

Barbara McKenzie

Colour and Light Illness and Death



A New Interpretation of Kafka's *Der Proceß*

Peter Lang

This work explores an original interpretation of Franz Kafka's novel, *Der Proceß* (The Trial), which argues that the novel is in the form of a series of dreams, dreamt by a man who has been stricken with a serious illness. The thesis presents detailed evidence to show that the novel is intended to be a transcript of the dreams of the protagonist, Josef K., and that K. is suffering from tuberculosis, a fact which both gives rise to and shapes his dreams.

The thesis also discusses the special role of art, literature and colour, which have a notable effect on the way the illness manifests itself in the dreams.

In arguing this interpretation the author explodes a number of myths about the novel, not least that the world of Josef K., rather than being dreary and monochrome, is full of beauty and colour.

Barbara McKenzie has recently completed a doctoral thesis on Kafka's *The Trial*, the content of which forms the basis for this work. The author is a graduate of Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, and Lancaster University, England.

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PETER LANG

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English translations of the titles of Munch's works are as provided by the galleries in question.

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Introduction

Der Proceß has been described as the ‘only truly opaque work among the major writings of Kafka’.¹ Certainly a complicating factor in the study of *Der Proceß* is the paucity of ‘givens’, i.e. the lack of underlying assumptions that might serve as a starting point for discussion. The first-time reader finishes the novel with no clear picture of the plot, the nature and role of characters, the dominant themes, the narrative technique and role of the narrator, the genre of the novel or the literary tradition it belongs to. Furthermore, there is still no consensus on these matters amongst experts, more than 80 years after its initial publication in 1925.

This thesis discusses three aspects of *Der Proceß*:

- Firstly, the thesis presents evidence that the novel is constructed as a series of dreams, i.e. it provides the reader with nothing more than the dreams of the protagonist, from which we may deduce at least some part of the protagonist’s waking reality.
- Evidence is then provided to show that the ‘process’ faced by Josef K. in waking life is not a criminal trial but refers to the progression of a serious illness, namely tuberculosis. K.’s illness gives the novel its structure, and at the same time contributes to the fact and form of the dreams.
- The thesis also discusses the special role of art and literature, including the significance of colour for Josef K., which has a notable effect on the way the illness manifests itself in the dreams.

An essential aspect of the thesis lies in confronting the dreamlike character of Kafka’s writing. By treating *Der Proceß* as a series of dreams, and applying knowledge of the characteristics of dreams in a methodical fashion, it is possible to look behind the implied but non-

1 Walter H. Sokel, *Franz Kafka* (New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1966), p. 28.

sensical ‘plot’ of the novel and to consider other options. Discounting an actual trial, but assuming an equivalent bureaucracy, opens up the possibility that the ‘process’ might refer to illness. Once *Der Proceß* is seen as dreams there are clearly logical extrapolations available from consideration of this premise in combination with essential information contained in the novel:

- Josef K. dies in the end, and furthermore he knows in advance that he is going to die. If *Der Proceß* describes a series of dreams, then the already improbable ‘execution’ is even less likely. An accident is discounted, leaving a narrow range of possibilities, the most probable of which are either that the course of the novel is about K. facing up to his death of old age, or that he has been diagnosed with a life-threatening illness.
- If *Der Proceß* describes a series of dreams, and especially if they are anxiety dreams, the bureaucracy that K. deals with would not represent the Court, but another bureaucracy that functions in a similar way to the Court but is suppressed in the dreams. It is probable that this structure, like the law, would also have a role in life and death.

Both these arguments demand consideration of the possibility that Josef K. is suffering from a mortal illness, and detailed analysis of the novel, as presented here, supports such a position.

That the dreamer should be suffering from such an illness would explain why Josef K. undergoes a series of increasingly degrading episodes eventually leading to his death, although he is never actually charged or restrained, and often receives sympathetic though ineffective responses to his plight from other characters. Censorship mechanisms that operate in dreams lead the dreaming Josef K. to disguise his illness as a legal trial. The analysis in the thesis shows a comprehensive and consistent set of symptoms of the illness throughout the novel. It becomes clear that the illness is tuberculosis, which was widespread and a major cause of death at the time (and eventually claimed Kafka himself). The Court largely represents the health system, with its bureaucracy, personnel ranging from information officers to highly qualified experts in the field, and its power over life and

death. This is supported by consideration of the direct speech used in his dreams, which tends to be consistent with a medical or hospital environment.

The study of the motifs present in *Der Proceß* has led, furthermore, to the realisation that the thesis cannot be complete without investigation into another aspect of the novel, i.e. that of art and literature. A study of the techniques used to create Josef K.'s dreams has to include investigation into the explicit allusions to art, mythology, religion and art. Consideration of these motifs has led to the conclusion that the role of literature and art, and particularly colour, is indivisible from the facts surrounding K.'s illness. It transpires that it is not possible to separate the evidence for the symbolism and for disease, as the two are interdependent, one drawing upon the other. Josef K.'s symbolism is derived from the concepts of religion, mythology and fate, as portrayed in art and literature. However his experience of art and literature combines with the symptoms of his illness, to create a unique and idiosyncratic symbolism.

I am not the first critic to acknowledge the dreamlike characteristics of Kafka's writing. Confronting the dreamlike nature of the work rationally, however, has led to the development of an interpretation, i.e. that the process is a medical one, that is more complete, more convincingly explanatory and more satisfying than any previously argued interpretation. At the same time, the research has revealed a dimension never before suspected – Josef K.'s world, previously seen as both dreary and threatening, is full of beauty and colour.

Explanatory Notes

- The edition of the novel that is principally referred to is what is often considered to be the 'critical edition', i.e. the Fischer edition edited by Malcolm Pasley (*Der Proceß*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1990). There are also references to the Vitalis edition (*Der Prozeß*, Prague: Vitalis, 1998), which contains a fragment not in-

cluded in the Fischer ('Als sie aus ...'), and also shows Kafka's amendments.

- When translating terms such as 'Wächter', the translation provided by Willa and Edwin Muir (*The Trial*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1925) has been largely favoured. There are one or two exceptions: I have tried to keep the translations uniform, so that 'Diener' is always translated as 'Attendant', and 'Merchant Block' is preferred to 'Salesman Block'.
- In order to assist the reader, line numbers have been provided along with the page numbers, in the form 9/05, the first number referring to the page. Where there follows a second reference to the same page, it will be in the form /06, i.e. referring only to the line number.
- All italics apart from where normally demanded by convention, e.g. book titles, are an addition of the author, unless otherwise indicated.
- The Roman names for figures from classical mythology have been preferred over the Greek, only because these tend to be the names applied by Western European artists to their works. Thus Diana is referred to rather than Artemis, and Mercury instead of Hermes.

Part I
Der Proceß as Dreams

Chapter 1: Background to the Narrative Structure

A dreamer will construct a kind of narrative, and assume that he is experiencing an empirical reality, as he has nothing else to compare it with, being detached as he is from the external world.¹ Likewise, and for similar reasons, the reader of *Der Proceß* assumes that the novel is concerned with an empirical reality, implying a sensible narrative, with real characters, and real locations, and behaviour that is meaningful in the real world. There is just sufficient sense in the narrative for the reader to give credence to it, ignoring certain discordances in expression, minor improbabilities and examples of incoherence. However just as the dreamer will waken if the events in the dream become just too incredible,² the weight of improbability, irrational behaviour and incoherence in the novel, not just in the course of one chapter but over several, eventually becomes too much to bear. At this point the reader needs to stop seeing the narrative as being 'realistic' in the sense of describing experiences in a recognisable external world, and contemplate other options, to consider whether the novel is in fact a realistic description, whether it could be described as 'dreamlike', or an allegory, a parable or a metaphor, or whether, perhaps more prosaically, it is simply the description of a series of dreams.

There is a strong case for treating *Der Proceß* as a narrative constructed in the form of dreams. The principal evidence for this view lies in the following:

-
- 1 'Wir schenken den Traumbildern den Realitätsglauben, weil wir im Schläfe keine anderen Eindrücke zum Vergleiche haben, weil wir von der Außenwelt abgelöst sind', Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* ([Vienna]: G.B. Fischer, 1961), p. 36 (presenting the views of Delboeuf).
 - 2 'Welche lächerlichen Widersprüche kann [der Träumer] in den Ordnungen der Natur und der Geschellschaft vertragen, bevor ihm, wie man sagt, die Sache zu bunt wird, und die Überspannung des Unsinnnes das Erwachen herbeiführt!', Freud, p. 39, quoting F. W. Hildebrandt, *Der Traum und seine Verwertung fürs Leben* (Leipzig, 1875), p. 45.

- the style of writing, which suggests that the author is endeavouring to describe dreams rather than a waking reality;
- the fact that there is discernable an underlying reality, which is both projected and camouflaged by the ‘trial’ scenario in a way that is consistent with dream censorship mechanisms, i.e. there is evidence that Josef K.’s ‘Proceß’ is a medical one.

An analysis of the textual evidence of a dream narrative structure is presented below in Chapter 2. This evidence is strongly supported by external factors:

- the demonstration in Kafka’s diaries of a pronounced interest in dreams, and writing in the form of dreams;
- the interest of many of Kafka’s favourite writers in describing dreams in their work;
- the chronological proximity of Sigmund Freud’s seminal work on dreams, *Die Traumdeutung*, published at the turn of last century, and the resulting influence on Kafka’s contemporaries.

In the decade or so before Kafka wrote *Der Proceß*, Sigmund Freud was developing his theories about dreams and how they provided insight into the subconscious. It is hardly surprising that K. and his friends, with their interest in new ideas, and their attendance at all kinds of lectures, should be aware of Freud’s thinking. Certainly Kafka was familiar with Freud in some form, as his diaries and letters reveal.³ At the turn of the century Freud published *Die Traumdeutung*, with a second edition in 1911. Although Brod does not refer to Freud as an influence in his biography and there is only one reference to Freud in the *Tagebücher*, that one reference is telling: ‘Gedanken an Freud natürlich’.⁴ This could be seen merely as a reference to Freud’s work on sexuality (Kafka told Brod that when he wrote of the stream

3 In a letter to Felix Weltsch in 1917, for example, Kafka mentions Wilhelm Stekel, who ‘aus Freud kleine Münze macht’ (*Die Briefe* (Frankfurt a. M.: Zweitausendeins, 2005), p. 149); in another letter, in April 1918, he refers to Freud’s sceptical comment that Jesus was always healthy (*Briefe*, p. 206).

4 *Tagebücher*, p. 355 (23/09/12).

of traffic in *Das Urteil* he visualised ‘eine starke Ejakulation’⁵). However the evidence presented below suggests that Kafka was not simply familiar with Freud’s ideas on dreams but had studied *Die Traumdeutung* in depth.

William Dodd has declared as ‘indisputable’ the view that Kafka’s work is in some way dreamlike, and certainly a large number of other critics share this view.⁶ Critics such as Sokel, Bridgwater, Timms, Marson and Leopold have gone further and concluded that Kafka used *Die Traumdeutung* as a textbook, while falling short of applying this conclusion in a methodical fashion. The reasons for this latter view lie in the peculiar nature of the text, which is consistent with a dream narrative as described by Freud and his sources. The dream characteristics discussed in *Die Traumdeutung* (summarised below) have all been noted in Kafka’s work, including *Der Proceß*, by various critics, though not necessarily attributing them to the author’s goal of a consciously dreamlike narration.

Aside from the internal evidence, there is substantial evidence of Kafka’s interest in dreams and their characteristics. In his diaries he described many dreams, in more than a dozen different entries, between 1911 until his work on *Der Proceß* in 1914.⁷ Since Kafka’s diaries were intended as a vehicle for literary endeavour as much as a record of personal experience,⁸ it is significant that on the first page

5 Max Brod, *Über Frank Kafka* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1980), p. 114.

6 ‘At one extreme, we might see the events of the novel in terms of a private nightmare – and the indisputable dreamlike quality of Kafka’s writing can be invoked in support of this thesis.’ William J. Dodd, *Kafka: Der Proceß* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1991), p. 20.

7 The first reference to dreams in Kafka’s diaries occurs very early on, on the first page in the published editions (*Tagebücher: 1909-1923* (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 1997), p.7), i.e. early 1910. There are seven obvious dream accounts (i.e. stated as such) or references to dreams in late 1911 (pp. 38, 53, 156 (three separate dreams)), 182,193, 197 and 217), one or two in 1912 (pp. 323 and 336) and another spate in the second half of 1913, (e.g. pp. 436, 456, 458, 460, 469 and 475), and one example in 1914 (p. 258).

8 Hayman explains ‘Kafka used his diaries both to record events or impressions and to sketch out fictions or description’ (Ronald Hayman, *K: a Biography of Kafka* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), p 83). Certainly the reason for Max Brod’s promotion of the idea of a diary was to encourage Kafka to write.

there is what appears to be a fictional dream, as Kafka tries out several variations on the same theme. ‘Nothing but Kafka’s dreams seem to interest him anymore,’ Brod had written in a 1911 diary⁹ – which could mean that Kafka was entirely self-obsessed, but alternatively could mean that Kafka was absorbed in carrying out psychological research in preparation for his literary work.

The dream descriptions in *Die Tagebücher*, whether fictional or actually dreamt by Kafka, often contain features that are described in *Die Traumdeutung* and/or are present in *Der Proceß*: odd scenarios, scenes taking a dramatic turn at the end, delayed realisation particularly of people’s presence, shifting context, jumping from one situation to another without knowing how it happened, unexplained and apparently unjustified fear, trivia. The characteristic lack of history or context of dreams is exemplified by the dream of 10 August 1917, which opens with ‘Ich stand mit meinem Vater in einem Hausflur’, thus there is uncertainty about which house features in the dream.¹⁰ Another description begins, ‘Ich wußte zuerst nicht eigentlich wo ich war’,¹¹ but after standing up he could see the sea, and then ‘Rechts sah man Newyork’ – delayed recognition of this type is a common experience for Josef K. The non-sequiturs and contradictions ubiquitous in *Der Proceß* (and discussed in the next chapter) appear to have been practised in the dream descriptions in the diaries, e.g. ‘Ich mußte ein wenig lächeln und um es zu verdecken schaute ich angestrengt ins Haus heran’,¹² or “‘Schlagt mich nicht!’ Sagt [...] der Student and trat einen Schritt zurück.’¹³

The dream that features this last example contains several motifs and ideas that appear in *Der Proceß*, including the student, the merchant (here named Messner), incessant knocking (c.f. the excerpt ‘Dann Fräulein Bürstner’) and a reference to the landlady. Messner is

Hayman reports that in 1911, when Kafka’s diary had lapsed, ‘to prod Kafka into writing, Max Brod proposed a competitive exercise: they should both keep diaries, describing both events and their feelings towards each other’ (p. 97).

9 Hayman, p.1.

10 *Tagebücher*, p. 640.

11 *Tagebücher*, p. 336.

12 *Tagebücher*, p. 88.

13 *Tagebücher*, p. 463.

also referred to in another ‘dream’ described a few weeks later. There are several other references to students at the end of 1913 and in early 1914, e.g. ‘[...] Der Student hatte gänzlich die Lust verloren, noch weiter zu arbeiten. [...] Er schloß Bücher und Hefte, ordnete alles auf seinem kleinen Tisch [...]’, evocative of the scene in ‘Verhaftung’ where the Overseer rearranges items on the bedside table.¹⁴ The Student himself does not appear in ‘Verhaftung’ but there are several other motifs from that chapter that appear in this dream, such as the window, coffee, the kitchen, doors, and the moon, this last having an implicit presence, while not directly referred to in ‘Verhaftung’ (see Chapter 5 below). There is a further short passage written on 15 March, i.e. a few days later, referring to ‘dem Studenten’ and also to a young man carrying a candle (‘da trat schon mit einer [...] brennenden Kerze ein junger Mann ein’),¹⁵ candles being another motif of the novel. It is possible that these writings were part of Kafka’s preparation for *Der Proceß*.

Some of Kafka’s dream descriptions are quite short, but one or two are long and detailed. That of 19 November 1911 is more than three pages, and is almost certainly fictional. The setting is ‘im Theater’ and again there are many ideas that can be found in *Die Traumdeutung* and/or in *Der Proceß*. The dreamer first thinks he is sitting in the front row, then finds that he is in the second (‘Ich sitze ganz vorn in einer Bank, glaube in der ersten zu sitzen, bis sich schließlich zeigt, daß es die zweite ist’¹⁶). The back of the seat faces the stage, so he is turned towards the auditorium, and must twist around to see the stage (‘Die Rückenlehne der Bank ist der Bühne zugekehrt, so daß man den Zuschauerraum bequem, die Bühne erst nach einer Drehung sehen kann’), contributing to a feeling of strangeness and uncertainty that is a key element in dreams. There is something oppressive about the way the audience fill their seats almost to overflowing (‘Rings um mich herum ist ein großes Gedränge, alles scheint in seinen Winterkleidern gekommen zu sein und füllt daher die Plätze übermäßig aus’).¹⁷ In the

14 *Tagebücher*, p. 350 (15 October 1913, or thereabouts).

15 *Tagebücher*, p. 394.

16 *Tagebücher*, p. 193.

17 *Tagebücher*, pp. 193-4.

audience is someone that he knows to be a woman, though she has a masculine face and is dressed in man's clothing ('da die Frau ein dunkelgelbes, männliches, langnasiges Gesicht hat und überdies, soweit man im Gedränge, aus dem ihr Kopf ragt, sehen kann, Männerkleidung trägt').¹⁸ (The discrepancies between what Josef K. knows and what he should know are discussed extensively below). The consciousness of what appears to be trivia, which is characteristic of dreams, is apparent in the dream in descriptions such as: 'Einen kleinen zehn- bis fünfzehnjährigen Jungen sehe ich jedoch auf der Bühne besonders klar. Er hat trockenes, gescheiteltes, gerade geschnittenes Haar'.¹⁹

Given the similarity in style of Kafka's major works, then if *Der Proceß* is constructed as a description of dreams it is probable that this would apply to other works. In the diary entry that deals with *Das Urteil*, Kafka endeavours to set down the associations he sees in the elements of the story – 'Anlässlich der Korrektur des 'Urteils' schreibe ich alle Beziehungen auf, die mir in der Geschichte klar geworden sind, soweit ich sie gegenwärtig habe'.²⁰ In his explanation of the symbolism and wordplays pertaining to Georg's dream, Kafka's analysis might almost have been drafted by Freud himself.

Freud was in the air, and his presence made itself felt in the literature of the time. John Frank asked in 1955 'how does it come about that many modern writers, like Hermann Hesse and Robert Musil, intersperse dreams in their work?'.²¹ Certainly dreams are significant in both Hesse and Musil. There are references to dreams in many of Musil's works, e.g. Thomas's dream in *Die Schwärmer* of being in a cupboard with Regina, and the dreams of both protagonists in 'Tonka'. Hermann Hesse wrote a number of fairy stories (*Märchen*), some of which have the word dream in the title.²² Dreams also feature

18 *Tagebücher* p. 194.

19 *Tagebücher*, p. 195.

20 *Tagebücher*, p. 379.

21 John G. Frank, 'Hans Carossa: Dreams on Politics' in *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No 4. (Nov. 1955), 263-269, p. 268.

22 Amongst Hesse's first collection of Märchen were *Flötenraum* and *Eine Traumfolge*. He subsequently published *Traumfährte: neue Erzählungen und*

in his novels – Harry Haller’s dream of Goethe in *Der Steppenwolf* takes up six pages.²³ With regard to Thomas Mann, Freud is an unquestionable force. Mann makes his admiration of Freud clear in a lecture given at a celebration of Freud on the occasion of his eightieth birthday,²⁴ and Freud is the likely inspiration for the detailed descriptions of Hans’s dreams in *Der Zauberberg*, especially given that in the same novel there are references to psychoanalysis in the person of the sanatorium’s house psychoanalyst.²⁵

Although Freud was such an influence on early 20th century thought, it would be a mistake to assume that he was Kafka’s only inspiration for writing in the form of dreams. Even before Freud published *Die Traumdeutung*, dreams played an important part in nineteenth century writing, including works by some of Kafka’s favourite authors and dramatists, the dreams often being life-changing for the characters involved. Kafka regularly went to the theatre and will have had intimate knowledge of the works of playwrights such as Ibsen, Strindberg and Grillparzer. For all three of these authors, dreams were crucial. Strindberg wrote plays that are termed dreamplays, including one entitled *A Dream Play* (1901). Strindberg had apparently studied Edgar Allen Poe’s treatment of dreams and was also impressed by Kipling’s story *In the Land of Dreams*, in which two people have the

Märchen (these are all in Hermann Hesse, *Gesammelte Werke* 6, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1970).

- 23 Hermann Hesse, *Der Steppenwolf* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2001), pp. 123-129.
- 24 First published as Thomas Mann, *Freud und die Zukunft* (Bermann-Fischer: Vienna, 1936). Mann refers to Freud as a ‘großer Forscher’ (in the opening sentence, p. 3), a ‘genialer Forscher’, (p. 9), ‘Der Psycholog des Unbewußten’ (p. 16), ‘der Erkennende und Traumdeuter’ (p. 9) and points to his ‘Wahrheitsliebe’, and to ‘sein Wahrheitsstolz, sein Begriff selbst von Ehrlichkeit und intellektueller Reinlichkeit, sein Wissensmut und seine Wissensmelancholie, sein Selbstkennertum, Selbsthenkertum [...]’ (p. 12).
- 25 Hans’ dream in the chapter ‘Schnee’ lasted several pages (Thomas Mann, *Der Zauberberg* ([Stockholm]: S. Fischer, 1954), pp. 668-674). Krakowski, the director’s assistant, ‘treibt nämlich Seelenzergliederung mit dem Patienten’ (p. 16). There is a section of Chapter 4 named ‘Analyse’ in which ‘Dr. Krakowski am Schlusse seines Vortrag große Propaganda für die Seelenzergliederung machte’ (p. 185).

same dream in which they meet. (Like Kafka, Strindberg wrote up his own dreams in his diaries.) In Grillparzer's *Der Traum, ein Leben* (1834), almost three acts of the play consist of the hero's dreaming, which reveals his ambitions. The third act of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (1867) is a dreamplay according to Michael Meyer.²⁶ Dreams are an essential part of all Dostoevsky's major works, with the dreams of Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov being a significant aspect of *Crime and Punishment*. Dreams occur in several works by both Flaubert (e.g. *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, where the protagonist falls into a hallucinatory state or dream, and *St. Julian*) and Kleist (e.g. *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*). The Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun described the dreams of the protagonist of at least one of his novels, *Pan* (1894). (Kafka is known to have owned several of Hamsun's novels at his death.)²⁷

The circumstantial evidence – Kafka's interest in carefully writing up dreams in his diaries, his acknowledgment of Freud (albeit fleetingly), the general historical literary background, with its move towards psychological realism, Kafka's own taste for writers concerned with psychological realism, and the presence of dreams in the work of these writers – coupled with the evidence within the text that the narrative structure is based on dreams constitutes overwhelming evidence that Kafka intended to write *Der Proceß* and other works in the form of dreams. There is another factor which supports this view, discussed in Part II: there is discernable in *Der Proceß* an underlying reality, which at the same time provides a reason for the protagonist, Josef K., to dream in the way he does, i.e. his medical condition.

26 Strindberg, *A Dream Play*, adapted by Ingmar Bergman; introduced and translated by Michael Meyer (London: Secker and Warburg, 1973), xiii.

27 Seven works by Hamsun are listed on the web page of *Franz Kafka's Library*, <http://www.pitt.edu/~kafka/k_s_bibII.html> [accessed 8 Jan. 2010]. Stated source for the list is: Born, Jürgen. *Kafkas Bibliothek. Ein beschreibendes Verzeichnis*. Mit einem Index aller in Kafkas Schriften erwähnten Bücher, Zeitschriften und Zeitschriftenbeiträge. Zusammengestellt unter Mitarbeit von Michael Antreter, Waltraud John und Jon Shepherd (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 1990).

Freud on Dreams

Clearly there has been a need to augment my own limited knowledge of dreaming through study of a work of serious research. For a textbook on dreaming this thesis relies on the findings of Sigmund Freud. The reasons for choosing Freud as an authority are obvious: *Die Traumdeutung* is a seminal work published fourteen years before Kafka commenced writing *Der Proceß*, enjoying enormous publicity, and Kafka is known to have had some acquaintance with Freud. While there are several critics who assume a narrative style based on *Die Traumdeutung*, no authority on dreams other than Freud has been mooted as an influence or guide (see Appendix). It is possible that Kafka was familiar with other works on dreaming, perhaps some of those listed in Freud's bibliography, but there is no concrete evidence of this (it is somewhat disappointing that while Kafka discusses or refers to psychology several times in the 'Oktavhefte', complaining at one point that he is suffering from 'Übelkeit nach zuviel Psychologie', he does not mention any specific authority that he might have been studying).²⁸

Main Points of Die Traumdeutung

According to Freud, the purpose of dreaming is to enable the dreamer to continue sleeping,²⁹ by fulfilling in the dream wishes that intrude into his or her subconscious when sleep is disturbed.³⁰ Dreams, therefore, always contain some kind of wish fulfilment. The wish may be disguised, e.g. in Freud's example of a child, on an imposed milk diet, who dreams of a big roast dinner that is eaten up, although by whom he does not know.³¹

28 'Die Acht Oktavhefte' appeared in *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande: und andere Prosa aus dem Nachlaß* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, [1953?]), 55-161, p. 153.

29 'Der Traum ist der Wächter des Schlafes, nicht sein Störer', Freud, p. 161.

30 'Nach vollendeter Deutungsarbeit läßt sich der Traum als eine Wunscherfüllung erkennen', Freud, p. 84.

31 P. 185. As Freud points out, hungry children often dream of eating, but because in this case the child was not allowed food, he camouflaged his wish fulfilment

The instigation to a dream is always to be found in the events of the day preceding the dream.³² Dreams can select their material from any part of the dreamer's life, provided only that there is a train of thought linking the experience of the dream-day with the earlier ones.³³

Dreaming is a purely mental activity.³⁴ However, it differs from the way we think while awake, since waking thought processes are in concepts but we dream mainly in images, particularly visual images, i.e. ideas behave more like perceptions than like mnemonic representations.³⁵ Elements of dreams can also occur as thoughts and ideas, but probably in the form of speech residues.³⁶ Dreams hallucinate – they replace thoughts by hallucinations.³⁷ The dream images are involuntary, as images accompanying sleep only occur if authority of self is reduced.³⁸ Dreams create a situation out of these images, representing an event which is actually happening; as Spitta puts it they *dramatise*

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- by concealing the identity of the person who ate the roast. ('Der Traum ist die verkleidete Erfüllung eines (unterdrückten, verdrängten) Wunsches', p.111.)
- 32 '[...] die Anregung zu einem Traum [liegt] jedesmal in den Erlebnissen des letzten Tages', Freud, p. 102.
- 33 'Der Traum kann sein Material aus jeder Zeit des Lebens wählen, wofern nur von den Erlebnissen des Traumtages (den "rezenten" Eindrücken) zu diesen früheren ein Gedankenfaden reicht', Freud p. 117.
- 34 'Wir gehen in der wissenschaftlichen Betrachtung des Traumes von der Annahme aus, daß der Traum ein Ergebnis unserer eigenen Seelentätigkeit ist', Freud, p. 33.
- 35 'Das Charakteristische des wachen Zustandes ist nach Schleiermacher [...], daß die Denktätigkeit in Begriffen und nicht in Bildern vor sich geht. Nun denkt der Traum hauptsächlich in Bildern [...]', p. 34 (Freud's reference is to Fr. Schleiermacher, *Psychologie*, Berlin: L. George, 1862, p. 351). 'Charakteristisch für den Traum sind [...] nur jene Inhaltselemente, welche sich wie Bilder verhalten, d.h. den Wahrnehmungen ähnlicher sind als den Erinnerungsvorstellungen', Freud, p. 35.
- 36 'Vieles wird auch im Traum einfach gedacht oder vorgestellt (wahrscheinlich also durch Wortvorstellungsreste vertreten)', Freud, p. 35.
- 37 'der Traum halluziniert [...], [...] er [ersetzt] Gedanken durch Halluzinationen', Freud, p.35.
- 38 '[...] der Schlaf ist ein Aufhebung der Eigenmächtigkeit. [...] Die Schlumberbilder werden durch den Nachlaß der Eigenmächtigkeit bedingt', Burdach, quoted in Freud, p. 35 (reference is to Burdach, *Die Psychologie als Erfahrungswissenschaft*, 3. BD, 1830, p. 476).

an idea.³⁹ Furthermore the dreamer sees these images as real: the images are assigned to an external space and we are in the same relation to images and perceptions as in waking.⁴⁰ While dreaming we take the dream as real, owing to our mental habit of assuming the existence of an external world with which we contrast our own ego.⁴¹ In dreams the subjective activity of our minds appears in an objective form, for our perceptive faculties regard the products of our imaginations as though they were sense impressions.⁴²

Powers of association are very strong in dreams,⁴³ and memory too, with access to memories otherwise seemingly forgotten.⁴⁴ Because the images are involuntary, will and rationality are weak,⁴⁵ as are emotional

39 'Aus diesen Bildern gestaltet der Traum eine Situation, er stellt etwas als gegenwärtig dar, er dramatisiert eine Idee, wie *Spitta* [...] sich ausdrückt', Freud, p. 35 (italics are Freud's; reference is to W. Spitta, *Die Schlaf- und Traumzustände der menschlichen Seele*. 2. Aufl. Freiburg i. B., 1892, p. 145).

40 '[...] kommt im Traum ein Raumbewußtsein hinzu, indem, wie im Wachen, Empfindungen und Bilder in einen äußeren Rahmen versetzt werden (S. 36). Man muß also zugestehen, daß sich die Seele im Traume ihren Bildern und Wahrnehmungen gegenüber in derselben Lage befindet, wie im Wachen (S.43)', L. Strümpell, *Die Natur und Entstehung der Träume*, (Leipzig, 1887, quoted in Freud, p. 36).

41 'Während des Schlafes habe ich die Traumbilder für wahr gehalten infolge der nicht einzuschläfernden Denkgewohnheit, ein Außenwelt anzunehmen, zu der ich mein Ich in Gegensatz bringe', Freud, p. 36.

42 'Zu den wesentlichen Merkmalen des Traumes gehört a) daß die subjektive Tätigkeit unserer Seele als objektiv erscheint, indem das Wahrnehmungsvermögen die Produkte der Phantasie so auffaßt, als ob es sinnliche Rührungen wären' (Freud, p. 35, quoting from Burdach, p. 476).

43 'Die Assoziationsgesetze, nach denen sich die Vorstellungen verknüpfen, gelten auch für die Traumbilder, ja ihre Herrschaft kommt im Traume reiner und stärker zum Ausdruck', Freud, p. 41.

44 'Daß der Traum über Erinnerungen verfügt, welche dem Wachen unzugänglich sind, ist eine so merkwürdige und theoretisch bedeutsame Tatsache', Freud, p.9.

45 'Die Unfähigkeit zu solcher Vorstellungsarbeit, die wir als absichtlich gewollte empfinden, und das mit dieser Zerstreung regelmäßig verknüpfte Hervortreten von Bildern, dies sind zwei Charaktere, die dem Traum verbleiben', p. 34. Volkelt writes of the 'Auflockerung, Lösung und Durcheinandermischung des im Wachen durch die logische Gewalt des zentralen Ich zusammengehaltenen Vorstellungslebens' (Freud, p. 39, from J. Volkelt, *Die Traum-Phantasie*, Stuttgart, 1875, p. 14).

responses, although the dreamer is capable of strong emotion.⁴⁶ Emotions can also be represented in dreams by the opposite emotion.⁴⁷ The content of dreams comes from the waking life of the dreamer, but the dream images are cut off from what is termed their ‘psychic value’, i.e. the significance normally attached to them in waking life.⁴⁸

Freud assumes two psychical agencies at work in the dream, one of which constructs the wish expressed by the dream, with the other exercising censorship upon the dream wish. The censorship modifies what is disagreeable or unacceptable and therefore likely to interfere with the purpose of the dream, which is to keep the dreamer from waking.⁴⁹ The effect of this is to bring about distortion in the expression of the wish.⁵⁰ Dreams often contain something which is distressing to the second agency, but which at the same time fulfils a wish on the part of the first agency.⁵¹

As a result of the special nature of the mental process of dreaming, dreams tend to be marked by certain characteristics. There is a sense of alienation emanating from the fact of objects and people being dissociated from their significance. Furthermore, because in dreams we lose the power to give intentional guidance to the sequence

46 ‘Der Traum ist im allgemeinen affektärmer als das psychische Material, aus dessen Bearbeitungen er hervorgangen ist [...] durch den Traum wird eine Unterdrückung der Affekte zustande gebracht’, Freud, p. 318.

47 ‘Die Traumarbeit [...] kann [Affekte] in ihr Gegenteil verkehren’, Freud, p. 321.

48 ‘Diese Entblößung der Bilder von ihrem psychischen Wert, die selbst wiederum auf die Abwendung von der Außenwelt zurückgeführt wird, soll nach *Strümpell* einen Hauptanteil an dem Eindruck der Fremdartigkeiten haben, mit dem sich der Traum in unserer Erinnerung dem Leben gegenüberstellt’, Freud, p. 38 (*italics* are Freud’s).

49 ‘Das Peinliche soll im Traum nicht dargestellt werden’, Freud, p. 321.

50 ‘Wir dürfen also als die Urheber der Traumgestaltung zwei psychische Mächte (Strömungen, Systeme) im Einzelmenschen annehmen, von denen die eine den durch den Traum zum Ausdruck gebrachten Wunsch bildet, während die andere eine Zensur an diesem Traumwunsch übt und durch diese Zensur eine Entstellung seiner Äußerung erzwingt’, Freud, p. 100.

51 ‘[...] die peinlichen Träume enthalten tatsächlich etwas, was der zweiten Instanz peinlich ist, was aber gleichzeitig einen Wunsch der ersten Instanz erfüllt’, Freud, p. 101.

of our ideas,⁵² dreams are disjointed and incoherent, inconsistent, irrational or absurd, and lacking in the moral sense we have when awake.⁵³ Freud describes dreams as ‘absolut egoistisch’.⁵⁴ Because all elements in the dream are significant,⁵⁵ dreams are very condensed.⁵⁶

There are two other general points that need to be kept in view when considering *Der Proceß*. Firstly, words spoken in a dream are based on words that the dreamer has heard in waking life.⁵⁷ Secondly, two or more dreams from the same night can be considered as a whole, i.e. they have a related meaning.⁵⁸

Anxiety Dreams

Of particular significance in the context of *Der Proceß* is the role of anxiety dreams, as I will be arguing that the novel can be seen as a series of dreams of this nature. Freud refers to anxiety dreams as a special

52 ‘Wir haben gehört, daß schon das Einschlafen den Verzicht auf eine der seelischen Tätigkeiten, nämlich auf die willkürliche Leitung des Vorstellungsablaufs, mit sich bringt’, Freud, p. 38.

53 ‘Der Traum ist unzusammenhängend, vereinigt ohne Anstoß die ärgsten Widersprüche, läßt Unmöglichkeiten zu, läßt unser bei Tag einflußreiches Wissen beiseite, zeigt uns ethisch und moralisch stumpfsinnig’, p. 38, also chapter VI G., ‘Absurde Traume’. Freud quotes Hildebrandt as saying ‘Welche Widersprüche kann [der Träumer] in den Ordnungen der Natur und der Gesellschaft vertragen [...]!’, Freud, p. 39 (Freud’s reference is F.W. Hildebrandt, *Der Traum und seine Verwertung fürs Leben*, Leipzig, 1875, p. 45).

54 Freud, p. 221.

55 ‘Der Traum gibt sich nie mit Kleinigkeiten ab; um Geringes lassen wir uns im Schlaf nicht stören’, Freud, p. 127.

56 Freud, pp. 192-209.

57 ‘Wo etwas im Traum den Charakter einer Rede hat, also gesagt oder gehört wird, nicht bloß gedacht – was sich meist sicher unterscheiden läßt –, das stammt von Reden des wachen Lebens her, die freilich als Rohmaterial behandelt, zerstückelt, leise verändert, vor allem aber aus dem Zusammenhange gerissen worden sind’, Freud, p. 127.

58 ‘Alle Träume derselben Nacht gehören ihrem Inhalt nach zu dem nämlichen Ganzen’, Freud, p. 229.

sub-species of dreams.⁵⁹ Anxiety dreams only occur if the censorship has been wholly or partly overpowered; the overpowering is facilitated if anxiety is produced by somatic sources.⁶⁰ One situation where the feeling of anxiety might be determined somatically is where there happens to be difficulty in breathing, owing to disease of the lungs or heart.⁶¹ This will prove of particular relevance to the novel in question.

The anxiety felt in the dream stems from a source other than the idea accompanying it in the dream.⁶² The essence of the dream need not be represented in the dream at all.⁶³ Alternatively, important elements may be replaced in the dream with elements of low intrinsic importance.⁶⁴ Dream elements commonly associated with anxiety include the sensation of inhibited movement,⁶⁵ or being threatened with knives, daggers or lances.⁶⁶ Distressing moods during sleep become a motive force for the dream, which the dream is supposed to

59 '[...] die Angstträume als besondere Unterart der Träume mit peinlichem Inhalt', Freud, p. 111.

60 'Ebenso kommt der Angsttraum nur zustande, wenn die Zensur ganz oder teilweise überwältigt wird, und andererseits erleichtert es die Überwältigung der Zensur, wenn Angst als aktuelle Sensation aus somatischen Quellen bereits gegeben ist', Freud, p. 184.

61 '[n einigen Angstträumen] ist die Angstepfindung somatisch gegeben (etwa bei Lungen- und Herzkranken bei zufälliger Atembehinderung)', Freud, p. 163.

62 'Die Angst, die wir im Traume empfinden, ist nur scheinbar durch den Inhalt des Traumes erklärt', p. 112.

63 'Was in den Traumgedanken offenbar der wesentliche Inhalt ist, braucht im Traum gar nicht vertreten zu sein', Freud, p. 210.

64 'Bei der Traumbildung können diese wesentlichen [...] Elemente nun so behandelt werden, als ob sie minderwertig wären, und an ihre Stelle treten im Traum andere Elemente, die in den Traumgedanken sicherlich minderwertig waren', Freud, p. 211.

65 'Was bedeutet die so häufig im Traum erscheinende Sensation der gehemmten Bewegung, die so nahe an Angst streift?' Freud, p. 230.

66 '[Träume] von Bedrohung mit Messern, Dolchen, Lanzen, die beide letztere [sic] für den manifesten Trauminhalt von Angstleidenden charakterisch sind', Freud, p. 271.

fulfil.⁶⁷ However in anxiety dreams the sleeper may react against wish fulfilment and waken in indignation and distress.⁶⁸

67 'Peinliche Stimmungen während des Schlafes werden zu Triebkräften des Traumes, indem sie energische Wünsche wecken, die der Traum erfüllen soll', Freud, p.332.

68 'Oder es kann geschehen, daß das schlafende Ich [...] auf die zustande gekommene Befriedigung des verdrängten Wunsches mit einer heftigen Empörung reagiert und selbst dem Traume unter Angst ein Ende macht', Freud, p. 381.

