

DREAMS AND HYSTERIA

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Jack Sprat would eat no fat
His wife would eat no lean
And so, between the two of them
They licked their platters clean.

But in Freud's account of the butcher's wife's dream, there are not two, but three, all of whom sustain a particular appetite, but without eating anything—which demonstrates a world of difference between the satisfaction of mutual needs—and **desire**.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud asserts that: "The meaning of every dream is a fulfilled wish", which Lacan, in *The Direction of the Treatment* retranslates as "the dream is an expression of a desire." But what Freud's patient offers is an apparent contradiction of his theory: "A dream in which one of my wishes was not fulfilled."

The Dream:

"I wanted to give a supper-party, but I had nothing in the house but a little smoked salmon. I thought I would go and buy something, but I remembered then that it was Sunday afternoon and all the shops would be shut. Next I tried to ring up some caterers, but the telephone was out of order. So I had to abandon my wish to give a supper-party."

For Freud, this dream does represent a wish—but a wish for an unfulfilled wish. For Lacan, it signifies a desire for a desire—desire, as an effect of language, being fundamentally unfulfillable.

Freud's patient's initial presentation of her dream is triumphant: "How do you fit that in with your theory?" Freud agrees that it is a dream which "at first sight... seemed sensible and coherent." We can compare this response with his comments on Dora's account of her father's affair: "This is all perfectly correct and true, isn't it? What do you want to change in it, now that I've told it to you?"

But an analysis of the dream reveals to Freud a weakness in her discourse—he is not satisfied with her explanation of it. According to her story, arising from her associations, her husband, the butcher, feels himself too stout, and wants to reduce his weight. He wants-to-be thinner, by going on "a strict diet"—denying himself food—and "invitations to supper". His wife, in order, so she says, to "go on teasing" her husband, with whom she is "very much in love", begs him not to give her any more caviar, thus denying herself a favourite food.

Freud compares this unconvincing reasoning with that of Bernheim's post-hypnotic patients who, faced with actions for which they cannot account feel compelled to give a false account, making what Freud terms false connections. In the *Studies on Hysteria*, he says: "In cases in which the true causation evades conscious perception one does not hesitate to make another connection, which one believes, although it is false." It is by means of these false connections, which, according to Freud, cover the lacunae in the patient's speech, that he is able to proceed from the *periphery* of the patient's discourse to its pathogenic nucleus, in a *radial* direction.

Freud's question regarding his patient's account is: "Why was it that she stood in need of an unfulfilled wish?" Just as he questioned Dora on her complicity in her father's affair. His question leads to a further development. He asks his patient for more associations, which she gives only "after a short pause, such as would correspond to the overcoming of a resistance." The patient then recalls a visit of the day before to a woman friend, of whom she feels jealous because she is praised by her husband. But: "this friend is very skinny and thin and her husband admires a plumper figure." So her husband desires not what will satisfy his needs, but what he wants-to-be. And the thin friend occupies the place of the butcher's want-to-be. The thin friend wants-to-be: "a little stouter". —"When are you going to ask us to another meal? You always feed one so well." Which raises the question, for Freud, of what the butcher's wife is to feed her thin friend on? Presumably the thin friend's "favourite dish" —the smoked salmon? Which, if, as Lacan points out, it is presented "under a thin gauze, the raising of this gauze creates a similar effect to that which occurs in the culmination of the ancient mysteries."

To eat the salmon? Or: "To be the phallus, if only a somewhat thin one. Was not that", asks Lacan, "the ultimate identification with the signifier of desire?" For, in the butcher's wife's dream, the smoked salmon is the signifier of her friend's (the other woman's) desire, and it is metaphorically substituted for the caviar desired by the patient. Her desire for caviar can be satisfied at any time—her husband is willing to give her anything she asks, but what she asks is that her desire be sustained as unfulfilled.

But there is a third development, a subtler interpretation, involving, for Freud, a "subsidiary detail", and for Lacan "the little meaning... that proves to lie at the basis of the desire". For the metaphorical substitution, in the patient's dream, of the smoked salmon for the caviar, creates also a metonymic displacement, proving that "there is no signification that does not refer to another signification". For by this substitution, the butcher's wife achieves also an hysterical identification with her friend, whereby she can put herself in the place of the other woman, and thus in the good esteem of her husband. On one level, the dream signifies a successful attempt to thwart her friend's desire for her "favourite dish", and at a deeper level, it sustains the butcher's wife's desire to **be** the "favourite dish" —the object of desire for her husband.

References

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