



In my perspective the analyst's interpretations of dreams affect what linguists call transmutation of the symbolic basis, a process that is necessary to help the mind to improve its capacity to think.

In the analytic situation dreams might change; they can be communications to the analyst, performances for the analyst, gifts, acts of being obliging for the analyst and expressions of the working-through process in response to the analyst's interpretations. In this sense, dreams also reflect what is going on in the patient–analyst relationship at the transference level.

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Over the years between Freud's definition of a dream – firstly in the 'Project' (Freud, 1895) and then in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1899) – as the hallucinatory fulfilment of an unconscious repressed wish and the most recent contributions of the neurosciences on implicit memory and the so-called unrepressed unconscious, the psychoanalytic theory of dreams can be said to have travelled an immense distance along a path replete with transformations and developments.

With regard to the first question, on my conception of the function of dreams, it seems to me that, in clinical terms, dreams have a twofold potential for the analyst. On the one hand, they are an incomparable source of information on the affects prevailing in the analytic space; they can be the vehicle of choice for an analytic approach to the here-and-now of the transference relationship by means of interpretation; and they may in addition constitute an indispensable aid to the work of construction. On the other hand, dreams reactivate and can symbolize old emotions, stemming from sometimes traumatic experiences dating back to the earliest periods of relational life and to a phase of presymbolic, preverbal mental functioning, which are stored in *implicit memory* (Mancia, 2004, 2008; Sandler, 1987). From this point of view, dreams also open the way to the possibility of reconstructive work.

Turning now to the second question, I do of course make a fundamental distinction between dreams resulting from traumatic emotions and experiences and other types of dreams. My approach will involve forging a theoretical link between what Ferenczi (1931) called the *traumatolytic function of dreams*, which complemented his brilliant contribution to psychoanalytic

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trauma theory, and the concept of the *unrepressed unconscious* and its present-day developments.

On 26 March 1931, Ferenczi wrote a short paper entitled *On the revision of the interpretation of dreams*, which raised two interesting questions. In the first, he enquired whether a second function, bound up with traumatic experiences, could be attributed to dreams, while the second concerned an extension of metapsychology to include the mechanisms underlying psychotic pathology and trauma – in particular, the fragmentation and atomization of the personality – thus anticipating his well-known hypotheses on the ‘confusion of tongues’.

These ideas originated in Ferenczi’s analytic work with patients with very severe pathology, which had led to his discovery that splits in the ego resulting from early traumatic experiences were defence mechanisms prior to repression, so that patients who had had such experiences did not offer the analyst interpretable unconscious material relating to these experiences since they had in many cases never been conscious.

Ferenczi thus postulated that a more complete definition of the function of dreams would include not only the undisputed function of wish fulfilment, but also a second function, that of traumatolysis, whereby traumatic experiences were dissolved and undone. In his view, many dreams, lacking unconscious representations, did not present interpretable psychic contents or oneiric images, but gave rise only to painful sensations or experiences of physical or mental suffering. Ferenczi held that, besides their wish-fulfilment function, dreams served for the recovery, through these sensory and bodily experiences, of the memory traces of a language that had been rendered mute. It was this possibility of working through that Ferenczi called the *traumatolytic function of dreams*, which foreshadowed by a number of years the notion of ‘healing dreams’ coined by Winnicott (1949) in his well-known paper, *Hate in the counter-transference*.

Surprisingly, in fact, Freud had already partly anticipated the insights of his faithful disciple in *Screen memories* (1899), *Remembering, repeating and working-through*<sup>4</sup> (1914), and, in particular, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*<sup>5</sup> (1920); however, Ferenczi insisted on the need to deepen this hypothesis by distinguishing two aspects – primary and secondary – of the function of dreams. The *secondary dream* comprised an attempt to overcome the trauma by means of a narcissistic split that distorted the traumatic experience, thus allowing the traumatic experience to be consciously recovered; whereas the *primary dream*, being inexorably subject to the law of repetition, was made up of violent and unmanageable sense impressions inaccessible to memory,

<sup>4</sup>“There is one special class of experiences [...] for which no memory can as a rule be recovered. These are experiences which occurred in very early childhood [...]. One gains a knowledge of them through dreams” (Freud, 1914, p. 149).

<sup>5</sup>“This would seem to be the place, then, at which to admit for the first time an exception to the proposition that dreams are fulfilments of wishes. [...] *it is impossible to classify as wish-fulfillments* [my emphasis, LJMC] the dreams [...] which occur in traumatic neuroses, or the dreams during psychoanalyses which bring to memory the psychical traumas of childhood. [...] Thus it would seem that the function of dreams, which consists in setting aside any motives that might interrupt sleep, by fulfilling the wishes of the disturbing impulses, is not their *original* function” (Freud, 1920, p. 32 f.).

consciousness or recollection, which originated at a time of unconsciousness and had therefore never undergone repression. A direct, albeit inaccessible relationship with the traumatic scene was thus involved.

Quite a few years later, advances in the neurosciences and many recent psychoanalytic findings have borne out Ferenczi's insights, which were echoed in some of Freud's last writings – in particular, *Constructions in analysis* (Freud, 1938). The neurosciences now see memory as a construction rather than an archive, and have confirmed the view of many contemporary authors that there is not only a long-term, autobiographical, explicit memory accessible to consciousness and to recollection, and derived from the psychic mechanism of repression, but also an implicit memory that cannot be repressed, recollected, or expressed in words.

Considered in these terms, a dream may on the one hand constitute a vitally important representation facilitating apprehension of the phantasies and emotions arising in the transference, while on the other presenting aspects that reconstruct preverbal and presymbolic experiences that are characteristic of the implicit memory stored in the unrepressed unconscious. Hence, in addition to a dream's traditional function of wish fulfilment, it can be seen as performing the further function – thus bearing out Ferenczi's hypothesis – of creating images to fill the void of non-representation and of symbolically representing traumatic experiences of presymbolic origin. Interpretation of these symbolic representations and images can thus assist the psyche in undertaking the process of reconstruction necessary for improving its capacity for mentalization and for transforming experiences that were initially neither thinkable nor representable into experiences that are thinkable, albeit not recollectable.

This, then, is what connects Ferenczi's contributions with present-day developments in the study of the unrepressed unconscious. Relatively recent authors such as Bleger, Aulagnier, Bollas, Mancina, Coderch, Marucco, and César and Sara Botella, who see psychic life as an ongoing transformation from non-representation into figurability and from memory traces without recollection into dreams that seek to symbolize them, do indeed come close to Ferenczi's hypotheses in their view that one of the principal functions of the analyst is performance of the work of figurability, whose aim, on the basis of the formal regression of his or her thought in the sessions, is to gain access to unrecollectable memory or to the unrepressed unconscious.

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