought the reader's acceptance by developing a form of hyper-realism that enclosed the fantastic within a plausible scientific frame-work, using realism as a means of projecting fantasy and the unreal. In the manner of Dr Watson, the narrator of *Sherlock Holmes*, Freud chooses to relate his story through the voice of a medical doctor. There are in fact clear links between Victorian gothic fiction and the Victorian detective novel: the latter initially presents the phenomenon of the ineffable in the form of the marvellous or inexplicable only to reveal its explanation through the power of scientific rationality, whereas the gothic uses the mode of scientific rationality as a way of establishing credibility for its story of the ineffable. What is unique about *The Interpretation of Dreams* is that it succeeds in belonging to both genres: it begins by setting itself up in the detective story mode by promising to reveal the scientific secret behind the irrationality of dreams. But while its narrative employs the dry method of a conceptual analysis of the ideological structure of dreams, this is deployed only to reconnect the reader to the mystery of the dream, 'its point of contact with the unknown', and to reinstate the ineffable in the form of nightmarish horror.

Gothic writers sought to make the implausible plausible not only by setting it within the context of scientific realism, but also by developing the narrative technique of using multiple narrators, found manuscripts (a procedure most notably employed by Freud in his short story, 'A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis'), diverse kinds of documents, and the like. All these devices are used by Freud in his quest to make the implausible narrative of the discovery of the secret of dreams acceptable to the sceptical reader. Although the mode of scientific discourse which he utilizes clearly prevents him from using the range of narrators or different forms of writing employed by, say, Stoker in *Dracula*, Freud establishes an equivalent form of multiple authorship not only through the varied voices of his patient's reported dreams, but also through the habitual interpolations of extracts from fictional scientific papers allegedly authored by other specialists in the field (Ferenczi, Rank, Robitsek, Rosegger, Sachs, Silberer, and Tausk). In a dream reported from Rank, the dreamer, in a self-referential twist typical of this anachronistically postmodern novel, reads *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In the editions from 1914 to 1922, two complete chapters that were supposed to be written by Rank, one of which was devoted to 'Dreams and Creative Writing', were included at the end of Chapter VI ('The Dream Work'). However, Freud subsequently considered this too obvious a give-away and therefore removed them. Even without them, however, the palimpsest of different narratives which makes up *The Interpretation of Dreams* clearly has the function of augmenting the plausibility and authority of the central narrative voice.

The topic of the book, dreams and their interpretation, is, of course, an impeccable one for the genre. In the manner of many gothic novels, such as *Frankenstein* and

*Wuthering Heights* (1847), a dream is staged early on that offers an interpretation of the book itself—in this case, the dream of Irma’s injection. It was during the original attempt to analyse this dream that, as Freud puts it, ‘the “meaning” of the dream was borne in’ upon him. ‘Insight such as this’, he comments elsewhere, ‘falls to one’s lot but once in a lifetime’.<sup>11</sup> In this inspirational moment, the secret of *all* dreams are revealed as ‘the fulfillment of a wish’. The dream itself, on the other hand, leaves out the metafictional overriding preoccupation that will be articulated later in the dream of the self-dissection of Freud’s own pelvis, namely Freud’s own desire to reveal the secret of dreams. In *Irma’s Injection*, such desire is alluded to only covertly in the imagery of secrets, of penetration, of Irma’s recalcitrance and her reluctance to open ‘her mouth properly’, or submit to Freud’s ‘solution’. The main focus of the analysis is taken up with the revelation of a secret, namely the universal meaning of dreams: in a gothic device typically used when the material becomes too far-fetched for credibility, the reader is immediately invited to share in an ironic distancing from such an implausible claim. After the great moment of revelation, Freud points out that rather than accept the disturbing implication that his solution for Irma’s complaint was a misdiagnosis, in the dream he provides a whole series of different, incompatible explanations for it. As Freud notes, while all these interpretations of Irma’s illness consistently exculpate him, they:

were not entirely consistent with one another, and indeed ... were mutually exclusive. The whole plea—for the dream was nothing else—reminded one vividly of the defence put forward by the man who was charged by one of his neighbours with having given him back a borrowed kettle in a damaged condition. The defendant asserted first, that he had given it back undamaged; sec-

only, that the kettle had a hole in it when he borrowed it; and thirdly, that he had never borrowed a kettle from his neighbour at all. So much the better: if only a single one of these three lines of defence were to be accepted as valid, the man would have to be acquitted.

If the reader misses the joke here, Freud was later to make its ridiculousness explicit in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*: 'Each one of these defences is valid in itself, but taken together they exclude one another'.<sup>12</sup> If so, then the dream cancels out its own wish. Such ironic deflations subtly undermine the seriousness of the careful achievement of the scientific realism of the book's case study, its multiple narrators, found manuscripts profusion of footnotes, editor's comments, etc. A further example of this self-ironising technique comes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, when Freud draws attention to the ways in which the tragedy of Oedipal drama is offset in dreams by the humour of its unconscious representations: 'Some of these representations,' he notes dryly, 'might almost be described as jokes...'. Six years later, of course, he was to develop this idea more comprehensively in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905)—but if the unconscious was allowed to be a joke, Freud's secret, that the *Interpretation of Dreams* was also a joke book, though obliquely hinted at, was never overtly revealed.<sup>13</sup>

*The Interpretation of Dreams* conforms to the tenets of the gothic genre in a number of other ways. In the first place, its mode is performative: while ostensibly offering the reader knowledge, in the manner of realist fiction, its real project is to produce theatrical effects during the reading process. Unlike the realist novel, which offers the reader apparently truthful information about its subject-matter, the project of the gothic novel is rather to make the reader undergo an experience—typically, the frisson of

horror or of sexual excitement (or preferably both). Freud himself calls attention to this dramatic quality of dreams which always create a 'situation' out of their images. They

represent an event which is actually happening ... they 'dramatize' an idea. But this feature of dream-life can only be fully understood if we further recognize that in dreams ... we appear not to *think* but to *experience*.

The dramatic effects that *The Interpretation of Dreams* seeks to produce are reinforced by the wealth of theatrical references to Sophocles and Shakespeare. As Horace Walpole explained in his Preface to the first gothic novel, the *Castle of Otranto* (1765), the gothic style, with its restless mixed mode of tragedy and horror combined with absurdity and ironic self-deflating humour, was consciously inspired by the mixed genre style of Shakespeare's drama. Freud follows this form conscientiously, blending the horror in his text with the wry humour of his commentaries.

The link to Shakespeare is repeated in many gothic novels through a struggle of power between the generations, between children and their parents, and, particularly, between father and son. By placing *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* at the centre of his dream interpretation, Freud sets up the typical familial power structure of gothic fiction, developing it into a whole series of conflictual relationships imaged through the characteristic device of the *doppelgänger*. Freud's nephew John, bizarrely a year older than Freud himself, is produced as the formative double of this kind. They are simultaneously both psychic opposites and images of each other: 'My nephew [John] reappeared in my boyhood, and at that time we acted the parts of Caesar and Brutus together. My emotional life has always insisted that I should have an intimate friend and a hated enemy'. Freud



remarks how easily his friendships, like dreams themselves, reverse things into their opposites—in doing so making them, we may note, impossible to interpret. The typical male bonding structure is reinforced in subsequent relationships with Josef ('my friend and opponent in the dream'), Professor Fleischl, Otto the family doctor, and Fliess, Freud's more than confidant. Typically, this brotherly bonding develops through the projection of stereotyped women through whom the men express their homoerotic relationships. A good example of this can be found in *Dracula*, where the circuit of men who exchange their blood through Lucy Weston also enables her in a manner of speaking, as Van Helsing observes, to marry them all—something that earlier in the novel she had already said she would like to do. Van Helsing, like Freud, combines ancient wisdom with modern science; however his risqué comment about Lucy Weston is nothing to Freud's constant harping upon incestuous desires, repressed homosexuality, and extravagant forms of perversion. At the same time, the theme of the New Woman, whom the gothic novel typically desires to repress, is dealt with in Freud's novel by a dream in which he projects monstrosity onto two characters from Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *The Wild Duck*. We shall see how Freud returns to this topic in a later, highly significant dream about a 'monstrously passionate woman'.<sup>14</sup>

Anxiety about gender relations in gothic fiction is usually accompanied by apprehension about class relations (as, for example, in *The Monk*, or *Caleb Williams*), a feature clearly in evidence at the margins of this text. The comfortable references to servants (for example in the examination in a sanatorium dream) show Freud feeling no cause for scruple. As a good bourgeois man, he shows himself quite content to describe the dream process itself according to the

model of the capitalist and entrepreneur—while the dream worker remains characteristically absent. Elsewhere, however, the text evinces greater anxiety — no doubt the invention of the term ‘dream-work’, displacing labour into the realm of dreams, is symptomatic. Freud recounts a form of class-war taking place on a staircase in a Viennese house which he habitually climbed when visiting a patient:

When I paid my morning visits to this house I used as a rule to be seized with a desire to clear my throat as I went up the stairs and the product of my expectoration would fall on the staircase. For on neither of these floors was there a spittoon; and the view I took was that the cleanliness of the stairs should not be maintained at my expense but should be made possible by the provision of a spittoon. The concierge, an equally elderly and surly woman (but of cleanly instincts, as I was prepared to admit), looked at the matter in a different light. She would lie in wait for me to see whether I should again make free of the stairs, and if she found that I did, I used to hear her grumbling audibly; and for several days afterwards she would omit the usual greeting when we met.

The smoker’s cavalier attitude, buttressed by his own class position, finds itself more menaced in a dream, when the dreamer flees for protection to a mother figure, who turns round to reveal herself, horror of horrors, as a member of the working classes. Freud recounts how the dreamer:

*fled for protection to a woman, who was standing by a wooden fence, as though she was his mother. She was a woman of the working classes and her back was turned to the dreamer. At last she turned round and gave him a terrible look so that he ran off in terror. The red flesh of the lower lids of her eyes could be seen standing out.*

Such terror in the face of working-class hostility is reiterated throughout the book by Freud's repeated citation of Maury's dreams of the French Revolution, of the Terror and the guillotine, of anarchist bombs, as well as his own dream of the revolutions of 1848. On the other hand, in a typical expression of nineteenth-century bourgeois class hostility in the other direction, Freud represents himself as one of the 'bourgeois plebs' pitted against the aristocracy whom he dreams up in the flattering form of sea-slugs. In tune with the nationalist and colonial anxieties of late nineteenth-century gothic fiction, he includes dreams involving German nationalists in Austria, and his father fantasized as a Hungarian Garibaldi. And while Freud, like many writers of his time, reproduces typical contemporary racist ideological notions regarding primitivism and savagery (presuppositions which determined the unlikely concept of the unconscious operating outside of time and of history), he also includes a dark projection of anxiety about increasing anti-semitism, a social fantasy that psychoanalysis, alas, found itself powerless to cure or even to understand.<sup>15</sup>

## Shock Horror

The gothic novel was the first kind of novel to construct its narrative around the revelation of secrets; the detective novel then turned the revelation of a central secret into its guiding narrative form. At first sight, *The Interpretation of Dreams* appears to abandon this characteristic model, for the 'secret' of the book is unexpectedly revealed by the end of Chapter II: the meaning of the dream is that '*its content was the fulfilment of a wish and its motive was a wish*'. The shrewd reader, however, can surmise that the claim that dreams are the fulfillment of a wish is something of a

tautological joke in the context of a book whose overriding wish is to discover the secret of dreams. Freud's technique is to lure the reader into the illusion that the ineffable mystery of dreams has finally fallen to the big guns of scientific probing. The analyses that then follow to 'prove' this thesis are, however, really a device to compel the reader to experience more and more terror through forcing him or her to endure dreadful dreams. Freud's demonstration, through a seemingly endless succession of dreams and their analyses, of what he unhappily calls the 'final solution' to the enigma of the meaning of dreams, in fact submits the reader to a repetition effect of horrific dreams of compounding grotesqueness alternated with disorientating absurdity. Meanwhile the elaborate 'interpretations' of the dreams return the reader to apparent normality and rationality—and yet as they become more and more complicated and far-fetched, it seems more and more as though their function is to turn even the most banal dream text into the realm of the absurd and the fantastic. The reader is increasingly impressed by the author's extraordinary skill in transforming the most recalcitrant material of apparently banal dream-text into an ingeniously elaborated interpretation: in this sense, *The Interpretation of Dreams* operates as a manual of practical criticism in looking-glass land. Normal literary values are reversed, so that the dream 'text' is a brief, mundane piece of writing, whereas the interpretation develops against all odds into a richly imaginative and fantastic literature. Where the dream itself is not horrific, dull or even pleasant dreams are transmuted through a gloomy gothic interpretation, as in the charming castle by the sea dream where the analysis ends with the demonstration of how it conceals 'gloomiest thoughts of an unknown and uncanny future'.

The first dreams to which we are introduced seem relatively harmless, domesticated and benign. The book opens beguilingly with a dream of being Napoleon's wine-merchant, followed by alarm-clock dreams, children's simple dreams, the smoked salmon dream, the entrancing dream of the Botanical monograph, of buying vegetables, tuning the piano, and visiting Rome. The dreams rush past without the reader noticing that gradually Freud begins to slip in dreams whose effect is to generate a cumulative horror through the events they describe, a horror often focused on the family, and representations of the death of loved relatives — for example, the aunt who sees her sister's only remaining son in a coffin:

*Last night, then, I dream that I saw Karl lying before me dead. He was lying in his little coffin with his hands folded and with candles all round—in fact just like little Otto, whose death was such a blow to me.*

Yet even here, initially, the reader is quickly reassured. According to Freud, this is typical of the sort of dreams that 'have some meaning other than their apparent one', and he duly interprets the dream as a desire for a visit from an estranged former friend, a Professor of Literature, no less, with whom the dreamer is still in love. A similar dream is then repeated towards the end of the book; but significantly it is there described as being a dream of the very opposite type, namely a dream which needs no interpretation. This most sinister, most uncanny dream of all comes at the beginning of Chapter VII. Freud begins by masking its origins, so as to ensure that it will remain uninterpretable and uncontainable in its effects. He claims for it a circular origin: that it was told to him by a woman patient, who had heard it herself heard it in a lecture on dreams. Freud adds, 'its actual source is still unknown to me': it is the navel of

dreams, the point of contact with the unknown. Within Freud's narrative, the patient from whom he heard it did not merely recount it to him, but obligingly re-dreamt it, thus internalizing it and making it her own, and a legitimate object for his analysis. Freud deliberately avoids the *mise-en-abyme* of how you interpret a dream in which the dreamer has re-dreamt someone else's dream by stating that it requires no interpretation. Instead he teasingly gives it a status which is accorded only once elsewhere in the book (the dream of Irma's injection), namely of being a 'model' dream. The dream itself, which is remarkably brief, moves into the imaginative realm of childhood by reworking the nursery rhyme 'Ladybird, ladybird' ('... fly away home; Your house is on fire, your children will burn...'):

*After a few hours sleep the father had a dream that his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?'*

Despite the claimed obscurity of its origins, Freud argues that the dead child was indeed actually burning, a candle having fallen upon him. What is it about this dream that makes it, as Freud observes, so moving—so moving that his patient in fact re-dreamt it, and commentators have subsequently returned to it again and again, trying to tease out its enigmatic secret? This despite the fact that it is presented as a transparent dream, one that needs no interpretation? The return to life of the dead child, the reproachful complaint and the father's grieving guilt, make it the most powerful, inexplicable gothic moment in the book. But if it operates as an 'open' text, it is also the dream which closes the narrative of dream interpretations: in the first dream, of the aunt who sees her sister's son dead in a coffin, Freud denies its content and argues that it is

precisely not about wishing for the death of loved one. However, this is then followed by a section on 'typical dreams' whose longest, most comprehensive section concerns 'Dreams of the Death of Persons of whom the Dreamer is Fond'. It is here that Freud introduces the theme of the Oedipus complex by citing both *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet*, arguing that such dreams, in fact after all involve an unconscious wish for the death of the loved one. But finally, in the dream of the Burning Child, Freud reverts to his first suggestion, namely that, despite its content, such a dream is not about wishing for the death of the loved one at all. He achieves this recuperation by reversing *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*—so that the dead son returns to reproach the guilty father. Once again, dreams — or the dream interpreter — can always obligingly reverse things into their opposites.

The book is thus framed by these two disturbing dreams of the death of loved children—a preoccupation that Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* repeats from De Quincey's *Suspiria*. The horror generated in between is not confined to *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet*: instead, while ostensibly analysing the formal structures of dreams (the 'dream-work', the 'psychology of dream processes' etc.) Freud quietly presents us with a procession of gothic horrors whose cumulative effect is increased by our attention being ostensibly focussed on the concomitant technical descriptions of how dreams operate: the dream of a mother seeing her only daughter of fifteen lying dead in a coffin, of a mother witnessing her daughter being run over by a train, a child seeing his father carry his head on a plate; of a mother cutting her son's head off; of giving birth to a child with a deformed skull; of Fliess' sister dying in three-quarters of an hour; of a father being in a train accident (followed by a whole succession of dreams about the death

of fathers); of Freud handing over his sons to a stranger; of a twenty-month old baby's distress when his father was leaving for the front.

Even after the dream of the Burning Child, the horror continues to accumulate: late in the book comes the dream of his mother's death, remembered from his seventh or eighth year:

*I saw my beloved mother, with a peculiarly peaceful, sleeping expression on her features, being carried into the room by two (or three) peoples with birds' beaks and laid upon the bed.*

Here the tall figures with birds' beaks are Egyptian gods whom Freud contrives to associate with copulation; the expression on his mother's face is copied from a memory of his grandfather lying in a coma a few days before his death. With these family horrors come other forms of ghastly violence, in both the dreams and the analyses, which only lead one to wonder about Freud's bizarre and sometimes sick imagination: of peering at the white scabs inside Irma's mouth; of the constant illness of his friend Otto; of a raging mother carrying out infanticide; of seeing the signs of syphilis on the hand; dreams of being naked; of the crushing of the may beetle in the casement; of running after a little girl in order to punish her and then copulating with her on the stairs; of hats turning into genitals; of being tied up with silk cloths while two university professors carry out an operation on the dreamer's penis; a whole gamut of castration dreams; of a seal-like creature coming up through a trap-door; of an amorous chimpanzee and a gorilla-cat being hurled at a woman; of a man dreaming he was a pregnant women; of women who grow beards; of a man dying without knowing it; of butcher's boys eating the flesh of burning dead bodies; of Freud giving a now-deceased friend a piercing look so that he melts away; of



asking a question which makes the Governor of a garrisoned castle drop dead; of a young man mutilating his own genitals; of a woman dying in childbirth; of a Museum of Human Excrement, in which the Gulliver-like Freud micturates; of monsters and devils on the tower of Notre Dame; of his own son wounded with bandages on his face; of Crassus having molten gold poured down his throat; of death wishes, hysteria, paranoia, regression, vomiting, convulsions, revulsion, disgust, sadism, masochism, punishments, executions, murders, torture instruments, revenge, brutality, torment ...

### Freud's Imperial Romance

What is all this intense psychic violence about? Within its milieu of psychic gore, another dark dream is concealed which contains the metafictional centre of the novel, a dream, Freud tells us, concerned with writing his gothic novel: the double castration dream of Freud dissecting his own pelvis and going in quest of female power. The representation of the process of self-analysis of *The Interpretation of Dreams* as self-dissection also suggests that Freud is identifying with the famous dissector and mortician of Gothic literature—Count Frankenstein, himself another transgressive searcher, in his workshop of filthy creation, for secrets of life and death which should have remained hidden, knowledge of which eventually rebounds upon him. In the Preface to the first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud claims that his subject matter does not 'trespass beyond the sphere of interest covered by neuropathology'. This academic stance is quickly transformed into a developing obsession, comparable in scope only to Frankenstein's 'fervent longing to penetrate the

secrets of nature', to strive for 'immortality and power' and 'the deepest mysteries of creation'.<sup>16</sup> Freud's novel too is concerned with the pursuit of forbidden transgressive knowledge beyond the limits of the human—knowledge which then rebounds with a vengeance upon the perpetrator: 'he who would tamper with the vast and secret forces of the world may well fall a victim to them'.<sup>17</sup> In the manner of his forebear, Freud's search for the secret of dreams combines the cutting edge of the science of modernity with the deepest mysteries of hermetic secret lore, and ancient Egyptian wisdom. This hunt for prohibited knowledge, which inevitably merges with illicit forms of sexual desire, shows that Freud's book, like *Frankenstein*, is a romantic quest novel, its central subject his yearning to discover the secret of dreams, a longing that turns out to be closely allied to dreams that 'satisfy their craving for an answer to the riddles of sex'. For the dream of self-dissection begins with castration only to move on to sex, specifically, feminine sexuality. Its subject turns out to be nothing less than a fantasy based on Rider Haggard's *She*. So while the ostensible topic of the dream book is announced as the revelation of the secret of dreams, namely that they have a meaning that is the fulfilment of a wish, Freud here goes on to reveal that the secret desire of his book about the meaning of dreams is to find the solution to the enigma of woman herself.

In the nineteenth century, it has been suggested, the gothic moved away from romance into the realm of science-fiction. However, as Patrick Brantlinger has argued, the earlier romance form was not obliterated but simply displaced—into the 'imperial gothic' of colonial fiction.<sup>18</sup> It is in this dream that Freud himself moves into such a mode. He has already hinted at this in structuring the whole book as an imaginary walk, and of dreaming of

psychoanalysis itself as a journey, tropes which allude to the genre of travel writing and adventure story — in Chapter IV, Mungo Park himself makes an appearance. The links between the imperial fiction and psychoanalytic narration are clear: in Anne McClintock's words, 'true to the trope of anachronistic space, the journey into the interior is, like almost all colonial journeys, figured as a journey forward in space but backward in time'.<sup>19</sup> In the dream of dissecting his own pelvis, Freud invokes the romantic form of the imperial gothic not merely by the metafictional device of dreaming about writing about *The Interpretation of Dreams*—but overtly by deploying the imagery of Henry Rider Haggard's *She* (1887) and *Heart of the World* (1896) as the central imaginative material of the dream.

Gilbert and Gubar argue that 'the very topography as well as the motion and direction of Haggard's quest-plots helped Freud conceptualize the psychic geography' to be found at the end of the 'royal road to the unconscious'.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, the dream reveals that Freud identified his own sexuality with that projected in Haggard's popular escapist romances which were designed explicitly for male readers. Haggard gamely dedicates *King's Solomon's Mines* to 'all the big and little boys who read it'.<sup>21</sup> Freud recounts how he defends himself from the hostile challenge of Louise N. who refuses his gift of *She* along with the claims of psychoanalysis, with the following more prudish comment about the self-revelation of writing *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

I reflected on the amount of self-discipline it was costing me to offer the public even my book upon dreams—I should have to give away so much of my own private character in it.

After all, the best of what you know

May not be told to boys.

Freud reveals that he easily identified with Haggard's gruff, self-confessedly misogynistic narrators, who preface their romances with authenticating details of found manuscripts and ancient sources much as Freud himself leads us through the textual history of dream interpretation in the interminable first chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In Haggard, close male friendships transcend male-female relationships ('one who was dear to me with a love passing the love of woman').<sup>22</sup> Rather more casual love and sex between white men and black women is an habitual preoccupation; typically, the black woman is the required to die so as to leave the white man free. In *She*, the male Amahagger worship their women—and then slaughter them. 'As for women, flee from them, for they are evil, and in the end will destroy thee' warns the wise old man Billali in the novel: women in general are distrusted by Haggard as evil, even — especially — the idealized, exotically beautiful women, Maya and Ayesha, who act as guides to the male heroes of the two books. It is these two phallic, castrating women that Freud dreams about in his dream about self-castration, about dissecting his own pelvis, about writing *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Both *She* and *Heart of the World* are novels about seeking out the secrets of nature by exploring the unknown, dark continents of Africa and Central America. In *King's Solomon's Mines*, Africa is itself imaged as a female body that has to be surmounted at the point of 'Sheba's breasts' and then penetrated in its dark, unknown interior.<sup>23</sup> As Maria Torgovnick suggests, psychoanalysis and colonial fiction share this 'axiomatic identification of "primitive" landscape with the female body'.<sup>24</sup> *She* was to return once again not just in Haggard's *Ayesha — The Return of She* (1905) but also in Freud's texts when a few years later he compared the

enigma of female sexuality to the dark continent of Africa. Like Holly, Freud identifies himself as the explorer of darkest Africa; like Strickland and Don Ignatio in *Heart of the World*, he is the searcher for El-Dora-do, the 'City of the Heart', for the enigmatic secret here revealed to be not so much the meaning of dreams as the riddle of the 'eternal feminine' of female sexuality.

In his commentary on the dream, Freud gives the following explanation of the Haggard material, which hinges on the comment that 'STRANGELY ENOUGH' he was assigned the task of dissecting his own pelvis, assisted by Louise N.:

The following was the occasion of the dream. Louise N., the lady who was assisting me in my job in the dream, had been calling on me. 'Lend me something to read', she had said. I offered her Rider Haggard's *She*. 'A strange book, but full of hidden meaning', I began to explain to her; 'the eternal feminine, the immortality of our emotions...' Here she interrupted me: 'I know it already. Have you nothing of your own?' — 'No, my own immortal works have not yet been written'. — 'Well, when are we to expect these so-called ultimate explanations of yours which you've promised even *we* shall find readable?' she asked, with a touch of sarcasm.

Louise N., epitome of the New Woman, clearly has no desire to read the fantasies, sexual or otherwise, of boy's adventure books, or *The Interpretation of Dreams* for that matter. In the dream, Freud identifies the search for ultimate explanations in *The Interpretation of Dreams* with Haggard's heroes' quest for the secrets of life and truth in Africa and unlimited wealth in America. His claim that the book is 'full of hidden meaning' simply repeats the narrator's own comment about *She* ('this history of a

woman ... was some gigantic allegory, of which I could not catch the meaning'.) The book seals up its own meaning, like dreams themselves.

But what is the significance of Freud's interpretation of *She* as a book about 'the eternal feminine' and 'the immortality of our emotions'? Ayesha herself is of course 'almost eternal', represented as a woman who has killed her lover Kallikrates, but who then waits two thousand years for him to be reborn and to return to her. When he returns, as the beautiful, dumb blond Leo Vincey, he does so according to the injunction: '*seek out the woman, and learn the secret of Life, and if thou mayest find a way to slay her*'. The eternal feminine must be destroyed. Freud's comment alludes to the chapter entitled 'Ayesha Unveils'. Holly, the narrator, a sceptical, possibly Jewish, Cambridge academic with an interest in antiquarian subjects, Egyptology, lost civilizations, and stoical platitudinous home-spun philosophizing about the human lot, is undergoing an audience with the veiled *She-who-must-be-obeyed* and daringly asks to see her face. By way of warning, she reminds him of the myth of Actaeon, who 'perished miserably' because he looked on too much beauty. If he saw her face, she predicts, he would eat out his heart in 'impotent desire'. When he sees what he describes as the dark erotic sublimity of Ayesha's face, Holly duly declares himself blinded and smitten forever by this 'Venus Victrix'. At this point of Holly's absolute erotic devotion, however, Ayesha catches sight of his ring which contains the scarab of her long-lost lover; at first she goes into a terrorizing fury, but then continues more calmly:

'It is very strange,' she said, with a sudden access of womanlike trembling and agitation which seemed out of place in this awful woman—'but once I knew a scarab like that. It—hung round the neck—of one I loved,' and

she gave a little sob, and I saw that after all she was only a woman, although she might be a very old one.'

Ayesha thus reveals that powerful *femme fatale*, matriarch with 'an intellect so powerful', or Mother Goddess as she may be, she is 'after all ... only a woman'. The word 'strange', which Freud emphasizes by capitalising the phrase 'STRANGELY ENOUGH' in the dream, and which he connects to his comment 'a *strange* book', here links to Ayesha's comment in which she exposes both 'the eternal feminine' and the vulnerability of the immortality of her emotions. It is on the revelations of such profound material that Freud bases his understanding of women and the mystery of female sexuality—here betraying, as he himself admits, so much of his own private character. The dream about writing *The Interpretation of Dreams* discloses that the quest for the secret of feminine sexuality is what really lies at its heart. On the one hand, the dream reassuringly recalls the discovery that the all-powerful Ayesha is a vulnerable woman after all; on the other hand, structurally it opens with a self-castration assisted by the formidable Louise N., and closes with Freud's terror at the prospect of being engulfed by the abyssal chasm, a terror so extreme that he awakes from the dream in 'mental fright'. This ending recalls the sheer mental fright that causes Job, the manservant in the novel, to expire before he can recross the chasm. Though doubtless Freud is saved by being master rather than servant, the finale of his dream suggests a sympathetic identification with Job, who is so extreme a misogynist (and racist) that he is the only man in the book who shows himself proof against She — woman — herself.

But the real horror of Freud's gothic novel came in its performative after-effect: transforming Haggard's male fantasies from the realm of popular culture into the

normative basis for the psychoanalytic understanding of feminine sexuality.

## Notes

1. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Pelican Freud Library (hereafter PFL) 11, 333-4.
2. See Nicholas Royle, *After Derrida* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 85-90, 93-6.
3. Anon, *A Young Girl's Diary*, Prefaced with a Letter by Sigmund Freud, trans. Eden & Cedar Paul (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1921), 5.
4. See Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, ed. Lionel Trilling and Steven Marcus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 103-4, 543.
5. Freud, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* [1901], PFL 5, 64.
6. Freud, *The Uncanny*, PFL 14, 366.
7. *The Uncanny*, 370-4.
8. Freud, 'Dora', PFL 8, 37.
9. Thomas de Quincey, *Suspiria de Profundis*, in *The Confessions of an Opium Eater and Other Writings*, ed. Grevel Lindop (Oxford: World's Classics, 1985), 113.



10. James Sully, 'The Dream as Revelation', *Fortnightly Review* 53 (n.s.) (1893), 360.
11. Haggard continued: 'As though a man's brain could harbour a host of "Shes"! Such literary polygamy is not possible. Only one love of this kind is given to him' (Introduction to *She*, ed, Daniel Karlin, [Oxford: World's Classics, 1991], xii).
12. Cf. my 'Psychoanalytic Criticism: Has It Got Beyond a Joke?', *Paragraph* 4 (1984), 87-114.
13. Cf. the discussion in the footnote to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, PFL 4, 405.
14. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 6.
15. *Interpretation of Dreams*, 572; an earlier dream involved picturing Dreyfus on the Ile du Diable (250).
16. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, in *Three Gothic Novels*, ed. Peter Fairclough (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 296, 306, 308.
17. Haggard, *She*, 29.
18. Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

19. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 242. Cf. Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man's Land*, 43.
20. Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man's Land*, 43.
21. H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, ed. Daniel Butts (Oxford: World's Classics, 1989), 1. See Gilbert and Gubar's comment on this aspect of the book, *No Man's Land*, 7; their point is corroborated by John Sutherland, *Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, 270.
22. H. Rider Haggard, *Heart of the World* [1896] (London: Longman, Green & Co, 1898), 6.
23. Among many commentators who make the obvious inference about this topography, see R. Stott, 'The Dark Continent: Africa as Female Body in Haggard's Adventure Fiction', *Feminist Review* 32 (1989), 69-89.
24. Maria Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 156, 275.

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