Dare To Dream:

Analyzing Dream Interpretation As An Act of Translation In Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria By Bonnie Tulloch

As translators, dream interpreters face a daunting task. In order to translate dreams they must decipher the language of the unconscious mind. Confronted with untranslatability, their interpretations, or *translations*, are the product of innovation, efforts to distill meaning from dream images. For interpreters of the Freudian school of thought, innovation leads to foreignization. An accurate interpretation of the unconscious "...signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language" (Invisibility 20). As Freud points out in his book On *Dreams*, disrupting these codes requires abuse¹; in order to decode dream symbols interpreters have to fight conscious inclinations. Such abuse involves experimentation and often, deviation from the source text. In his case study, Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria, Freud's interpretation departs from Dora's original dreams, treating them as a subtext for her neurosis. Combining scientific theory with literary analysis, he explores the various significations of symbols, beyond that which they normally imply. His methods introduce a productive mode of reading, which is now applied to the study of literature. However, while scholars have seen the literary value of Freud's approach, they have failed to recognize its relevance to translation studies. As a translation, Freud's interpretation challenges notions of fidelity. Expanding the possibilities of analysis he empowers translators, endowing them with the ability to create rather than reproduce. His work, which is more than a straightforward decoding of a text, addresses and furthers discussions of translation theory. Therefore, it should be explored from a translation perspective.

Nonsensical texts, dreams are a problem for modern science. Unconscious thought is inaccessible and thus, difficult to study. According to Freud: "The majority of medical writers adopt a view according to which dreams scarcely reach the level of being psychical phenomena at all" (On Dreams 72). A foreign language that cannot be

¹ Philip E. Lewis' concept of innovative translation. See Nornes p. 176

explained to satisfaction, the unconscious is often disregarded. However, rather than disregard the significance of dreams Freud developed his own understanding of how their language functions. He accomplished this task through his identification of patterns. In dreams he recognizes a common trend, that of a wish being satisfied. From this observation he argues that:

[E]very dream is a wish which is represented as fulfilled, that the representation acts as a disguise if the wish is a repressed one, belonging to the unconscious, and that except in the case of children's dreams only an unconscious wish or one which reaches down into the unconscious has the force necessary for the formation of a dream (Dora 59-60).

Freud's theory of dreams creates a scientific platform for his analysis. He interprets with the purpose of uncovering the wish that is being fulfilled and the repressed desire that lies beneath it. In the case of Dora, his analysis is made to reveal the sexual desires underlying her hysteria. Freud is "...determined to use the material to illustrate his theory of dreams, to show the strategic value of dreams in analysis" (McCaffrey 119). Therefore, his first step in translating Dora's dreams is to establish his theory of translation, how the process works, what it is meant to achieve and so forth. His innovative philosophy challenges scientific reservations and guides his efforts. Based on its principles he is able to work, creating meaning where others claim there is none.

In accordance with his theory, Freud seeks to reverse the domesticating violence of conscious censors that disguise dreams. The foreign text, or the *unconscious*, has been reconstituted "…in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that preexist it in the target language", so as to protect the dreamer from discovering unacceptable truths (Invisibility 18). Therefore, it follows that Freud's discoveries also have to appear unacceptable if they are to be considered accurate representations. He has to strip the dream elements of their protective mask. The implications arising from such an act are controversial. In order to be faithful to the source text (i.e. unconscious) Freud has to be extremely unfaithful to the dream as it appears to Dora. He has to estrange the dream from the dreamer and her conscious attempts to resist the truth. In this way Freud's translation resonates with Venuti's concept of foreignization because, it "…inscribes an interpretation that is new vis-à-vis whatever interpretation has achieved authority in the receiving culture" (Poet's Version 246). By inscribing a new interpretation Freud offers

Dora insight into the nature of her illness; however, such a task requires a dramatic altering of perspective that undermines her current reality.

Although foreignizing in effect, Freud's translation occurs through a series of subtle substitutions, the first of which begins with his transcription of Dora's dreams. His first act of translation is to substitute a word-for-word rendering of the dreams with an intralingual² version. According to Freud, any changes are minor: "The wording of these dreams was recorded immediately after the sitting, and they thus afforded a secure point of attachment of the chain of interpretations and recollections that proceeded them" (Dora 40). However, despite Freud's claims of fidelity his rewording of Dora's dreams already implies an act of interpretation. The dreams are susceptible to the revisions of his memory; therefore, "…the possibility that Freud's handling of the dream texts altered them is a real one" (McCaffrey 135). By paraphrasing Dora's dreams he challenges traditional notions of textual loyalty; however, this act allows him more freedom as an interpreter. Freud's transcription sacrifices *word-for-word* accuracy for *sense-for-sense*³ effect. A focus on the *sense* of the dream involves a shift from the original text and acts as a starting point for his interpretation.

As Freud notes in his case study, Dora's first dream is repetitive, initially having occurred while she was staying with friends at the lake. During her visit she rejected the romantic overtures of Herr K., the husband of her father's mistress. Freud presents the dream as follows:

A house was on fire. My father was standing beside my bed and woke me up. I dressed myself quickly. Mother wanted to stop and save her jewel-case; but father said: 'I refuse to let myself and my two children be burnt for the sake of your jewel-case.' We hurried downstairs, and as soon as I was outside I woke up (Dora 56).

Although Freud is aware of the significance events at the lake may have played in triggering this dream, they do not restrict his interpretation. Understanding the multiplicity of factors that underlie dream formation, he considers the possible

² Roman Jakobson's term for a translation that rewords the original text. See Bassnett p. 22

³ An idea first presented by Horace and Cicero. All translations should aspire to reproduce the same "sense" of the original text while avoiding an exact word-for-word rendering. See Bassnett p. 49

importance of any circumstance that comes to Dora's mind. Hence, after hearing the dream he uses free association⁴ to connect it to various events that had occurred in her waking life.

The first part of the dream, for example, is related to an argument Dora overheard between her father and mother. In the argument her parents were quarrelling about locking the dining room door at night. While her mother wished the door to be locked, her father was concerned that it would prevent her brother, whose room adjoined the dining room, from getting out if there was a need. Upon hearing Dora's account, Freud emphasizes the importance of her father's words: "*something might happen in the night so that it might be necessary to leave the room*" (Dora 57). For Freud, the ambiguity of this expression suggests an underlying meaning. He explains his reaction in a footnote:

I laid stress upon these words because they took me aback. They seemed to have an ambiguous ring about them. Are not certain physical exigencies referred to in the same words? Now, in a line of associations ambiguous words (or, as we may call them, "switch-words") act like points at a junction. If the points are switched across from the position in which they appear to lie in the dream, then we find ourselves upon another set of rails; and along this second track run the thoughts which we are in search of and which still lie concealed behind the dream (ibid 57).

Freud's concept of "switch-words" further reveals his approach to translation. Instead of viewing his work as a faithful word-for-word reproduction of the original, he pictures his translation as a different set of tracks, a *new* interpretation that runs parallel to the first. Freud is interested in illuminating the original text not reproducing it verbatim. Switch words are a convenient technique through which he can arrive at his interpretation. By exploring the numerous significations of a word he creates new dimensions of meaning, adding to the dream's significance. Dora's dreams gain in translation as they acquire greater depth and complexity, a complexity that accurately embodies the intricacies of unconscious thought. Therefore, unlike other translators, Freud considers language's ambiguity an advantage rather than a hindrance. Operating on his metaphor of train tracks he veers in different directions when translating, taking advantage of the freedom it

⁴ A psychoanalytic technique employed by Freud in his dream analysis. Free association is used to connect random events/thoughts of the dreamer back to the dream and its interpretation.

allows. When interpreting Dora's father's words, "*something might happen in the night so that it might be necessary to leave the room*", he changes course, switching from present to past associations that might reveal the statement's meaning (ibid 57). This specific chain of signifiers leads him to Dora's childhood, a period of her life that he uses to consolidate his interpretation.

Employing the switch words and their allusion to physical exigency, Freud relates the concept of *fire*, which appears in the dream, to childhood *bedwetting*. Deconstructing the notion of *fire* he arrives at the opposing concept of *wetness*. Freud relies on cultural associations to ground his interpretation. Referencing a popular warning against playing with matches he writes: "Perhaps it is believed that [children] will dream of fire and then try to put it out with water" (Dora 63). After questioning, Freud receives confirmation that Dora used to wet the bed as a child. This information supports his belief that her hysteria is the result of sexual repression because bedwetting, according to Freud, is a form of masturbation (ibid 66). Relating the act of bedwetting back to the dream he declares: "But what is usually done to prevent children from wetting their bed? Are they not woken up in the night out of their sleep, exactly as your father woke you up in the dream?" (ibid 64). With this association in mind he returns his attention to events at the lake, stating: "This, then, must be the actual occurrence which enabled you to substitute your father for Herr K., who really woke you up out of your sleep" (ibid 64). In Freud's interpretation readers now see the realization of his switch words; they lead him down a path of significations that stand in relation to the original text but cannot be viewed as its replicate. He concludes that Dora "... summoned up an infantile affection for her father so that it might protect her from her present affection for a stranger" (ibid 77). Accordingly, Freud's interpretation radically transforms the significance of the dream as it first appears. It becomes a manifestation of Dora's unconscious love for the man she rejected.

As Freud illustrates through his association of fire with bedwetting, cultural connotations influence his interpretation of dream symbols. The majority of these connotations are linguistically based; wordplay and puns are used to uncover the different layers of meaning hidden within each symbol. The symbol of the jewel-case, for example, is interpreted to be a representation of the female genitals. Freud writes:

"Perhaps you do not know that 'jewel-case' [Schmuckkästchen] is a favourite expression for the same thing that you alluded to not long ago by means of the reticule you were wearing-for the female genitals, I mean" (ibid 61). As explained, Freud relies on the cultural nuances of the word to ground his interpretation. However, in addition to the word's linguistic connotations he also takes into consideration its indexical properties. On the linguistic level the jewel-case signifies an item of value (i.e. jewels/sex), but on the indexical level, which is even more basic, the box-shape of the jewel-case presents a womb-like image. Freud elaborates on this mode of symbolic interpretation in his book On Dreams, where he states: "Sharp weapons, long and stiff objects, such as tree trunks and sticks, stand for the male genital; while cupboards, boxes, carriages or ovens may represent the uterus" (72). His method of symbol reading is unusual but it allows him the perspective to see things differently. As Freud infers in his theory, most people are unable to read the unconscious because it departs from their regular view of the world. Freud's own proficiency is self-credited, acquired through experimentation and exploration of the possible avenues a symbol or sign can take. Unlike most people he considers the cultural and non-cultural undertones of dreams, bringing the familiar into unfamiliar territory through his interpretation.

Although unconventional, Freud's exploration of the jewel-case contributes significantly to his final interpretation of the dream. When asked, Dora reveals that Herr K. had given her a jewel-case as a present. Freud examines this information and its relation to previous discoveries. He writes:

Now bring your mind back to the jewel-case which Herr K. gave you. You have there the starting-point for a parallel line of thoughts, in which Herr K. is to be put in the place of your father just as he was in the matter of standing beside your bed. He gave you a jewel-case; so you are to give him your jewel-case (Dora 62).

Thus, according to Freud, the jewel-case is a symbol of Dora's sexual desire for Herr K. This interpretation validates his assessment of Dora's true feelings. He states:

The dream confirms once more what I had already told you before you dreamed it—that you are summoning up your old love for your father in order to protect yourself against your love for Herr K. But what do all these efforts show? Not only that you are afraid of Herr K., but that you are still more afraid of yourself, and of the temptation you feel to yield to him. In short, these efforts prove once more how deeply you loved him (ibid 62).

While Dora denies this explanation Freud interprets her denial as self-defense, another attempt to repress unwanted feelings and therefore, further confirmation of what he has said. He trusts his own interpretation more than he does Dora's opinion.

Although presented as fact, the fluency of Freud's interpretation invites debate. It is either proof that his theory is true, or, the art of his own creation. Taking every random association into consideration, a number of Freud's peers side towards the latter. Meyer Solomon (1914) writes:

Dreams are not, I believe, at least fundamentally and essentially, the result of an intrapsychic struggle between desire and repression. In other words, I do not believe in the Freudian conception of the formation and function of dreams which would make dreams a compromise between the endopsychic censor and the desire for wish-fulfilment, this compromise consisting in the transformation of the latent into the manifest content of the dream, symbolism being used very freely (101).

Here Solomon critiques the freedom with which Freud abuses dream elements in his interpretation. The ambiguous nature of dream symbols and the process of free association make it so that they can be linked to almost anything. As Solomon states, "symbolism [is] used very freely" in Freud's analysis. His critique suggests that the meaning Freud discovers is not inherent to the dream; rather, it is constructed through interpretation. After all, Freud's unique perspective influences the way he views dream symbols. Therefore, to some degree, his discoveries are determined by his expectations.

Thus, Freud's theory of dreams simultaneously liberates and confines his interpretation. He is bound by his own logic, but that is unavoidable. As Lois Tyson states: "...part of the paradox of seeing and learning is that in order to understand some things clearly we must restrict our focus in a way that highlights certain elements and ignores others" (3). For Freud, interpreting the unconscious requires a new rationality and exercising this rationality requires a dismissal of alternative perspectives. As different ways of seeing the world, "...critical theories compete with one another for dominance in education and cultural communities" (Tyson 3). Freud's theory is fighting for precedence; he is attempting to discount current cultural understandings of dreams and what they reveal about human behavior. To accomplish this task he merges literary and

scientific analysis in his transformation of dream texts, challenging notions of difference that separate these schools of thought. Therefore, rather than focus on the products of his efforts, which are subjective interpretations, attention must be brought to the process by which they are made.

A scientific practice that employs literary techniques, Freud's strategy is unprecedented. His combination of scientific theory and literary device lead to some interesting and controversial discoveries, some of which are observed in his interpretation of Dora's second dream. Freud arrives at his interpretation through the use of metaphor. He performs a literary analysis of the following segment:

I then went to the station ['Bahnhof] and asked about a hundred times: 'Where is the station?' I always got the answer: 'Five minutes.' I then saw a thick wood before me which I went into, and there I asked a man whom I met. He said to me: 'Two and a half hours more.' He offered to accompany me. But I refused and went alone. I saw the station in front of me and could not reach it. At the same time I had the usual feeling of anxiety that one has in dreams when one cannot move forward. Then I was at home. I must have been travelling in the meantime, but I know nothing about that. I walked into the porter's lodge, and inquired for our flat. The maidservant opened the door to me and replied that Mother and the others were already at the cemetery ['Friedhof'] (Dora 86).

Hearing this portion of the dream Freud pays particular attention to the places referenced: the *station*, *woods* and *cemetery*. He substitutes the word "station" for "box", uncovering another representation of the "female genitals" (ibid 88). Then, elaborating on his interpretation he writes:

The use of "Bahnhof" ["station"; literally, "railway-court"] and "Friedhof" ["cemetery"; literally, "peace-court"] to represent the female genitals...also served to direct my awakened curiosity to the similarly formed "Vorhof" ["vestibulum"; literally, "forecourt"]—an anatomical term for a particular region of the female genitals" (ibid 91).

Freud views these elements—the *station*, the *cemetery* and the *woods*—as a "symbolic geography of sex" (ibid 91). Working off the metaphor of female anatomy as a geographical map, he concludes that "...[there] lay concealed behind the first situation in the dream a phantasy of defloration, the phantasy of a man seeking to force an entrance into the female genitals" (ibid 91). This interpretation foreignizes Dora's dream,

completely transforming its original text and the general notions surrounding it. His metaphor further emphasizes the sexual repression underlying Dora's illness; the hysteric symptoms (i.e. headaches, coughing, loss of speech, etc.) are really signifiers of her repressed sex life (ibid 42). In this way Freud's literary interpretation of the dream correlates with his scientific theory of hysteria.

From a translation perspective, Freud's innovative approach resonates with Philip E. Lewis' concept of abuse. His interpretation takes the form of "...of the strong, forceful translation that values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the polyvalencies or plurivocities of the original by producing its own" (Philip E. Lewis qtd. in Nornes 176). Freud's sexual reading of symbols forcibly adjusts Dora's, as well as the reader's, perception of the dream's significance. He takes familiar objects and places (i.e. jewel-cases and train stations) and transforms them through his unique understanding of their symbolic function. Although Nornes refers to abuse in the context of subtilling, the concept can easily be extended to the domain of dream interpretation. Like some subtillers Freud's abuse is also "...directed at convention, even at spectators and their expectations" (187). His target audience is the field of medical professionals that have rejected his explanation of dreams. Freud writes in the preface of *Dora*:

It was not without good reason that in the year 1900 I gave precedence to a laborious and thorough study of dreams over the publication of neuroses which I had in view. And incidentally I was able to judge from its reception with what an inadequate degree of comprehension such efforts are met by other specialists at the present time (5).

As these words reveal, Freud recognizes the controversial nature of his interpretations. The negative response to his ideas confirms rather than refutes his belief that they need to take hold. Instead of being dissuaded by the unfavorable reception of his theories, he is more motivated to bring them to light. In order to do this Freud needs to be forceful and unrelenting in his analysis.

As seen in his interpretations, the majority of abuse Freud enacts upon the text is accomplished through his use of figurative language. Focusing on its illocutionary aspects, he employs imagery and wordplay when reconfiguring Dora's dreams. Following the categorizations of André Lefevere, Freud's interpretation is a cross

between an *imitation*⁵ and a *version*⁶. Freud views his work as a deviation from the original dreams. As he mentions, switch words operate as points of departure from the source text. However, while his interpretation possesses imitative elements, it runs parallel to the dream. The substance underlying the original dream is still represented in the interpretation. Thus, Freud's work challenges definitions of interpretation. It does not fit neatly into either of Lefevere's categories; rather, it is a combination of the two.

Interestingly, when comparing Freud's work to poetry his interpretive strategies compare with the tactics of the poet translators of his time. In an article discussing the ethics of poetic translation Lawrence Venuti writes:

In the twentieth century, in contrast, the poet's version routinely involved departures from the source text that were motivated by the imposition of a different poetics or by mere ignorance of the source language, although in some cases both factors were operating (Poet's Version 231).

As noted by Venuti, for translators of poetry in the 20th Century ignorance and creativity work in conjunction. Like Freud, these translators use innovation to compensate for their lack of knowledge. Ezra Pound for example, translates Chinese poetry without speaking or even knowing how to read it (Poet's Version 232). The "poet's version" secures the translator of poetry freedom when interpreting original texts, but this freedom is merely the recognition of the subjectivity involved in translation (ibid 231). Don Paterson, another 20th Century translator, recognizes "… that the foreign text is the site of competing interpretations, and the versioning poet selects or constructs the one that answers to a personal preference" (ibid 233). According to Paterson, each interpretation is valid, but it is one of many possible perspectives. Similar to these translators Freud also introduces a new poetics; only his poetics pertains to the formation of dreams. His artistic approach is motivated by ignorance—a lack of scientific explanation. However, Freud's artistic sense poses a problem for science, which demands complete objectivity. Consequently, the ethics of his dream interpretations are questioned and deemed

⁵ A term used by Lefevere to describe an interpretation that departs from the source text. See Bassnett p. 84

⁶ A term used by Lefevere to describe an interpretation that changes the form of the original but retains its substance. See Bassnett p. 84

problematic. His innovative attempts are rejected because they depart from the accepted scientific approach.

Although avant-garde, Freud's approach is functional. His poetics of dreams introduces a perspective that allows others to access the unconscious. He offers strategies to his readers, teaching them how to decode symbols for themselves. Freud believes in the power of his methods; anyone can use them and meet with success. In *Dora* he writes:

There is a great deal of symbolism of this kind in life, but as a rule we pass it by without heeding it. When I set myself the task of bringing to light what human beings keep hidden within them, not by the compelling power of hypnosis, but by observing what they say and what they show, I thought the task was a harder one than it really is. He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his finger-tips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore. And thus the task of making conscious the most hidden recesses of the mind is one which it is quite possible to accomplish (69).

Outlining his process of interpretation, Freud introduces a new mode of analysis, a strategy that sometimes requires reading against the text or reading allegorically. For instance, when Dora plays with her purse by opening it and shutting it, Freud views her behavior as a pantomimic act of masturbation (Dora 68). The parallels between the act and his interpretation are drawn, but the one interpretation radically transfigures the other. Thus, Freud, through his unique perspective, adds significance to everyday life in a way that transforms human experience. A purse becomes more than a fashion statement, just as a jewel-case becomes more than a jewel-case. As a translator he creates meaning, searching for obscurity and finding it in the unassuming normalcy of everyday acts.

Consequently, Freud's methods are relevant to translation studies because they challenge traditional notions of faithfulness. Although he departs from the original texts of Dora's dreams, he does not view himself as an unfaithful interpreter. Freud is simply performing what he understands to be the implied reading. Every idea he has links back to the text, he merely follows the chain of significations that the dream symbols evoke. By following these significations Freud becomes aware of all, or at least most, of the possible interpretations of symbols. Then, after considering these possibilities, he sees

how they work together in the greater context of the dream. From this perspective he can be regarded as more faithful to the text because he is committed to exploring its every detail. This detail leads to greater freedom when translating. The more meaning Freud discovers the more material he has to work with. For example, when exploring the associations of *wetness* and *fire* in the first dream he states:

But I notice that the antithesis of water and fire has been extremely useful to you in the dream. Your mother wanted to save the jewelcase so that it should not be *burnt*; while in the dream-thoughts it is a question of the 'jewel-case' not being *wetted*. But fire is not only used as the contrary of water, it also serves directly to represent love (as in the phrase 'to be *consumed* with love'). So that from 'fire' one set of rails runs by way of this symbolic meaning to thoughts of love; while the other set runs by way of the contrary 'water,' and, after sending off a branch line which provides another connection with 'love' (for love also makes things wet), leads in a different direction (Dora 64).

Through his extensive analysis of dream symbols Freud seeks the various avenues of interpretation available to him. As he later points out, "...the word 'wet' served in the dream thought as a point of junction between several groups of idea" (ibid 81). Instead of settling for a straightforward substitution Freud employs various meanings, creating a web of associations all originating from the text. By viewing words as junctions he opens himself to the possibilities of the dream, rather than restricting himself to one definition. As shown he accounts for the ambiguous nature of language, exploring phrases by applying them to different contexts. The further his analysis extends the more flexibility he grants himself when translating. His deconstruction of concepts provides him with more options when restructuring the text.

Although scientists like Solomon critique Freud for his individualistic approach to dream interpretation, the value of his work lies in its subjectivity—the unique perspective it offers. Freud's reading of Dora's dreams, like any act of interpretation, involves a subjective response to the text that includes a personal decoding and restructuring of its symbols. However, the significance of Freud's interpretation is not that it is unfaithful to the dream text, but that it is unfaithful to his culture. His understanding of the dream rejects presiding notions of human behavior. He stands in opposition to the interpretive community of his target audience. Freud's interpretation abuses accepted norms, forcibly

adjusting society's sense of perspective. Thus, he bewilders readers on purpose, forcing them to question the ideologies that hold them. Through his own innovation Freud is able to communicate the foreignness of unconscious thought, challenging those who would claim it indecipherable. At the same time however, he reveals the foreignness of translation, whose interlingual space, like that between sleeping and waking thought, also awaits further elucidation.

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