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Title: Hearing Voices in Dreams: Freud's Tossing and Turning with Speech and Writing

Year: 2002

Version: Published version

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Please cite the original version:

Keskinen, M. (2002). Hearing Voices in Dreams: Freud's Tossing and Turning with Speech and Writing. *PsyArt: A Hyperlink Journal for Psychological Study of the Arts*, 6(1).
https://psyartjournal.com/article/show/keskinen-hearing_voices_in_dreams_freuds_tossing_

Hearing Voices in Dreams: Freud's Tossing and Turning with Speech and Writing

by Mikko Keskinen 

May 29, 2002

abstract

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud repeatedly claims that there is no original speech in dreams. All dreamed speech is lifted from waking life and used as mutable raw material, whereas thought and writing can occur independently of the dream-work. This article examines Freud's insistence of the unoriginality and mutability of speech, which ostensibly reverses the supposed phonocentric tradition of Western metaphysics. Freud's interpretations, the article suggests, point to the importance of a general linguistic system in the production of meaning in dreams. This system includes non-phonetic writing and the concretization of abstract dream-thoughts into visual images. This concretization or materialization also applies to phonetic writing, which allows for a number of articulations. Utilizing literary phonemic reading theorized by Garrett Stewart, the article proposes a new interpretation of "Philippe's dream." The speech/writing dichotomy does not fully hold in Freud's argumentative rhetoric, nor is it unequivocally functional in interpreting dreams -- or literature.

article

"Hearsay = Hörensagen" (Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* 250)

Speaking from Hearsay

What does the statement "I hear voices" mean? Literally, it means that my hearing is normal, that I am not deaf, nor suffering from auditory difficulties. In another context, the statement signifies that I am abnormal, that I, as it were, hear too much, as some schizophrenics do (cf. Stephens and Graham). Both of these alternatives refer to waking life. How does the situation change when hearing takes place in the realm of dreams?

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*,¹ Sigmund Freud repeatedly claims that there is no original speech in dreams. "When anything in a dream has the character of direct speech . . . when it is said or heard and not merely thought . . . then it is derived from something actually spoken in waking life . . ." (216-17). In other words, "the dream-work cannot actually *create* speeches" (454; emphasis in original). Freud hurries to add that the speech lifted from waking life is "merely treated as raw material and may be cut up and slightly altered and . . . divorced from its context" (217). In this process, the cut up pieces are either incorporated or rejected, and often put together in a new order, so that what appears to be a whole in a dream "turns out in analysis to be composed of three or four detached fragments" (454). Needless to say, this new amalgamated version abandons the original waking life meaning of the words and a "fresh one" is given to them instead (454).

Dream-work is thus extremely unoriginal and copious as regards speech, but at the same time entirely disrespectful to the source, i.e., to the spoken words copied. Hence, the spoken raw material has no other function than to provide the dream-work the stuff that dreamed speech is eventually made on.

When we hear voices, spoken language, in dreams, we are all abnormal in the sense that there is no actual source of sound around; all the voices are silently generated by our minds, not by some external entity. Sleep and dream are, of course, altered states of mind, and the normal/abnormal dichotomy is hardly applicable to them as such. However, it could turn out to be fruitful to use the dichotomy as a heuristic tool to examine Freud's structural conception of speech in dreams.

What Freud claimed to be a general rule may have been correct in the limited context of late 19th century central Europe, and as such is not to be objected to. However, one wonders if, after a century of innovations in mass media, the ubiquitous presence of visual or graphic stimuli in the form of advertisements, logos, newspapers, magazines, and texts on the Internet might slip into the dreamer's dreams in disguise of speech. In fact, Alexander Grinstein, in his *Freud's Rules of Dream Interpretation* (1983), states that speeches in dreams can refer to such written material (Grinstein 196). Even Freud himself admits in passing that "another copious source of undifferentiated speeches . . . seems to be provided by material that has been *read*" (455; emphasis in original). As Friedrich Kittler has suggested, the radically changed media situation, with new discourse technologies, has definitely had an effect on most Western people's sources of visual and auditory stimuli to a degree unforeseen by Freud (Kittler 3-33).

It is, of course, futile to criticize Freud's theory for his inability to account for media yet to come. What is more relevant to Freud's argument is his insistence on speech at the cost of language in general. If the originality of speech is as mutable as Freud persists, what distinguishes it from the actual raw material of both speech and writing-language, or more generally, linguistic structure? Why does Freud insist on the quoted nature of dreamed speech when the very token of quotation-its resemblance to the quoted-is its least respected feature in dreams?

It is trivially true that there is no original language. All speech-acts, whether spoken or written, consist of quotations of pre-existing words and structures of a given language. If I am to communicate, I cannot use any private language or idiolect only I know. Or if I do use a made-up, truly original, unique statement to signify something, it can either sink into the oblivion of meaninglessness, or get incorporated in the realm of the meaningful. Wittgenstein's example of an unacceptable string of sounds, *bububu*, in the meaning, "If it doesn't rain I shall go for a walk," ceased to be meaningless a long time ago. One could imagine that *bububu* is a private joke shared by many a Wittgenstein scholar, who use it at conferences as a perfectly meaningful utterance stating an intention to take a stroll.

All words, all expressions are iterable and re-contextualizable. The inventory of all the possible contexts of a given statement is an impossibility, not to mention its limitations.

Nevertheless, Freud claims that, in dreams, thought and writing can occur independently of the dream-work. Even the actual speech of waking life, when it is not presented as or felt by the speaker to be speech, can occur as such, without having to go through the process of transformation. In a similar manner, what has been thought or read in waking life can show up unaltered in a dream as long as it is not in the form of the spoken (455). What is it in articulated speech that exposes it to these transformations? Freud does not pose, nor answer this question.

Before trying to suggest possible answers myself, it must be acknowledged that Freud himself found another exception to his rule of unoriginal speech. In a footnote added to the 1909 edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud alludes to the obsessional neurotic, better known as the Rat Man. Freud writes, "The spoken words which occurred in his dreams were not derived from remarks which he had heard or made himself. They contained the undistorted text [*unentstellten Wortlaute*] of his obsessional thoughts, which in his waking life only reached his consciousness in a modified form." (339n; Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* 255n) In a way this exception seems to problematize Freud's rule, since the unarticulated thought is closer to mute writing than to vocal speech. However, Freud calls these merely thought words *Wortlaute*, which metaphorically relate to the auditory, whereas James Strachey's translation chooses the more graphic *text*. Whatever the connotation of the term used, the obsessional thought functionally gains the permanence of writing: its repeated mutism quarantees its unmutability in dreams. On the other hand, the very occurrence of those thoughts in the form of the spoken seems to undermine their speech-like

quality. This apparent paradox may stem from the fact that the Rat Man heard (his) silent thoughts as voices inside his head. Thus, they were factually unarticulated but *he* heard them, and that is the reason why they could be quoted in his dreams. He heard voices in dreams, because he heard them in waking life as well. But because the thoughts remained imprinted in the text of his mind, they did not have to go, or rather could not go, through the process of transformation allotted to quoted speech in dreams.²

One could trace possible reasons for this fate of speech in the very distinction between speech and writing in Freud. Throughout his work, as Jacques Derrida explains in "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Freud uses metaphors derived from writing for the processes of the mind. Permanence and repeatability are the characteristics of both writing and memory. Admittedly, erasability and re-writability also feature these two phenomena. The transcription of memory and writing is also contratranscription, i.e. inscription by erasure (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 212).

Speech, in contrast, tends to gain the status of impermanence and mutability. In dreams, neither speech nor writing implies self-presence or immediacy. Quite the contrary, speech is not living speech, immediate statement of intentions, nor the token of shared presence of the speaker and his/her interlocutor. Speech in dreams resembles more a re-mastered, or rather, wildly re-mixed recording of a live performance than the actual act before the reproduction took place.

The basic logic of this distinction, of course, differs from what Derrida calls the phonocentric tradition of Western metaphysics, i.e. the privileging of speech over writing (cf. Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* 76; Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 8, 20). In Freud's analyses of dreams, both speech and writing are based on the quoted and iterable nature of language. In another context, Freud indicates that "speech' must be understood not merely as to mean the statement of thought in words, but to include the speech of gesture and every other method, such, for instance, as writing, by which mental activity can be expressed" (Freud, *SE* 13: 176). This "arche-speech," to modify Derrida's *arche-writing*, seems to embrace both vocal and graphic speech. However, Freud's insistence on the special nature of articulated speech may bear traces of phonocentrism. Speech changes because the speaking subject is present to what s/he is uttering, whereas the unarticulated allows for absence and therefore remains formally intact.

In what follows, I will proceed from Freud's strict theoretical limitation of language in dreams to accounting for the broader questions of signification and interpretation suggested by his argumentative rhetoric and practical analyses. Such questions include the contextuality of signification, the translatability of dream-symbols, and the visual and the auditory in dream-language. These issues relate not only to the interpretation of dreams but also to that of literature.

From (Manifest) Content to (Latent) Context

The fate of speech in dreams dramatizes the contextuality all signification in an extreme form. The meaning of a signifier depends on the context in which it appears; only certain signifieds are realized in the paradigmatic potential of possible significations usually attached to a given signifier. In the dream-work, this phenomenon can be stretched to the utmost limit. In practice, the bond between the signifier and the signified often breaks all together. What *is* important and meaningful is the *position* of the word spoken or read in the discourse of waking life, i.e. the context itself (cf. 339). One could say that any signifier will do as long as it appears in the-latent content-wise-"right" place. The manifest content can often be disregarded entirely, since it is the events associated with it or the occasion alluded to which are significant (Freud, "Remarks"109; Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 304). The manifest content yields up to the latent context. That context is either the words surrounding a given word or the circumstances under which the discourse originally took place.

Every dream is language-specific. This means that the dream is based on the language of the dreamer, but also on the general paleographic potential of all tongues. Not only is each dream-language related to the dreamer's mother tongue; in addition, the meaning of each dream symbol depends on the specific context of a given dream. There cannot be a master key to dream symbols (but on a very general level a grammar and a phonology of dreams is a possibility; I will return to this problematic at the end of my article). The interpretation of dreams resembles, consequently, translation and decoding. Nevertheless, Freud doubted the possibility of translating a dream, not to mention his *Traumdeutung*, into another language (132n). Both *Die Traumdeutung* and the dreams it includes have, of course, been translated into several languages. What is the explanation for this apparent performative paradox? It is the very meaning, interpretation, and context of *translation*. Granted, to fully convey the stylistic nuances, intertextual associations, and phonetic features of a dream is practically impossible in translation. One object language cannot be turned into another without losing-and at the same time adding-some meanings. But translation, like interpretation, rarely functions on the level of object language only. Freud's interpretations of dreams invariably have recourse to metalanguage, to a language explaining a language, and the same principle has been used in the translations of his book and its exemplifying dreams. The German puns and quibbles which play such an important role in some of the key dreams of Freud's book are, in translation, given in the original form but they are supplemented with explanations and rough equivalents in another language. A similar procedure takes place in Freud's original analyses of German dreams: a dreamed word is explicated with the help of a metalanguage. The structure of the procedure is the same as in translation, although both the object and metalanguage are German.

Interestingly enough, the very language-specificity of dreams needs to be modified on the basis of both Freud's examples and everyday (or rather nightly) experience. People dream in several languages. Freud the polyglot cites his own dreams which feature English, Latin, Italian, French, and Greek words and expressions, which he literally has to translate into German in order to interpret them.

The contextual principle of a dream's meaning, thus, continues in waking life as well. As Grinstead notes, psychoanalysis is not primarily concerned about analyzing the dream but the patient (Grinstead 19). It is therefore important to interpret the way in which an analysand recounts his/her dream to the analyst; it may function as a sign of narcissism, defiance, or rebellion, or it can even be conceived as a gift (Grinstead 19-21). Hence, in an analytical situation, the significance of a dream lies in the representation of it. Trivially, the untold dream is like a voice heard by the patient only; if neither dream nor context is expressed in words, their meanings remain locked in the patient's mind. Paradoxically, however, when a dream is recounted, it cannot be mediated as such but is inevitably represented as a revised or completed version. Upon narrating, the dream as experienced by the dreamer is replaced with a verbal account, and the narrative order and the words used in describing it are already a propaedeutic part of interpretation. It could be said that a dream as such cannot be interpreted, for it needs to be translated into a representation in order to be analyzable. This applies to the introspective self-analysis as well; when recollecting a dream from the previous night, we fill in gaps, reshape fragments into something of a whole, and, in a word, make it a *Gestalt* if not a narrative. All this, of course, can happen in crystal silence, but it is all the more evident if we recount the dream to somebody or write it down in a dream diary.

What are, in Freud, the roles of speech and writing after waking up, when the dreaming is finished and the interpretation is about to begin? In his later works on the problem of handling dream interpretation in psychoanalysis, Freud explicitly warns against writing down dreams: "A dreamer often endeavours to prevent himself from forgetting his dreams by fixing them in writing immediately after waking up" (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 14). What seems like an aid to analysis, is, in Freud's view, actually a cunning plan of the resistance. The fixed writing preserves the dream but in one form only and consequently cuts other associations from it, making "the manifest dream inaccessible to interpretation" (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures* 14). The writing down of dreams thus seems to undermine Freud's method-which "has never failed" (553) him-of asking the patient to recount his/her dream a number of times; the versions are never identical with each other, and the very differences in the oral accounts provide keys to interpretation. Hence, the mutability of live speech is a means of solving the dream's riddle, whereas the dead and rigid writing threatens to seal it fast. In speech, the manifest meaning-content changes, which reveals the solid latent content. In writing, the manifest gets fixed, which thereby hides the latent.

However, the opposition between speech and writing, between the oral and graphic accounts of dreams, is not as stable as Freud suggests. True, writing seemingly fixes a dream in one form, but the very nature of phonetic writing allows for a number of articulations and significations, thus making it "speech-like." I will return to this phenomenon in detail in the last three sections of my article.

Freud's theory, although acknowledging the importance of language, at times emphasizes the dreamer's tongue at the cost of language in general. This makes Freud hear voices when he should read language in dreams. Freud's dream of interpretation is partly a hallucination, but he shares it with so many that it passes for reality.

Another Dictionary of Dream Symbols? Problems of Translation

Ironically enough, Freud's emphasis on the singularity of each dream-language has been forgotten in the (vulgarized) psychocultural reception of his theory. For instance, the blurb of the Avon edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* dubs the book a veritable dictionary of dream-symbols, so atrociously criticized by Freud in the Introduction to his Dreambook's first edition: "What does a dream about a loved one's death mean? What do dreams of swimming, falling, or flying symbolize? What is expressed in dreams about baldness or loss of teeth?" Hence, the general linguistic turn in the interpretation of dreams that Freud initiated has often been reduced to an automatic linking of signifiers to given signifieds. It is fascinating to speculate whether this misconstruction has anything to do with Freud's own vacillation between the members in the speech/writing and the general/singular oppositions. The same applies to Freud's ambivalence as regards the previous methods of dream theories.

In his survey of earlier lay dream theories, Freud finds two "essentially different methods" of interpreting dreams (129). These methods are symbolic interpretation and the decoding procedure. The former is based on the assumption that the content of a given dream can be replaced with "another content which is intelligible and in certain respects analogous to the original one" (129). The classic example of this method is Joseph's explanation of Pharaoh's dream in the Bible: the seven fat kine and the seven lean kine were the respective symbolic substitutes of the future periods of prosperity and famine in the land of




Egypt. The decoding method conceives dreams as a sort of cryptography in which each element is translatable into another with the help of a fixed key. A dream-book serves as a key which gives the equivalents to the ciphered signs of dreams; the interpreter will just have to put these translated meanings together and transpose the result into the future tense (130). Mechanical and amateurish as these methods seem, they still have some bearing on Freud's theory. In its at least seemingly close reading of a dream's details, the decoding method resembles the untotalizing and dynamic nature of psychoanalysis, although the former does not, of course, account for such processes as condensation or displacement.

Perhaps more surprisingly, even ancient symbolic interpretation is in some respects close to parts of the psychoanalytic treatment of certain kinds of dreams. Although Freud criticizes the traditional mechanical translation of dream-symbols encountered in traditional popular dream-books, the analysis of symbols in the so-called typical dreams has recourse to general and stable meanings. The typical dreams include the ones quoted above in connection with the blurb, and their symbolism representing sexual material seems to have a "permanently fixed meaning, like the 'grammalogues' in shorthand" (386). However, instead of suggesting a new dream-book, Freud emphasizes that those permanent symbols are part of general "unconscious ideation" found, more extensively than in dreams, in such cultural articulations as folklore, popular myths, legends, linguistic idioms, proverbs, and jokes (386). The fixed symbols therefore lie outside the economy of the dream-work proper. The work has already been done elsewhere, in culture, and dreams tend to utilize the symbols without elaborating them (cf. Ricoeur 100). The culturally worked out symbols have become ready-mades, received ideas, meanings off the peg (cf. Lakoff; Holland). As Paul Ricoeur points out, permanent symbols breach the opposition between the symbolic method and the decoding method by becoming a stereotyped code (Ricoeur 101).

The situation can also be thematized with an analog to ordinary language. Like the words of any natural language, symbols are conventions formed by past speakers. A subject is to use that pre-given language in order to communicate his/her thoughts, however personal they be. In a similar fashion, dream-symbols are both provided and their meanings overdetermined by culture. But subject is not totally at the mercy of a given language. In waking life, language can be used in unexpected ways; in dream world, the symbols may be automatic, but the dreamer's association with them can be quite idiosyncratic (cf. Ricoeur 102). The analog between ordinary language and fixed dream-symbols should not, however, be stretched too far. Natural language is based on an arbitrary and contingent convention between signifier and signified, whereas the symbols in typical dreams are semantically motivated and thus determined. The English word for cows in pharaoh's dream could be not only *kine* but any string of phonemes in accordance with the phonetic rules of that language. As a dream-symbol, however, the *kine* metonymically stand for food (edible meat) or prosperity (the exchange-value of cattle), which meanings, for instance, a *chair* or a *toothbrush* would not easily convey. Sexual symbolism is also motivated rather than arbitrary: such symbols as hat, umbrella, or room are based on the anatomy of male and female reproductive organs.

In dreams, the symbols are things, visual objects, not words. In interpretation, the dream-symbols become words; figures turn into figures of speech. The relations between the visual and the lingual in connection with the dynamics of the psyche as manifested in dreams deserve to be looked at in more detail.

Figuring Id Out

Interestingly enough, Freud's inscriptive metaphor for a dream-symbol is not mainly phonetic writing but writing of a more primordial order: hieroglyphics, pictograms, and ideograms. These forms of inscription are markedly visual and, so to speak, mute; they do not necessarily have one single pronunciation for the simple reason that they can contain a number of signifiers with different articulations. Moreover, those signifiers refer to different signifieds according to the context in which the sign appears. For instance, in Chinese the written ideogram is used as a common reference point among speakers of different dialects or when a specific word is emphasized in order to separate it from its homonyms (de Saussure 27). In its polysemous idiosyncrasy, rebus writing is another form of visual-aural meaning production in dreams. According to the rebus principle, the visual representation of an eye  can stand for an eye, it can homophonically refer to "I," but it can also function as a syllable (deaf +  = defy; boat +  = bowtie) (cf. Yule 11).

On the other hand, it is somewhat misleading to speak about *language* in connection with the Freudian account of dreams. Freud was careful not to call unconscious phenomena and processes "language" in the strictly linguistic meaning of the word. According to Freud, language is to be limited to the scope of the preconscious and the conscious. As Paul Ricoeur explains, there are a number of lines of thought in Freud which tie in with a common pre-linguistic signifying factor or signifier (*signifiant*) in the unconscious. That factor, also called the "instinctual representative," functions in the order of images, not of language. First, an instinct appears in the psychism in the form of a "representative," which presents things, not words. Second, the dream-thought regresses into a form which resembles "pictorial representation." Third, the mechanisms of derivation, substitution, and instinctual representation are connected with the level of fantasy or images instead of speech or writing. These three instances share a signifying power, which, however, operates prior to language. Even when language is at least nominally dealt with, it happens in the form of treating words as things (Ricoeur 398). Hence, rather than a language in the purely linguistic sense of the word, the unconscious uses a signifying system which only metaphorically can be called a language. In an analogous way, we can figuratively speak about the grammar of dance or of comics without, however, actually believing in the possibility of describing them as accurately as linguists do their object of study.

In a similar fashion, the symbolism of the unconscious is situated outside the linguistic proper: it is not a phonemically organized language given to a group of speakers, but a visually articulated system shared by several cultures (Ricoeur 399). To call the signifying mechanisms of the unconscious by the name of language may have some heuristic force but at the same time it can lead thinking astray. Granted, the unconscious signification can approach the complexity of a linguistic organization. However, the metaphor of language tends to efface the particularity of the unconscious production of meaning: its visuality and unarticulability. Ricoeur suggests that the symbolism of the unconscious be compared with rhetoric, which deals with the workings of subjectivity rather than with the phenomena of language (Ricoeur 400). When an abstract dream-thought is transformed into a pictorial and concrete means of statement, there appears a surplus of meaning: the controlled conceptuality gives way to a host of associations (375). Word are thus substituted for things and images; for instance, the concept of rest can be materialized as a *chair* or *bed* (with the inevitable extra associations of, say, leadership and sex respectively).

The same principle of concretization applies to words themselves: they lose, in the dream-work, their purely conceptual value and are treated as material objects. The abstract signified is not useful in dreams, whereas the concrete signifier is exposed to manipulation of various kinds. The materiality of the signifier does not merely, however, apply to the visual contour of a word or its letters, but can also embrace the auditory shape of a string of sounds or the phonemes of which it consists. The materiality of the by definition immaterial sound of language seems an oxymoron, but what is at stake here is the sheer surface of the phonetic, without any reference to the possible meanings it carries. The following examples may illustrate the sound enough stuff that associative dream-images can be made on. Freud paraphrases L. F. A. Maury's two dreams, whose images "were linked together merely through a similarity in the sound of words" (91-2):

He [Maury] once dreamt that he was on a pilgrimage (*pèlerinage*) to Jerusalem or Mecca; after many adventures he found himself visiting *Pelletier*, the chemist, who, after some conversation, gave him a zinc shovel (*pelle*); in the next part of the dream this turned into a great broadsword. In another dream he was walking along a highway and reading the number of *kilometres* on the milestones; then he was in a grocer's shop where there was a big pair of scales, and a man was putting *kilogramme* weights into the scale in order to weigh Maury; the grocer than said to him: "You are not in Paris but on the island of *Gilolo*." Several other scenes followed, in which he saw a *Lobelia* flower, and then General Lopez, of whose death he had read shortly before. Finally, while he was playing a game of lotto, he woke up (92; emphases in original).

The associative chains thus formed in the respective dreams (*pèlerinage - Pelletier - pelle; kilomètre - kilogramme - Gilolo - Lobelia - Lopez - lotto*) are those of the signifiers and not of the signifieds. It is the form of the signs that motivates the "discourse"; the content could be practically anything. Or more precisely, the sound of the signifiers forms the link between signs, not their orthography (for instance, *Lobelia* could be written as * *Laubelia* or * *Lobailia* without causing a change in pronunciation).

In rhetoric, this kind of gradual transformation of words by replacing a single letter at a time is called the metaplasm, and it has been utilized by as different writers as Gerald Manley Hopkins, Raymond Roussel, and John Updike. In the conscious use of the metaplasm, the chain of signifiers thus formed often dramatizes the secret connection between content-wise separate signs. The dream-work, however, tends to repeat the significant sounds to the point of overdetermination: the narrative teleology and progress are not as important as the emphasis on the importantly similar. Just as the symbolism of the unconscious is rhetorical rather than linguistic, even the raw material of articulated symbols-natural language-is treated in dreams as figures, as auditory or visual images, rather than as figures of speech in the usual sense of the phrase. This ties in with the Freud's observation that wish-fulfillment in dreams is regressive in three ways: it means a return to the raw material of images, to childhood, and to the perceptual end of the psychical apparatus (587). In regression, the fabric of the dream-thoughts is undone into its materials (582). The more primitive psychical structures along with older means of expression and representation are mobilized in the regression encountered in dreams. Formally, then, dreams have recourse to the pictorial even when they are seemingly utilizing alphabetic or phonetic writing.

In dreams, things are literally done with words, because words are treated as things, as visual-auditory objects devoid of conventional meaning. The dreamer is in the position of a small, illiterate, and even speechless (*infans*) infant for whom words, toys, and cutlery are of the same order. The primitive form of representation is analogous with the basic psychical topography and perceptual apparatus. As Ricoeur puts it, "'there is' meaning before 'I' speak; 'it' (i.e. the id) speaks" (Ricoeur 433). Or more chiasmically, to figure out what it (this or that image) means, means figuring id out.

Reading Voices in Dreams: Auditory Cryptographs

If pictorial representation is so essential to dreams that even phonetic language is conceived as a mass of sounds rather than as meaningful utterances, is not the concept and/or study of dreamed voice as a metonymy of speakerly presence a somewhat marginal or even off-key issue? Perhaps not so, if we study the problematic of voice and sound in more detail.

Freud was certainly not alone in hearing voices and sounds in dreams. In a footnote added to the 1909 edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud points out that the "oriental 'dream-books' . . . base the greater number of their interpretations of dream-elements upon similarity of sounds and resemblance between words" (131n). The punning and verbal quibbles that the oriental dreamers and the interpreters of dreams either witnessed or deciphered were thus of phonemic nature. They, in other words, only realized their punning potential to the full upon articulation. There was presumably more to the condensed consonance or fully packed portmanteaux than met the dreamer's or interpreter's eye.

By articulation I do not mean actual speech or oral pronunciation of the words in question. Rather, what I have in mind is the so-called phonemic reading as theorized by Garrett Stewart and later modified by John Shoptaw. For Stewart, phonemic reading is "reading with a hearing eye and a seeing ear". It does not imply reading aloud nor any suggestion of authorial voice, but the acknowledgement of the fact that phonetic writing is incapable of completely capturing the vocalicity of language. "The phonemic will not stay put within the morphemes apparently assigned by the graphic script," but will emerge from the word-divisions and amalgamations of sounds (Stewart 4-5). The act of reading gives a silent text a "voice," an articulation, which is at once muted. Reading is hence a synesthetic visual-aural phenomenon. This is due to the very nature of speech and writing in relation with the system of language: the phonemic bursts out of the graphic, and differential rules interfere in the acoustic continuum. This results in the fact that literary language is forced to seek a balance between the structure and the phonetic-graphic basis of language. In phonemic reading, special attention is paid to the so-called transegmental drift, to the phenomenon of writing in which the phonetic features of language breach the junctural borders of morphemes and blur the graphically defined shapes of segments (Stewart 3-9, 28-30).

Phonemic reading and transegmental drift can be exemplified with the verbalized specimens of rebus writing quoted above. Upon reading the sentence "The boat I sank," liaison connects *boat* and *I*, forming a homophonic articulation *bowtie*, and giving an (in at least some contexts) acceptable sentence "The bowtie sank." Both senses are "present" in the articulation, although not in the purely graphic or visual form of the original sentence. Word division and junctural borders are conventions which phonemic reading problematizes and undoes. Although Stewart's theory applies to literature, the phenomenon is by no means only literary. Transegmentality is the inevitable feature of all language, ranging from everyday speech-acts via poetry to the verbal products of the dream-work. Analogously, Stewart (20) claims that phonemic reading is in fact the way we inevitably read, although we usually resist the resonating surplus thus created and stick to the graphically demarcated order of sounds and words.

If Stewart's theory seems to verge on the language of a schizophrenic, John Shoptaw suggests that phonemic reading is not bold enough. Shoptaw coins the term *lyric cryptography*, by which he means a productive reading accounting for the multiple forces at work in a poem. Those forces derive from not only from the poet, but also from history, society, culture, and especially language. The cryptographic production involves phonemic links, graphemic changes, associations, dissemination of a key proper name, and intertextual echoes (Shoptaw 223-32). Cryptographic reading treats the graphic form of a poem even more liberally than phonemic reading. For instance, the title of Wordsworth's poem "The Solitary Reaper," hides, in Shoptaw's reading, the graphemic crypt phrase "the solitary reader," on the basis that the letter *p* can be rotated and thus be turned into a *d* (Shoptaw 228). This kind of manipulation of the graphic text is not as freewheeling as it seems, for the changes brought about are, in Shoptaw's examples, motivated by the poem's theme or other intrinsic features. The use of cryptographic reading does not, then, promote the trivial fact that the limited set of the English alphabet can generate an unlimited number of words and sentences. Rather, to conceive literary language as a cryptography thematizes the significative potential of the verbal, whether graphic or auditory.

A similar kind of manipulation of words and sounds can be discerned in dreams as well. The seemingly liberal and "schizophrenic" permutation of the ready-made verbal material drawn from waking life turns out to be, in interpretation, motivated and driven by some reason. I illustrate this phenomenon with the help of "Philippe's dream," analyzed by Laplace and Pontalis, and elaborated by Ricoeur:

The desire to drink is represented by a series of pictorial equivalents of this appeal: the drinking of fountain water from cupped hands, the arrangement of the palms of the hands in the form of a conch. . . . the substitution of the village square [*la place*] where the fountain stands, for the seashore [*la plage*], where the sand irritated his feet, is of the order of the metaphor; the movement whereby the unicorn [*licorne*] refers to its whole legend and to an entire cycle of signifiers functions as metonymy. . . . The unconscious text, which is to be interpolated into the conscious text, must be supplied as a signifying chain between LI and CORNE. The unconscious chain is therefore a complicated patchwork with its various signifiers of ordinary language (*Lili - plage - sable - peau - pied - corne*), whereas condensation condenses the sequence to its two end terms, li-corne. Thus the *licorne* image is both the mythic potential of the fabled animal and the wordplay of li-corne. (Ricoeur 400n, 401n, 403n; emphases in original)

What is missed in the elaborate analyses by Laplace, Pontalis, and Ricoeur is the basic motivation of all dreams, the wish to continue the sleep, to stay in bed. This is expressed in the dream with a pun on the French word for bed, *le lit*, which is homophonous with *li*. The horn (*corne*) of the mythical unicorn can be interpreted as a cornucopia, a container overflowing with, in this case, drink, thus fulfilling the wish to quench the thirst and, basically, to postpone the reason to wake up and leave the bed. The *lit* in *licorne* only comes into being when the word is read phonemically; or, to develop the French pun, *quand on lit li comme un lit*. Otherwise it would remain a morpheme, signifying nothing. The cryptic writing of the sound (if not the fury) of language is, provided that my interpretation is correct, part of the dream-work's silent repertoire. In waking life, the products of the dream-work must be exposed not only to a classification of their graphic form but also to a phonemic or cryptographic reading.

There are, then, voices and sounds in dreams, but they do not emit from any speaking subject-asleep or awake-but burst from the very nature of phonetic language.

Sound Asleep

Freud heard voices in dreams but remained at least partially deaf to the voice or sound of language in general. For Freud, speech and writing formed an uneasy pair of bedfellows, but he dreamed up a theory which could cover both without disturbing the rest of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In the metapsychanalytic reception of Freud's theory, the rest has continued; only rarely has the problematics of sound, voice, and silence emerged from the dogmatic Freudian slumber. In a metacritical aside, Thomas Pepper notes how the auditory permeates Freud's exemplary dreams-Irma's injection, the wolf dream, and the dream of the burning child-and asks, "Why is it that no one has ever seen or heard that all of these key dreams are about singing, shrieking, screaming, about the relation between silence and screaming?" (Pepper 10). Pepper does not, however, suggest an explanation of this uncanny muting of the vocal. The question is indeed difficult, and I do not pretend to be able to answer it myself. With the assurance of a somnambulist, I can, nevertheless, give some guesses.

The problems involved with speech, writing, voice, and silence in dreams is probably not a burning problem in actual analytic work. True, some observations which Freud presents as rules need to be modified in the 21st century practice of psychoanalysis. Those questionable generalizations include the merely vocal source of speech in dreams and the overall ruling out of the vocal from graphically inscribed language. But otherwise the whole articulatory constellation of language seems a marginal issue if the analyst primarily focuses on the analysand instead of his/her dreams. The case is different with the disciplines in which Freud's theory is most avidly being read at the present: literary criticism, philosophy, film studies-to name a few. These disciplines are not concerned about analyzing a patient but about dreams and Freud's analyses of them. The non-clinical approaches to dream-interpretation could potentially pay attention to such argumentative or rhetorical discrepancies or anomalies within Freud's theory as the speech/writing dichotomy. The interest in the treatment-wise marginal matters stems from the general linguistic turn in the mid-twentieth century Western humanites. Jacques Lacan's rereading of Freud, and Jacques Derrida's rereading of Lacan's reading are symptomatic of this turn.³ Such questions as representability, the role of language in the structuring of the psyche, and Freud's mediating position between the analytic and hermeneutic traditions of science coincide with the interest of contemporary scholarship known as Theory.

A theory rarely becomes completely outdated. When it loses some of its validity to its main discipline, it can gain new interest from others. This kind of process can be seen to be happening to Freud. The development of his thinking sedimented in the numerous additions to the subsequent editions of *The Interpretation of Dreams* dramatizes Freud's search for a solution to the problem of dreams while the working of his unwitting presuppositions repeatedly lead him astray. But those strays sometimes prove more interesting, for the theory outside the realm of psychoanalysis proper, than the solid findings in his own discipline.

Just as the ultimate purpose of dreams is to fulfill the wish of undisturbed sleep, Freud's interpretive strategy aims at a coherent, congruous reading. Often, however, nightmarish or anguished dreams seem to disturb sleep, but it is due to the dream-work's desperate attempt to save what it possibly can of peaceful rest; hence, sleep usually manages to continue, although not as sweetly as one would wish. In a similar fashion, Freud's interpretations often verge on over-interpretation or incompatibility, but still they generally hold together. Instead of tossing and turning in a fit of insomnia or of interpretive impasse caused by multiple voices and sounds, both the person asleep and Freud's interpretation manage to remain-sound.

Notes

¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Avon, 1969. All subsequent references are to this edition of the translation and will be given parenthetically in the text. ([Back to Main Text](#))

² The contestation of his own rules is a recurring motif in Freud's theoretical writings. He tends to challenge his own findings and generalizations with seemingly opposing examples, which, in closer inspection, turn out to strengthen the overall rule. This rhetorical give-and-take can be seen, in addition to the rule of quoted speech, in the general explanation of dreams as wishfulfillment. In the latter case, even the traumatic dreams, which haunt and taunt the dreamer, express the wish to work through the trauma in question (Freud, "Remarks" 4-5; Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 268). ([Back to Main Text](#))

³ Freud's conception of language in dreams could, of course, be analyzed with the help of post-Lacanian linguistics as well. For instance, Noam Chomsky's E-language/l-language division could provide a useful tool for thematizing Freud's linguistic oppositions and restrictions. For strategic reasons, however, I have utilized a different frame of reference in the present article. ([Back to Main Text](#))

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To cite this article, use this bibliographical entry: Mikko Keskinen "Hearing Voices in Dreams: Freud's Tossing and Turning with Speech and Writing". PSYART: A Hyperlink Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts. Available http://psyartjournal.com/article/show/keskinen-hearing_voices_in_dreams_freuds_tossing_. April 23, 2020 [or whatever date you accessed the article].

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