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The poet and the criminal: Dreams, neuroscience and a peculiar way of thinking

Abstract
Freud's sometimes startlingly acute and complex descriptions of the two realms of waking and sleeping, and his emerging method of analysing dreams in The Interpretation of Dreams (1900) foreshadowed and dramatised some later findings in neuroscience. Neuroscience in turn presents us now with an opportunity to modify and extend our understanding of the kind of thinking that produced Freud's pioneering turn-of-the-century version of the mind, and perhaps revivify our understanding of creativity. If there is validity in the lateralised description of the brain in neuroscience, does this throw light on the process Freud followed as he grappled with the question of establishing the discipline of psychoanalysis through defining a new method of understanding dreams? This essay surveys research findings on brain lateralisation with the aim of identifying a model of the human self composed of two wills never quite in partnership with each other, distinct in their modes of thinking, and potentially disruptive of each other's way of being, requiring a third position (a between-ness) if we are to function to our potential as human beings. This model is then applied to an understanding of Freud's early unresolved conflict between his then model of dreams (in his 1900 book on dreams) as disguised wish fulfillment and his method of dream interpretation that required the empathic practice of listening with a responsive passivity. The essay surveys briefly the history of difficulty the psychoanalytic profession has manifested in recognising the centrality of dreams and the art of dream interpretation with a view to showing that the kind of knowledge important to the arts, knowledge based in the subtleties of intuition, learned skills and proliferating complexity, have been historically undervalued. Finally this essay will propose that rather than considering the self in terms of conscious, preconscious and unconscious realms, or even according to a neurological model of left brain and right brain thinking, it is more useful, as Freud came to understand, to allow for a creative consciousness to emerge as a constantly negotiated state of between-ness, where poet and scientist might meld, where the linguistic and the chthonic recognise and accommodate each other, as they did eventually for Freud. This amounts to an argument for the centrality of poetry to thinking.
Keywords: dreams, creativity, neuroscience

Caesar had it easier in the world than Napoleon. Caesar was Caesar and Napoleon played
Napoleon – admittedly of all people nobody could have played Napoleon but Napoleon himself.
– Arthur Schnitzler (1927)

Introduction

Last night I dreamed I had stolen an artwork. Later, feeling uneasy about this, I was wrapping the artwork in newspaper. I knew I had made a wrong and weak decision in stealing the artwork, but my opportunistic act could not now be undone. I had a sour feeling, and it was not quite cured by waking up.

Already that dream is more than twelve hours old and it feels as if it happened years ago, and might not be about me as I am now. And yet it seems to have been a meaningful experience. What does the dream mean, though, and what does it mean that it seemed to be so full of meaning, and that meaning faded so quickly? In bewilderment and blindness we peer at our dreams: what might this be telling us about ourselves? In what sense might I be a thief, a disappointment to myself, someone who must hide his mistakes in newspaper wrapping, those sheets of common text? And how did stolen art become part of this? I cannot but sense here what Freud called the work of condensation. Where dreams are meagre and laconic things, the associations we attach to them and the multiplying connections to the way we 'read about ourselves' (to adopt the luminous phrase describing dreams in Craig Raine's poem, 'A Martian Sends a Postcard Home') can threaten to engulf us in page after page of interpretations.

We desire an easier way, some set of symbolic keys that will unlock the code that *must* lie behind dreams. Yet in the face of dreams, we are often bereft of the sensibility their interpretation seems to require. We are, as it were, so many Jeremy Benthams trying to understand what poetry is by stating, 'Prose is where all the lines but the last go on to the margin – poetry is where some of them fall short of it' (Bentham nd: 442): we miss the point, though at the same time we're relieved to be missing the point. Through missing the point we escape a confrontation with what deeply and subtly matters. Dreams can seem to be the unwelcome and distasteful persistence of openness to experience and feelings in what would otherwise be the blessed blankness of the dark.

I mention Jeremy Bentham's gauche observation of poetry, because I will come later to a small virtuoso talk by Freud to a group of fellow psychoanalysts on the possible motivations for writing poetry. The dark art object being wrapped by this essay is in all likelihood poetry.

Freud's sometimes startlingly acute and complex descriptions of the two realms of waking and sleeping foreshadowed some later findings in neuroscience, presenting us now with an opportunity to modify and extend his version of the self, engaging with the possibility of a permeability of consciousness that acknowledges the inherent and strange multiplicity of the human self in a new way. This essay begins with neuroscience, finds its way back to the Freud who was grappling with the writing of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and then pursues what it has uncovered: a peculiar way of thinking. This paper participates (though perhaps strangely) in the recent increasing interest in bringing the findings of neuroscience into contact with philosophical, psychological psychoanalytic versions of the mind [1] in order to uncover empirical evidence for Freud's model of the mind or to suggest avenues for further neuroscience research.

Part One: Two hemispheres, two distinct ways of thinking

There is a continuing and growing body of behavioural and neurological evidence for the claim that none of us is a single, coherent individual [2]. Neuroscience has followed Freud to this conclusion. Neuroscience however, in

turn presents an opportunity for re-conceiving some aspects of the nature of the split or asymmetry within our psyches. Evidence indicates we are constituted by an interaction between two ways of thinking and being, ways that operate relatively separately if given a chance to, as it were, fall out with each other. These two ways of perceiving and understanding the world are, roughly, located in the two hemispheres of the human brain separated by the corpus callosum. Their ways of thinking are apparently entirely different – sometimes complementary and sometimes in opposition. Both hemispheres, however, must contribute to our experience of ourselves and the world if we are to live as fully-human beings. Exactly how this is best managed is a constant challenge. Questions arise over whether at any one time we are making more use of one or the other of these different modes of thinking and perceiving, whether (and how) each mode can cede certain tasks to the other, how these two ways of thinking and being differ, how their differences affect us as whole psychic beings, what it means to experience a single identity when this doubled mode of perception is part of the structure of our brain, and finally whether we can, following Freud, understand and manage the psychology of our inner lives more fruitfully, and perhaps more creatively with this knowledge in mind. I wish to outline enough of the science to throw some light on these questions, with the historic occasion of psychoanalytic dream interpretation as a case study in creatively thinking through the meaning of a phenomenology of being human and being creative.

Our general blindness to the division within our thinking and the fact that there are two near-selves within us has been exposed by knowledge gained over the past sixty years from callosotomies (surgical separation of the two hemispheres of the brain by severing the corpus callosum), observations of brain damaged patients, excitation of the exposed cortexes of epileptic patients, as well as from the Wada procedure which allows each hemisphere to be anaesthetised briefly by injection of sodium amytal into an artery that supplies one or other side of the brain. Even more recently, transcranial Doppler ultrasonography has made it possible to measure localised blood flow in each hemisphere without intrusive medical procedures (Knecht et al 2000a, 2000b). Knecht and colleagues, for instance, have been able to show using this technology that for 95% of right-handers the left side of the brain is activated by language tasks. The non-invasive method of MRI has also shown with precision that the left hemisphere is the normal region of language production (Wang et al 2013; Ota et al 2011; Lux et al 2008).

Split-brain operations were first performed in the 1940s and continue to be practised. This operation relieves the whole-brain chaos of electrical storms for those suffering some forms of epileptic fitting. Once the corpus callosum, the bridge between hemispheres, is severed, it becomes possible to investigate the perceptual ‘world’ of each hemisphere of the brain. Startlingly, these post-operative patients feel no subjective difference in their daily lives. They feel normal and at first appear normal (McGilchrist 2009: 210-12). However, abnormalities become apparent when tasks are unusually demanding. For instance, when an object is shown to the visual field of the left eye (information which is available only to the right brain) these subjects cannot name it, though they do recognise it for they can still grasp a related object with their left hand, which is also controlled by the right hemisphere. The right side of the brain, in most cases, cannot speak, though this hemisphere can perceive and understand and also follow basic instructions. The left hemisphere has language almost to itself and this is where the capacity to speak usually resides. This division of tasks marks one aspect of a remarkable asymmetry between the two hemispheres.

Right hemisphere thinking

It appears that the right hemisphere specialises in the sort of knowledge that requires us to have a feel for it: the kind of knowledge that requires emotional and empathic connection with the world, understanding of broad and complex contexts, recognition of patterns and alterations in these patterns (this includes the skill of recognising faces), remembering visual impressions and scenes, imagistic thinking in general, following and extending networks of association, linking parts with wholes (Blakeslee 1980: 10-12, 117-169; McGilchrist 2009: 133-208). Thomas Blakeslee pictures this kind of knowledge and its communication by describing the education of a dancer thus:

> If you ask any really good dancer how to do a dance, he will naturally reply, 'Like this,' and proceed to show you. (Blakeslee 1980: 23)

This is knowledge that manifests as skill. The contribution that the right hemisphere makes to our consciousness can be gauged, in part, by what is lost to the human self when the right hemisphere is surgically removed. Sometimes due to the presence of a tumour the mature right hemisphere must be removed. When this happens, once again, curiously, the individual reports feeling no loss and no difference to their conscious awareness of themselves. Language abilities usually remain intact. There are, however, severe functional losses, which include an inability to understand metaphor, inflection, or emotional tone. There is a reduction in expressive personality, initiative, insight and imagination. Speech becomes flat and language becomes literal. From observation of these deficits, it appears that the right hemisphere contributes an empathic connection to the world, a connected-up perception that makes for understanding that includes contexts and networks. In short, this right-hemisphere-self is our emotional world, the world of the body-in-the-world. This is not, however, a primitive world. The complexity of nonverbal knowledge carried by the right hemisphere is demonstrated by tests that require mental manipulation of visual images, such as Thurston's hand test, a popular test on the internet for those wishing to explore the abilities of the 'left-hand brain', namely the thinking style of the right hemisphere. The Thurston mental manipulation of imagery is virtually impossible to do or describe verbally. The almost limitless capacity of the right hemisphere to retain visual information was revealed by a project conducted at the University of Rochester in 1970. Subjects were shown 2,560 images over two days, then tested for recognition an hour after the last showing, with a success rate of 85-95% when they were shown pairs of images, one of which they had seen and one which they had not (Haber 1970).

In his detailed study of lateralization in the brain, Iain McGilchrist characterizes the right hemisphere mode of perception as broad, contextual, vigilant attention (McGilchrist 2009: 32-93; see also Blakeslee 1980: 167 for a similar summary). McGilchrist makes the point that research shows the right hemisphere will attempt to incorporate both sides of the body, including both visual fields when the left hemisphere is damaged or out of action. In other words it has an impulse towards holistic perception.

The engagement of the right hemisphere with a visual world, or perhaps more accurately an embodied world, can be gauged by those reports of surgeons who excite neurons on the exposed cortex of subjects under operation. In a short but fascinating monograph the pioneering neuro-surgeon Wilder Penfield reported the results of probes on patients when under operations for epilepsy. When the anterior part of the first temporal convolution of a young man's right cortex was stimulated, the man reported he could see himself at an earlier time in his

life standing at South Bend, Indiana, corner of Jacob and Washington (Penfield 1967: 25). Another woman with a similar area stimulated reported, 'It is winter and the wind is blowing outside and I am waiting for a train' (26). She thought that this was a memory from childhood, but one she had 'forgotten'. Nothing like this occurs when the left temporal lobe is stimulated. The right hemisphere holds apparently fully realized sensual experiences. Penfield describes the reported experiences thus:

> These hallucinations are made up of elements from the individual's past experience. They may seem to him so strange that he calls them dreams but when they can be carefully analyzed it is evident that the hallucination is a shorter or longer sequence of past experience. The subject re-lives a period of the past although he is still aware of the present. Movement goes forward again as it did in that interval of time that has now, by chance, revived and all of the elements of his previous consciousness seem to be there, sights, sounds, interpretations, emotion. The hallucination includes those things that were within the focus of his attention. The things he ignored then are missing now. (Penfield 1967: 23)

This could be an excellent description of our common experience of dreaming – its phenomenological aspect. To further complicate the picture, and to remind us that we are dealing with an organic, not a mechanical system, it is worth noting that the relation between an individual stimulated nerve cell and a particular experience was not fixed, for upon re-stimulating an identical location after a lapse of time a different past experience could be conjured. If one hemisphere of the brain is the neurological site for such hallucinations, this does not, of course, explain dreams in any complete way.

What is missing from this account is the work of language that emerges when we seek the meaning of our dreams, finding there the work of condensation, displacement, metaphor and metonymy. Without this, the images might merely be the firing of nerve cells in one hemisphere, possibly randomly, to produce dream experiences. Though some might argue that this is enough to explain dreams, we do not feel this way about dreams. We feel them to be more like cryptic poems than randomly arranged alphabets. When Freud burrows through the meaning of 'botanical monograph' in his dream of that name, he proceeds by way of associating it with Professor Gärtner (gardener) and his *blooming* wife, to his patient *Flora*, the story of her forgotten flowers, and on to more remote and complex linguistic and imagistic associations of the kind familiar to poets (VI.1: 282). Perhaps one point worth noting here is that nothing properly meaningful ever happens in only one hemisphere of the brain, just as it can never be possible to live a wholly conscious or unconscious life. Meaning only finds its place as an active negotiation.

In those cases where this negotiation breaks down because the left hemisphere has been removed, destroyed or temporarily subdued by drugs or electrical charge, and the right hemisphere must become the guiding consciousness, people show dramatically reduced ability to speak (except for highly charged expletives), though they function easily enough socially and are well oriented in space. They do tend to descend into depression. Depressed patients (with apparently intact brains) in turn show strong activation in the right frontal cortex and right amygdala (Blakeslee 1980: 157-9; Deldin et al 2001; Liao et al 2012) when faced with tasks that require emotional understanding or response.

One significant aspect of asymmetry in roles is that parts of the right hemisphere seem to be crucial to creating a global attention that gives weight to

both left and right perceptual sides. In contrast, the left hemisphere will ignore or 'neglect' the left side of the visual field as well as the left side of the physical body when conditions allow it to be the dominant or sole source of consciousness. McManus reports that in his last years, Charles Dickens suffered a series of strokes in the right hemisphere. One effect of this was that when he read words on shop signs he would see only the right hand end of each word. This 'neglect' following on damage to the right brain could on the one hand indicate that the right brain is essential if attention is to be extended to the left side of objects and words, or it could indicate the determined one-sidedness of the left hemisphere when unchecked (unassisted) by the right hemisphere.

Left hemisphere thinking

The left hemisphere has its own distinct manner of constructing a perceived world. The left hemisphere does not, it would seem, engage with the world but rather finds in itself representations, models, theories, categories and labels that stand-in for the world. Left to itself it lives in a virtual world of well-established truths. Language is central to this, for language, spoken and in text, provides a means of defining and dividing-up the world (see for instance Dehaene 2009: 76-82, 270-77 on the speed and efficiency with which written material is taken up by the left hemisphere). Another way of saying this is that the left brain is most comfortable with what is known. McGilchrist speculates that the left hemisphere's hold on language is an aspect of its tool-using, grasping-the-world approach to perception (27, 55). Hicks and Kinsbourne (1978) have made the point that the speech area of the left hemisphere, Broca's area, is closer to that part of the brain that directs the right hand than to any other brain area that controls other limbs. They have shown that this physical closeness determines a functional relationship. Most tool use occurs with the right hand, most tools are designed for the right hand, and this might in part be a result of the force and quality of 'direction' that language gives to the right hand in preference to any other, more distant limb.

Right hemispherectomy, that is surgical removal of the right brain, leaves a person insisting consciously that they have not changed, when in fact this condition is more disabling than a left hemispherectomy. Though language ability is unaffected, emotion, nuance, creativity and humour fall away, as noted above. Typically the left side of the body (previously controlled and monitored by the right hemisphere) is ignored to the extent that ownership of the left side of the body can be denied. Hatred towards limbs on the left is sometimes expressed. The left side can become paralysed except for gross movements. Orientation in space becomes a source of confusion. Even finding one's way between rooms can become impossible (Hurwitz et al 2011). Putting on a shirt can become a major challenge. These are serious enough problems but in addition the loss of insight, imagination, emotional control and ability to conduct a relationship are humanly crippling (Gardner et al 1955; McManus 2002: 180-192; McGilchrist 2009: 32-94).

Two examples from case studies will help to show the flavour of left hemisphere dominance in perception and understanding. The first records a variant of Capgras Syndrome. Capgras Syndrome is a psychiatric condition often associated with damage to the posterior areas of the right hemisphere where face recognition is centred. Thompson, Silk and Hover reported the case of such a brain-damaged man who was convinced that there were eight duplicates of his wife and four children, each duplicate family living in a separate duplicate city, each of them living with a double of the patient himself (Thompson et al 1980). Each time he discontinued medication or was

discharged from hospital he became convinced he was in a duplicate city with an imposter family, while his duplicate was with his real family in the real city. He knew each family was made up of imposters because they did not 'feel' real to him. When, at one point, he did acknowledge he had found his way back to his real family he still maintained that the duplicate cities with their imposters, including the one who had deserted the real city once he arrived, still existed somewhere. Among many difficulties this man faced we can see that he had trouble joining-up the world across intervals of time, that the complex holistic skill of recognizing faces had become severely limited, and that an absurd, confabulated narrative resolved for him the confusion resulting from his partial perceptions of the world. These are typical modes of thinking for the left hemisphere. Another example, reported by Blakeselee, was provided by a study that followed up patients who had right brain hemispherectomy. Six weeks after the operation one patient was interviewed:

> 'Al, how do you feel?'
> 'With my hands' was the reply without change in voice tone or facial expression. (Blakeselee 1980: 152)

Of course, to speak of a right hemisphere or a left hemisphere perception of the world is to ignore the fact that in a normal brain both hemispheres usually are active at any time. Chris McManus calls them 'two half-brains, designed to work together' (McManus 2002: 183). Again, it is the two parts, mostly inhibiting each other, that produce fully human qualities in thinking.

The logic-based stubbornness of the left hemisphere is compounded by its tendency to develop a positive feedback loop when paying attention to an aspect of the right-hand field. Instead of exhausting a stimulus and moving on from it, patients with right hemisphere damage typically become fixated upon an item in their right visual field to the neglect of all else until they are forcibly moved on. Aspects of this phenomenon go by the term, 'attentional hemi-neglect' and are covered widely in the literature (McGilchrist 2009: 45-6; McManus 2002: 186-92; Kinsbourne 1978: 147-71; Blakeslee 1980: 165-7). McGilchrist refers to this as the 'stickiness' of the left hemisphere's attentional style. Once it grasps hold of something it is reluctant to let go.

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From the above brief discussion of research into brain functioning, what emerges is a single human self that is produced by a constant negotiation between two distinctly different forms of thinking. These operate in an asymmetrical, possibly antagonistic relationship, certainly one that involves mutual inhibition. Overall, there is a tendency for the right brain's participation in thinking and perceiving to remain unremarked by the conscious aspects of self, while the left brain's activities tend to be both highly conscious and resistant to the participation of the right brain. In the second part of this essay I wish to bring into focus the difficulties we encounter even as whole-brain individuals when one manner of thinking begins to claim to itself an exclusive ownership of knowledge. In the years when psychoanalysis emerged as a science and a profession, and indeed as a body of writing, do the above findings in neuroscience help us to understand the kinds of thinking that were at stake and in contention in this process? I focus on the early moments of psychoanalysis at the turn of the twentieth century when Freud produced *The Interpretation of Dreams* and early psychoanalysts pursued its ideas.

Part Two: a peculiar way of thinking

Freud recognised the need for a peculiar and particular way of thinking when attempting to understand dreams. One major difficulty this presented for the then new science of psychoanalysis was that this way of thinking could not be conveyed in an explicit set of instructions. Freud never did produce a clear set of principles for dream interpretation. Whether Freud's new psychology amounted to 'a transferable and teachable method' (Jung 1970 [1905]: 332) was to be an ongoing sore point for Freud and for his followers. Though his brilliant Swiss psychiatric colleague, Carl Jung, held to the scientific validity of Freud's interpretive method, when pressed on its detail he reverted to acknowledgements that Freud's method was after all an art, and a particularly difficult one to learn (1970 [1905]: 332). Jung attempted to explain the difficulty by pointing out that this art required of the therapist mental access to 'a particular way of thinking':

> … there is a particular way of thinking required for psychoanalysis, which aims at bringing symbols to light… Thinking in symbols demands from us a new attitude, similar to starting to think in flights of ideas. These seem to be the reasons why Freud's method has only exceptionally been understood and even more rarely practiced, so that there are actually only a few authors who appreciate Freud, theoretically or practically. (1970 [1905]: 289)

In 1910, in a letter to Freud, Jung reflected upon this elusive way of thinking:

> 'Analogical' or fantasy thinking is emotionally toned, pictorial and wordless, not discourse but an inner-directed rumination on material belonging to the past. Logical thinking is 'verbal thinking'. Analogical thinking is archaic, unconscious, not put into words and hardly formulable in words. (quoted in Kerr 2012: 272)

This description of attunement to inner-directed thinking 'in flights of ideas' resonates with an unusual passage from Freud late in his dream book:

> The dream-thoughts to which we are led by interpretation cannot from the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate network of our world of thought. It is at some point where this meshwork is particularly close that the dream-wish grows up, like a mushroom out of its mycelium. (Vol 5: 525)

Both Freud and Jung were describing ways of thinking (shared by therapist and analysand) not so much concerned with conclusions as with proliferating meanings and associations. Where Jung moved between images of flight and a plunge into an inner past, suggesting both spiritual possibilities and archaic connections, Freud chose images of branching, seeping vegetative growth to describe this way of thinking. Jung's reference to it being 'inner-directed' offered the reader the possibility that this form of thinking might provide direction or insight for the future. Freud's image of the occasional mushrooming of a 'dream-wish' from a generalized 'mycelium' seems laden with bemusement at an almost literally vegetative process that is not directed by insight but by connection. Far from being directed as if by a deeper form of will, this process seems to be blindly biological. As if suddenly aware of the strangeness of his writing in the passage quoted above, and prompted by his admission that at the navel of every dream there is a tangle of unanalyzable

thoughts, Freud re-focused his text by stating, ‘But we must return to the facts…’ (525).

Both Freud and Jung are possibly reaching for descriptions of the experience of thinking-with-the-right-brain, as it has been outlined above. This is experiential knowledge, knowledge that happens between people or within a less apparent self in the experienced time of unfolding situations, not out of a manual and not from abstracted sets of rules.

Freud and Jung were in addition, however, facing the problem of how an intellectually articulated left-brain analysis might interpret and value this kind of thinking.

Reluctance, rigidity, and left-brain ambition for dominance

Given the strangeness of the way of thinking described by Freud and Jung above, its apparent arbitrariness at times, and its seeming dependence upon a special feel for it (frequently early analysts went to Freud to receive instruction from him), one is not surprised that many analysts have not only had difficulty with this peculiar manner of thinking, but that dreams and dream interpretation itself have been repeatedly shifted to the margins of psychoanalysis in practice.

It is worth noting here that this recourse to Freud as the ultimate or charismatic teacher of his method does not invalidate psychoanalysis as a viable or valid method of inquiry. Even in the physical sciences, it can be necessary to develop skills under supervision as a postgraduate student, and take instruction from experienced individuals in the workplace order to achieve the ‘feel’ that becomes practical competency (eg Garfinkel 1999). Freud attempted to pass on the peculiar skill of interpretation to his colleagues through the meetings of the Wednesday Psychological Society, later called the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, which met each week in his rooms from 1902 until his departure from Austria thirty years later under threat from the occupying Nazis.

My argument here is not that the peculiar method of thinking described above depended upon special instruction or charismatic transmission from Freud, but that perhaps the right-brain style of thinking required has become a skill undervalued in education and professional life. There are periodic references in professional literature to the reluctance of psychoanalysts to engage with dream interpretation. By 1970, for instance, after noting the importance Freud placed on dreams, the prominent American psychiatrist Ralph Greenson wrote in the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, ‘A careful reading of the psychoanalytic literature in recent years, however, reveals that a number of psychoanalysts believe either that the dream has declined in clinical importance over the past forty years and is of no special value for psychoanalytic therapy or they use techniques which indicate they had disregarded Freud’s theory and methods of understanding and using dream in clinical practice’ (Greenson 1970: 106). Greenson acknowledged that dream interpretation could not be taught to those ‘blind and deaf to the beauty and wit in the blending of dream formation’ (131).

By 1983, ongoing ambivalence in professional practice regarding dream interpretation had become chronic enough for Alexander Grinstein, Professor of Psychiatry at Wayne State University and a practicing psychoanalyst, to publish a corrective manual, *Freud’s Rules of Dream Interpretation*. In the introduction to his ‘systematic presentation of basic rules’, Grinstein echoed Greenson from a decade earlier, noting that ‘despite the importance of understanding dreams, in well over thirty years of teaching and supervision I have found students and even experienced clinicians are often baffled,

sometimes to the point of panic, whenever dream material is presented by their patients' (Grinstein 1983: ix). Grinstein went on to describe the recommended state of mind of an interpreting analyst listening to a patient's dreams: 'It is essential that the therapist keep his attention suspended, listening passively, and not attempt to concentrate on any particular element or association' (2). His description echoed Freud, Jung, Greenson and others in describing a knowledge based in experience and dependent upon artful skill – requirements that incidentally served to undermine the possibility of a systematic remedial manual.

Writing at the time of the centenary of the publication of Freud's book on dreams, the Swiss analyst Jean-Michel Quinodoz wrote of 'a progressive disaffection with the theoretical study of dreams in psychoanalysis … in the last few decades' including a 'relative dearth of publications on the subject' (Quinodoz 2002: 96).

We could say that this art of interpretation involves reducing the usual activity of the left brain and allowing a more holistic, less articulate, more passive, intuitive part of the self to direct the process until it can be handed back to the left brain for that third way, an articulation that takes on board experiential knowledge (a process Iain McGilchrist repeatedly refers to as 'betweenness').

A few psychoanalysts have continued to press for the centrality of dream interpretation in analysis. Thomas Ogden, for instance, incorporates himself, the analyst, as a 'co-dreamer' with his patient when he writes of a space of reverie, wherein he aims to 'get the drift' of a patient's talk, and thus to respond with his own preconscious waking reverie when he recognizes that a patient has 'genuinely' dreamed (Ogden 2005: 95-6, 106-7). Masud Khan, the flamboyant and later disgraced psychoanalyst, is another who attempted to resurrect the place of dreams and dream-thinking. Khan made a distinction between the 'dream text' (the dream as reported in words) and the dream experience (all that words cannot do justice to, and cannot reproduce or truly evoke). He suggested that this inaccessible aspect of dreaming is nevertheless enriching and healing for individuals who can manage such 'good dreams' (Khan 1983: 45-50).

With notions of good dreams, inaccessible experiential aspects of dreams, and co-dreaming, the treatment of dreams by these few seems on the one hand to resonate with that Freud who understood empathically the vegetal nature of the mind and accepted 'that it is in fact never possible to be sure that a dream has been completely interpreted' (Vol IV: 279) while on the other hand it is a long way from Freud's insistence at the end of his dream book on grounding the dream in its fixed nature as a disguised wish fulfillment – a position that Freud would himself revise and complicate in his 1920 essay, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', downgrading his fixed rule to a description of the wish-fulfilling *tenor* of dreams (Vol 18: 13).

Unable in the early years of the twentieth century to integrate these two approaches Freud continued to hope for a time that a true science would emerge even while he maintained his commitment to an interpretive method that proceeded by an intuitive feel for what was going on: a balance of alertness and passivity, or open-mindedness and opportunism. Freud at this time could write of dream-thoughts mushrooming as a force of nature from their dark nutritious floor, while he also held fast to the idea that no dream could depart from his formula of disguised primal wish fulfillment: an italicized truth established at the end of Chapter II of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and later dreamed as an inscription on a marble tablet placed upon the house where the 'secret' was revealed (Vol IV: 121).

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It was to be these questions of the limits and methods of interpretation upon which schisms and splits would multiply in the nascent psychoanalytic movement. Eugen Bleuler, Alphonse Maederer, Herbert Silberer and Oskar Pfister, Wilhelm Stekel and Alfred Adler would be among those who challenged Freud's severely restricted theoretical frame for dream interpretation (Kerr 2012: 191; Marinelli 2003: 67-87). By 1908 Adler was presenting his universal theory of dreams based upon psychic hermaphroditism. Stekel published his book, *The Language of Dreams* in 1911 at a time when many analysts believed that there might be a stock of typical dream symbols, which analysts could access as a dictionary or manual. Folk tales, myths and works of literature might count as evidence for the endurance and existence of many of these common symbols. Stekel's 'uninhibited, intuitive symbol interpretations' (Marinelli 2003: 76) were, though, a disappointment to Freud and an insult to the scientific pretensions of psychoanalysis for Jung, by then editor of the movement's journal. The minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society for 1913 show a number of forays by speakers into interpretations of literature as dream. Freud's role, as far as it can be discerned through the recorded minutes, was to conclude discussions with a brief judgment on whether a paper presented made a useful or relevant contribution to psychoanalytic theory as he conceived it.

In the minutes of January for 1913, after a meandering discussion of symbolism in literary treatments of the report of a man rescued from a mine near Falun in Sweden in 1719, Freud offered his approval for this kind of psychoanalytic work, but noted where he thought interpretations were 'forced' (*Minutes 1912-1918* 1975: 152). In the meeting of 5 March 1913, Dr Reik spoke on the famous Austrian poet, Arthur Schnitzler, singling out seemingly arbitrary details in the poet's work, just as an analyst might do when interpreting dreams (1975: 172-5). Schnitzler's aphorism to the effect that poets are criminals without the courage to commit a crime, was taken as evidence of Schnitzler's inability to explore in depth his own forbidden desires. In the meeting of 2 April 1913, Dr Sachs presented a paper on Jonathan Swift, suggesting that his interest in gigantism was the fantasy of a man of impotence with shamefully small genitals (1975: 183-4). The difficulty for Freud was to control this theorizing so that it remained within a recognizable professional framework for psychoanalysis without his personal authority appearing to draw to himself the role of seer, which could so quickly become the role of charlatan.

Sometimes at these meetings Freud would present his own elaborated thoughts on an evening's topic, demonstrating his own distinctive line of reasoning. In November, 1918, for instance, after a detailed paper from Dr Bernfeld on poetry written by boys between the ages of thirteen and nineteen, Freud outlined for the group the five motivations poets might have for writing poetry. The most detailed motive he described was 'the third one, who knows because he looks. The poet wants to make a showing of what he has seen. The situation is similar to the one at school, in which one child displays what are "secrets" to another, inexperienced, child. Product: realistic writing' (1975: 301). The self-congratulatory implication of this intimate exhibition of knowing in front of his own classmates, as it were, in a setting where everyone accepted adult rehearsals of childhood patterns, would not have been lost on the psychoanalysts present. It is possible their regular attendance was strongly motivated by the likelihood that Freud would reveal a 'realistic' 'secret' or two each week, or impart somehow the knack of getting at the most realistic of the secrets available to analysis.

Freud's ease of movement from an observation on the composition of poetry to one on productions of realism and in connection with that, revelation, is typical of his paradoxical, complex and powerful method, a method that nevertheless hovers somewhere outside the methodical.

Freud's early treatment of dreams, especially in his dream book, I suggest, is inconsistent and contradictory, moving between a dexterous, fluid and intuitive account and a more rigid model-driven account. Freud was a writer deeply immersed in literature and art, and was himself a superb storyteller. He handled words and imagery in poetic and literary ways, always alert to the rhetorical situation: he was speaking to, leading on, and engaging a reader. He was an excellent scientific writer as well, with substantial research publications behind him at this time. While both skills and both sensibilities are expressed through his exact use of language, he did not at first acknowledge the contradiction. It was as if he hoped the reader would not notice movement between his necessarily loose, associational thinking and his tighter analytic thinking (to characterize his brilliance inadequately). Perhaps, seeing beyond the simple problem of two incompatible ways of thinking, he understood that each was necessary to the other if psychoanalysis was to be taken up as a science even while it was also undertaken as a particularly subtle and significant social practice.

Richard Wollheim, John Kerr and others have recognised Freud's immense capacity for building theoretical models. The Goethe Prize (awarded in 1930) attests to contemporary recognition of his literary ability. Freud makes it clear in the course of his early discussion of alternative ways of understanding dreams in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that this new method must have a basis in a theory that accords with experience, so that its method, once it emerges, would have a validity beyond any one person's gift for interpretation. This preoccupation with establishing a method, however, becomes eventually evidence of Freud's left-brain fixity on a limited range of options for the motivations behind dreams. He kept to his theoretical model regardless of evidence in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In fact, at this time, he allowed no evidence to contradict his model once he struck upon the convenient argument that any apparently contrary dreams could still be interpreted as evidence of repressed, unconscious wishes that only psychoanalysis could uncover. While Freud's ability to move between forms of thinking enabled him at times to keep developing and changing his ideas, to avoid for instance the kind of misguided science that condemned his contemporary Cesare Lombroso to so many years wasted in following rigid theories of atavism and racial difference, Freud's brilliant balancing act could not at this time resolve the conflict between a form of knowledge based upon a fixed model of the world, and a form of knowledge based upon practised fluid immersion in the world.

His later subtle elaborations of a dynamic and descriptive unconscious, primary and secondary processes, a topography of the mind that included the death wish alongside the libido of the id, and the relation between superego and ego, developed open narratives of complex, creative solutions to that great literary-scientific question: how do we know ourselves? He did find a way through the impasse that *The Interpretation of Dreams* represented, an impasse that becomes clear to us when we see this work as a dramatization of the lateralised brain's two ways of thinking through a problem.

Dreaming and brain lateralisation

I wish finally to make a brief proposition, related to how we might make use of models of the self from neuroscience and lessons from psychoanalysis to manage a creative life. This involves, we could say, respect for and interest in the work both hemispheres do, with openness to what arises seemingly unformed and uncannily from the right hemisphere into the useful but harsh light of the articulating left hemisphere, to be returned as a model to be tested, savoured, and held in the care of the right hemisphere. This movement-between hemispheres can be ceaseless, its truths uncovered never final or finally curative. Significantly, the description of this betweenness begins with priority being given to the right brain as a beginning to thinking and then finally as a reference point for conclusions. Here, the asymmetry of the situation is to be respected. In a rebuttal of Daniel Dennett's version of consciousness (1991), in the online discussion-journal *Psycoloquy*, Roland Puccetti makes the point that while the right brain is mute, it is only 'unable' to speak from a left brain perspective (Puccetti 1997). It is the left brain that does speak, and in fact depends upon speech, and tends to equate speech with consciousness, intelligence and thought. The right brain's muteness is not its disability, but rather the condition of its existence. This is thinking's starting point (often nebulous) and ending point. We, speaking so much, tend to keep this particular strangeness of human thinking at bay.

The meaning and purpose of neurotic defence might lie close, perhaps, to the left hemisphere's almost comically limited awareness, as limited and uptight as Freud's repressed ego described in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (Vol XVIII: 19-21), and with the melancholy of doubt the right hemisphere is drawn towards. In other words, knowledge of lateralisation in the brain can inflect and enrich our understanding of how conscious and unconscious aspects of the self operate. These ideas do not displace the psychoanalytic psyche, but, true to Freud's openness, and his commitment to science, they add dimensions to the ways in which we might understand and manage our selves. This might be an urgent clue to us who turn, after attending to the practices of the work day, towards that open-ended, seemingly too-playful mode of thinking we call creative work. It is the turning, becoming 'loosened', as Freud puts it (Vol XVIII: 20), that is important.

Conclusion

My dream of the stolen artwork, and its sour aftertaste, remain with me. Why, in the dream, is it art that I have stolen? Like Schnitzler's pair, Caesar and Napoleon, on the one hand we are through-and-through ourselves, almost machines so powerful and automatic is this impulse to be ourselves, while on the other hand we each invent a shaky, doubtful performance of self. As performers we are our own gods while we are also despairing thieves copying scraps of dialogue, costumes, gestures, vocations from wherever we can, to patch together a role for ourselves in this pressing social performance of life (*What do you do? Where do you live? How much do you earn? What do you know?*). It strikes me now that I might have been as afraid of this artwork as I was ashamed of myself for coveting it. The dream seems to be one about repression or denial that hasn't, and wont, quite work. I am caught, in this dream's aftermath, between love and fear, desire and shame, image and word. Wrapping art in news text seems, in the light of this essay, to be an image of the right brain's mysterious and artistic mode being obscured (wrapped) by the left brain's factual, text-based mode of thinking. Nevertheless, the *shape* of the artwork is there, even if the work is covered by newsprint. I think part of my dreaming self knew that the artwork was not truly hidden by the newsprint, for the contours, the felt shape and weight would have been suggestive of what

was within. Perhaps, for me, it was a shameful sense of illegitimacy connected with art that soured me. I owned and yet did not own it.

It is possible that in his possibly impulsive small oration to his friends in Vienna about the writing of teenage poetry Freud was driving home the point that poetry can reveal not just the vague shapes of grown-up secrets, but the power and presence of these truths as aesthetic truths. Freud's equation of a certain kind of poetry with realism seems a small paradoxical moment that points to a larger question. Are our poems avenues to experience or invitations to retreat from experience? Are our poems mostly recycled clichés or discoveries made on the wing? If the right brain is, mostly, lost for words, then what it knows about all that is beyond words must in the end give our speech its actual shape, weight, value and feel. The implication of Freud's equation of poetry with realism seems to be that once one looks, then discoveries are best (most realistically) spoken as poetry.

I imagine Freud at this intimate moment among his friends allowing himself to be himself, while at the same time playing Freud for their amusement. The poet might indeed be a criminal at heart and a coward in the criminal world – and the opposite as well.

Notes

[1] See Solms & Zellner 2012; Littlefield & Johnson 2012. return to text

[2] See recent overviews of this research: Ivry & Robertson 1997; Malik 2002; McManus 2002; Searle 2004; McGilchrist 2009; Kahneman 2011. return to text

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