Dreaming by the Book: Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams and the History of Psychoanalytic Movement by Lydia Marinelli and Andreas Mayer, Other Press, 2003, 256 pp., reviewed by Arnold D. Richards.

The Interpretation of Dreams is the canonical text for psychoanalysis. The extent of its influence beyond psychology and the mental health professions is such that it may be considered one of the canonical texts of twentieth century culture. Considering all that has been written about Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams over the past century, is there a place for yet another volume, especially a volume with some claim to originality? The answer, in my opinion, is yes.

Dreaming by the Book: Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams and the History of Psychoanalytic Movement by Lydia Marinelli and Andreas Mayer is such a volume. The authors have relevant credentials to do this study. Marinelli is a historian and the Research Director of the Sigmund Freud Foundation in Vienna; Andreas Mayer is a sociologist and a Research Scholar at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin. Marinelli and Mayer have together written a close history of the book itself, something that, as far as I know, has not been done before. Marinelli and Mayer, in Science in Context (2006 Vol 19 #1), argue against the two common approaches found in the historiography of psychoanalysis. One type of history presents an over-idealized version of Freud and his work; the other offers a tendentious, anti-Freud polemic, focusing on Freud’s errors and questioning the validity and therapeutic value of psychoanalytic theories. Dreaming by The Book follows a new historiography, one that fosters a scholarly attitude toward questions about how psychoanalysis was discovered and was developed, with particular attention to the relevant analytic texts and to the discourse about these texts found in letters and other written exchanges. John C. Burnham (The New Freud Studies: A Historiographical Shift. Journal of the Historical Society Volume 12 June 2006) maintains that Dreaming by The Book signals the arrival of the new Freud Studies which contextualizes and broadens the reach of scholars studying Freud and the development of psychoanalysis. Burnham contends that: The Interpretation of Dreams was an instructional manual for psychoanalysis, (c.f. Lothane / Summer exchange on the members list and the open line) with Freud using the interpretation of his own dreams to show how a person could carry out a psychoanalysis. Changes and notes in successive editions of the book reflected the dialogue between Freud and the readers of his text concerning issues of technique and theory. Viewed in the light of these dialogues, the book becomes a collective product and not just a book with Freud as its sole author. The readers of the book formed a psychoanalytic community even before the Wednesday study group began in 1902. The elaboration of individual concepts as central as the Oedipus complex came about in disputes with readers that have had a lasting effect on discussions in psychoanalysis right up to the present day. Mayer Martinelli and Mayer’s main point is that the back and forth discourse between Freud and his readers and his followers makes the Dream book a dynamic institution.

1. Through an examination of the complicated textual history of the book, which came out in eight editions between 1900 and 1930, the authors establish three significant phases in its emendation. (It would have been helpful for Martinelli and Mayer to have included a chart listing each edition and noting the major emendations in each.)

The first phase of the book’s history coincides with the founding years (1899-1909) (editions 1
an 2) of the psychoanalytic movement. During this period, it is through personal contact with Freud that individuals learn to understand and practice psychoanalysis. For clinical readers, learning occurs in a process that involves dreaming, writing and reading the book, often while engaging in an “epistolary analyses” (p. 7) with its author.

The second phase (1909-1918) (edition 3 thru 6) begins with the founding of the IPA. There is a wider collective effort with a broader reach beyond the clinical into myth and literature, presented in the newly established psychoanalytic Journals, the Yahrbuch, the ZeitSchrift, etc. This phase is organized around establishing the universal validity of the psychoanalytic concepts found in the Dream book. The advances in the field have an impact on Freud and find their way into the Dream book. The authors identify this phase as what they, following Ludwig Fleck, call Journal Science.

In the third phase (1919-1930), (edition 7 thru 9) Freud begins to treat the book as a historical document and to assume a monopolistic control over its interpretation. In this phase the problem of translatability moves to the fore. Freud, publishers and translators grappled with the problem of translating dreams into different languages. Some translators, following a directive from Freud, provided their own dream material. Freud wrote, "In both [The interpretation of Dreams and Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious], so much depends on the wording that the translator would have to be an analyst himself and replace the material I gave with new material from his own experience, as has in fact been the case with various translations". The first to try to obey Freud's summons was A. A. Brill in the 1913 English edition; and Brill continued this effort in subsequent editions of his translation. Freud gave Brill exclusive rights to English translation and the two of them engaged in a dialogue about translation which also involved a reexamination of some of the basic concepts. Marinelli and Mayer write: "The modifications Brill introduced in the original text followed two lines: in one, material was offered as evidence for formal processes of dream distortion; in the other an attempt was made to 'translate' dream symbols for American dreamers". Brill's translations of the Interpretation of Dreams met with criticism from all sides, from psychoanalysts and scholars, to which Freud responded with his famous defense of Brill "I would rather have a good friend than a good translator". One of the main critics of Brill's translation was Ernest Jones whose political agenda was to protect psychoanalysis as a centrally established organization and who was determined to provide a standardized English translation under his personal direction for the English and American psychoanalytic communities that would be followed by official translations in other languages. Jones’ aim was to return the book to its author, Freud, an effort which culminated in the Strachey Standard edition. However this has not been the final word. There was Bettelheim's critique of Starchey's Angleized terminology, for example his psyche instead of soul, a new translation by Joyce Crick and translations in the Adam Phillips/ Penguin edition and the forthcoming Solms Complete Works.

A key player from the start and into the second phase was Wilhelm Steckel who was part of the original 1902 Wednesday psychological group. In fact, it was his idea to set up the group in the first place. Martinelli and Mayer recount Steckel’s rise from 1902 to his fall in 1914. Steckel, one of the targets of Freud’s 1914 paper on the history of the psychoanalytic movement, was a sexologist with a keen interest in dreams, particularly dream symbolism. He reviewed the dream book in 1902 and popularized dream symbolism as the method for dream interpretation and for psychoanalytic technique. Steckel fell from grace because of his technical prescriptions for
dream interpretation. These included insisting that all of his patients write down their dreams, especially their first dreams, and give them to the analyst to preserve them for his later symbolic interpretations in as undisturbed a form as possible. For Freud, symbol interpretation was the interpretation of last resort, for Steckel it was the starting line.

Freud also, I believe, recognized the limitations of writing down dreams because he knew that the censor/resistance was not easily vanquished. I recall a patient of mine who wrote down a dream in the middle of the night to help him remember it. When he woke up he found that his handwriting was illegible. I recall one of my teachers, Otto Isakower, telling us in class ‘Shrieben is Verboten’, writing is forbidden. His stance was that a dream is presented in a visual mode and it is best for analyst and analysand to stay in that visual mode when they attempt to get at the latent meaning behind the manifest content of the dream. He would tell us never to ask patients to tell us their dreams. He suggested that we say instead to the patient, “Let’s have a look at it.”

In any case, Freud added examples to counter Steckel’s interpretive technique in the third edition. Martinelli and Mayer write:

“Steckel’s symbolism, which challenged the way Freud went about interpreting dreams, thus made it necessary for Freud not only to supplement his dream theory in that area but also from the third edition on to demarcate his own approach with increasing precision”.

Marinelli and Mayer also point out that he inserted a paragraph to counter Adler’s idea that every dream (for men) shows an advance from the feminine to the masculine line. He acknowledged that Steckel had an intuitive gift but thought that his intuitions were not always correct and often could not be taught. The text in the book ends with four appendices: a discussion by Freud’s younger brother, Alexander; seven letters from Eugene Bleuler to Sigmund Freud (1903B 1906); Seven letters from the Correspondence between Sigmund Freud and Alphonse Maeder; and Dreams of Poetry Dreams of Myth: Two Texts from Sigmund Freud’s The Interpretation of Dreams by Otto Rank.

Freud's younger brother tries to make the case that dreams bring the fulfillment only of those wishes that are not fulfilled in waking life. Ex contrario: fulfilled wishes are not dreamed of. He supports his thesis with four dreams of his own and a dream of a women friend. All five dreams do not touch on fulfilled or unfulfilled childhood sexual wishes. We do not know what transpired between Freud and his brother in regard to this disagreement, but clearly the Dream book was the occasion for an intellectual engagement between the two brothers.

The second appendix is seven letters from Eugene Bleuler to Freud, the third appendix is three letters from the correspondence between Freud and Alphonse Maeder. Bleuler started out a Freudian believer, but his commitment foundered when he found that he was not able to apply Freud’s method of dream interpretation to his own dreams. This was the starting point for his criticism of the technique of psychoanalysis and led after a time to him leaving the Zurich Psychoanalytic Society, but he still stayed connected to psychoanalysis. He was not a believer, but also not an enemy. Maeder was also part of the Swiss group, first a follower of Freud and
then followed Jung as a dissident. He became president of the Zurich Society after Bleuler stepped down in 1911. He agreed with Jung that dreams had a teleological or prospective function, which will help the patient lead a better life through the self-healing processes in the unconscious. Clearly the Jung/Maeder unconscious was very different from the Freudian unconscious. This (ref.?) all came to a head in the 1913 Munich Congress. According to Martinelli and Mayer, Maeder tried, unsuccessfully, to avoid an open rift between Freud and Jung, in part because his view of dream interpretation was just as discordant with Freud’s as Jung’s. And then imbricated in the theoretical dispute were the Vienna/Zurich, Jewish/Christian differences in sensibilities. Maeder defended himself against the charge that his characterization of the Viennese psychoanalysts as caught in a Semitically based negative father complex was anti-Semitic. In 1914 Freud wrote out the Swiss (and Adler as well) from his psychoanalysis in his paper On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement.

The last appendix is two texts by Otto Rank, which were included in the fourth edition of the Interpretation of Dreams and removed from the sixth. Otto Rank, who had been encouraged by Freud to take courses in mythology, literature, history, and philosophy and who had presented the Viennese position on dream interpretation in the 1913 Munich Congress, found himself in turn banished from the Freudian thought collective in 192_. The move to marginalize dissidents and return to the Orthodox was reflected in the last editions in which Freud reasserted his authority as the author of the dream book and the creator of psychoanalysis.

A subtext of Martinelli and Mayer’s analysis of the Dream book is that the theory and practice of psychoanalysis cannot be neatly separated from its politics. This was true during the second and third decades of psychoanalysis and remains the case today (Richards). Martinelli and Mayer’s study of the textual hegira of The Interpretations of Dreams is consistent with the notion (Fleck 1936) that the development of psychoanalysis is a social process in which cultural, historical, and personal factors take on an important role. Just as psychoanalysis as a treatment is a conversation between the analyst and analysand, psychoanalysis as a discipline develops out of conversations between authors and readers. Freud must have been very much aware of the importance of conversations. How else can we understand his remarkable epistolary output of more than 30,000 letters in his lifetime? Many have lamented the decline of letter writing in recent decades. Perhaps, the advent of e-mail and list serves may reverse that trend, and with the advantage that communications between two individuals may have a larger public audience. I certainly hope so, for the sake of our science and our profession.