Freud’s Tropology of Dreaming

In chapter 6 of The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud discusses the ways in which libidinal impulses given an ideational expression in dream-thoughts (Gedanken) — the impulses motivating the dream — become transformed into a dream’s manifest contents (Inhalte) — the symbols, scenes, and events that seem to occur in the dream. He identifies four operations in this process of transformation: condensation (Verdichtungsarbeit), displacement (Verschiebungsarbeit), (the means and considerations of) representability (Darstellbarkeit), and secondary revision (sekundäre Bearbeitung). These operations are not to be understood as tactics or defense mechanisms (Abwehrmechanismen) employed by the psyche to evade confrontation with a painful reality. A dream may display evidences of a desire to evade reality, for example, may show a tendency in the dreamer toward projection, regression, or the like; but in this chapter, Freud is concerned less with the defense mechanisms that the psyche may employ to evade reality than with the operations utilized by all dreamers for fashioning a specific “dream-content” out of the more primary dream-thoughts. In other words, whereas defense mechanisms are specifically evasive processes, the mechanisms of the dream-work are, as it were, positive transformations in which libidinal impulses (expressed in the dream-thoughts) are made into figurative signifiers (the dream-contents) of those impulses. Thus, in the summary of this chapter, Freud concludes that the form of the dream, the dream as it is experienced, is fashioned by:

a) the displacement of psychical intensities to the point of a transvaluation of all psychical values;
b) the imposition of considerations of presentability [Darstellbarkeit], by which thoughts are given visual or acoustical form;

c) the creation of greater intensities through condensation; and

d) an imposition of the appearance of logical relations among or distancing of the elements of the dream-contents through secondary revision.²

In his discussion of the dream-work, Freud shows a tendency to fuse one operation with another or to view them as working simultaneously on the material of the dream-thoughts. Some recent commentators have suggested the possibility of subsuming certain of the operations discriminated by Freud under others; Norman Holland, for example, has suggested that displacement is a master category, under which condensation and secondary revision can be subsumed.³ This is consistent with Freud’s notion of the totalizing nature of the dream-work by which the psyche is able to enjoy the contemplation of the dream-thoughts while satisfying the censor, representative of moral consciousness. But Freud insists on the distinctions among the four operations of the dream-work and goes to considerable trouble to characterize each of them in its own terms. And we may ask, therefore, why Freud insists on four distinct operations for the dream-work. Why only four categories when modern commentators, in their efforts to identify the number of defense mechanisms utilized by the psyche, find as many as thirty-nine?⁴

I believe that what Freud has done in his reflections on the relations between the dream-content and its more basic dream-thoughts is to rediscover, or reinvent, the theory of tropes conventionally used by rhetoricians in his culture to characterize figurative language in general and to explicate the relation between literal and figurative meanings in poetic discourse specifically. The correspondence of two of the operations of the dream-work (condensation and displacement) to two of the tropes of figurative language (metaphor and metonymy, respectively) has been noted by Jakobson and fruitfully exploited by literary critics and social theorists already.⁵ But the full delineation of the analogies between the nineteenth-century theory of the tropes and Freud’s theory of the dream-work has not, to my knowledge, been attempted.

It is not, of course, a matter of influences. We do not have to suppose that Freud borrowed the ideas of some contemporary theorist of figurative language and imported them into his considerations of the dream-work. Such ideas were a part of the general culture that Freud would have imbibed especially in his early schooling, a large part of which consisted in
training in rhetoric, composition, and eloquence, in spite of the bad light in which rhetoric was seen in the estimation of writers, scientists, and philosophers alike. Nor does the analogy between Freud’s conception of the dream-work and the conventional theory of tropes detract at all from the theoretical validity or heuristic utility of the former. It matters little whether the operation by which the elements of a dream are charged with “greater intensities” is called metaphorization or condensation. Freud often speaks of the dream-work as being analogous to poetic discourse, and it is not therefore surprising that he found metaphorization present in it, whether he called it that or not. Moreover, his conception of the relation between the dream-thoughts and the dream-contents is precisely analogous to that form of poetic discourse which literary theorists and biblical exegetes call allegorization.

The four operations identified by Freud function in the same way that the tropes do in allegory to mediate between the literal and the figurative levels of meaning of the text. By noting the precise similarities between the conventional theory of the tropes, on the one side, and the operations of the dream-work as postulated by Freud, on the other, we can not only comprehend why he insists on four operations (rather than some other number) but also, in the process, gain a clearer understanding of both the tropes and Freud’s conception of the dream-work simultaneously.

It should be stressed that Freud had no way of observing the operations of the dream-work directly. He knows them only as their effects appear in the report of the dream given by the patient or, when it is a case of one of his own dreams, as these effects appear in his memory of the dream. He takes cognizance of this when he stresses that the same operations appear in the composition of the dream-report on waking as operated during the dream itself to effect the transformation of the dream-thoughts into the dream-contents. A number of levels of transformation are thus postulated between the libidinal impulses occasioning the dream and the final interpretation given of it by the analyst: impulse, dream-thoughts, censorship, repression, construction of the dream-contents, memory of the dream, the dreamer’s spoken or written account of the dream, the analyst’s analysis of the dream. The favored object of the interpretation is of course the dream-report (or the analyst’s transcription of the report). On the basis of the contents of the report, the analyst then proceeds to reconstruct the dream-thoughts.

The deduction proceeds on the basis of the analyst’s capacity to identify evidences of the operations of condensation, displacement, representa-
tion, and secondary revision. Having identified these evidences, the analyst proceeds to determine the specific impulses in the services of which they were employed. The nature of these impulses, in turn, is determined by appeal to the theory of the structure of the psyche which precedes, both logically and temporally in the evolution of Freud’s own thought, the theory of the dream-work itself. One could, therefore, reject the theory of the dream-work without rejecting the theory of the structure of the psyche that precedes it, or the reverse. The Freudian theory of the psyche does not concern us here. We are concerned only with the theory of the dream-work and wish to determine the extent to which it corresponds to the theory of tropes and helps us better to understand this theory. For if Freud’s theory of the dream-work is even minimally plausible, then we have a way of grounding the theory of tropes in a general theory of consciousness in which the relations between literal and figurative meaning in a host of fields of speculation, from anthropology to literary criticism and philosophy, can be explicated.

A trope is literally a “turn” or deviation from literal speech or the conventional meaning and order of words. The number of possible turns has never been determined definitively, but they include all of the figures of speech which the play of the categories of similarity and difference, spatial or temporal relationship, qualitative variation among members of a single species or genus, and contrastive inversion makes possible, from ablatio (“taking away”) to zeugma (“yoking”).

Within the general category of figures of speech, however, it has been conventional since the Renaissance to discriminate among four principal modes of figuration and to classify figures of speech in terms of four fundamental categories: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. These categories or class names of the figures of speech are derived from the consideration of the mode of relationship presumed to sanction the conjunction or disjunction of entities or their qualities signified in the specific figure of speech employed. Thus, metaphor (literally, “transfer”) is sanctioned by the presumption of some resemblance between any two or more objects conventionally classified as belonging to different species. Metonymy (literally, “name change”) presupposes the spatial or temporal contiguity of the objects conflated in a reductive metaphor. Synecdoche (literally, “grasping together”) presupposes the sharing of essential qualities behind or beneath manifest attributes of two or more entities. And irony (literally, “illusion”) presupposes a fundamental contrast between things or qualities conventionally presumed to be affined or similar.
Following the usage of post-Renaissance rhetoricians, therefore, I shall use the term *trope* to refer to the mode of relationship presupposed in the use of any given turn of speech and the term *figure* to refer to any specific turn in an utterance or discourse. In other words, the tropes will be the class names of generic categories of figures of speech. Thus, a *catachresis* (such as “blind mouths”) is a figure of speech classified in the genus *irony*, because it gains its effect by playing upon the sense of contrast between eyes (to which the adjective *blind* might be conventionally applied) and mouths (which are not normally thought of as being blind). The force of the figure derives from the contrast between the expectation of what noun might follow the adjective *blind* (eyes) and the noun (*mouths*) actually used by Milton (in *Lycidas*) in this phrase. The *revisionary* aspect of this figure, to use Freud’s term, derives from the retrospective reflection compelled by the conjunction of the noun *mouths* with the adjective *blind*. The total effect is to widen our appreciation of the force of both the adjective and the noun as signs and, at the same time, to bring under question implicitly the rule of usage which had formerly constrained us to use *blind* primarily with *eyes*, and *mouths* primarily with adjectives such as *loud, silent, open, closed*, and so on. In fact, *blind* in this context has the effect of suggesting both “unseeing” and “open” and either “vocal” or “mute,” depending upon the secondary associations we bring to the words *blind* and *mouths* together.

I will pursue the discussion of the other tropes shortly. For the moment, I will concentrate on the analogies between the trope of irony and Freud’s category of secondary revision in his discussion of the dream-work, since it is in this case that the similarities between rhetorical and Freudian concepts are most easily perceivable.

The principal example of secondary revision given by Freud is the dreamer’s recognition during the dream that “this is only a dream” (my emphasis). Such a recognition occurs, he tells us, when the censor has been taken unawares and has let through, into the dream’s manifest content, some “unacceptable material” (527; 400). In his discussion of other manifestations of secondary revision, Freud speaks about both what happens in the dream and what happens in the analysand’s account of the dream, that is, the dream-report. Thus, for example, he notes the presence in what must obviously be the dream-report of interpolations introduced by the phrase *as if* (“it was as if I was descending an endless staircase”) and additions to or subtractions from the original account of the dream. Secondary revision, Freud concludes, seeks to remodel the dream material into “something like a day-dream” (530; 401–2).
This interpretation, addition, subtraction, or remolding presupposes a certain psychic distance from the dream experience and, moreover, a heightened psychic consciousness, an interplay of the sleeping and the waking worlds, where the critical faculties of the dreamer are brought into play, and the dream features are refashioned in the service of such waking values as logical consistency, propriety, consistency, coherency, and the rest (528–37; 400 ff.). Secondary revision is ironical in mode because it mediates between those manifest features of the dream which are identical with the dream-thoughts and the imperatives of the censor. It is ironical insofar as it takes a critical stance vis-à-vis the dream-contents. And it is ironical insofar as it seeks to substitute another, more “suitable” content for the offending one or else seeks to deny the significance of the dream in the process of dreaming (“this is only a dream”).

As Laplanche and Pontalis point out, “secondary revision may be said to resemble rationalization.” What is meant in ordinary parlance by rationalization may itself be termed ironical, insofar as the rationalizer is seeking to mediate between alternative accounts of the same set of phenomena, recognizes at least two possible accounts, and wishes both to defend the preferred version and negate or neutralize the distasteful one. As in daydreaming, so, too, in secondary revision, the psyche is simultaneously dreaming and directing the contours of the dream in response to wish-fulfilling fantasies. There is present, then, in secondary revision as described by Freud, the same duality of referent characteristically met with in ironic discourse: to some manifest object, on the one side, and to a secondary, indirectly indicated object, on the other side.

That this ironical element is crucial to Freud’s conception of the process that he calls secondary revision is further suggested by the kinds of example he cites to illustrate the process: the “joke” inscriptions on the Fliegende Blätter, intended to make a scramble of letters look like a Latin motto while really having a meaning only in German; and Havelock Ellis’s earlier characterization of the process: “Sleeping consciousness we may even imagine as saying to itself in effect, ‘Here comes our master, waking consciousness, who attaches such mighty importance to reason and logic and so forth. Quick! gather things up, put them in order — any order will do — before he enters to take possession’” (539). The phrase that serves as an emblem of the whole process (“It is only a dream”) is itself an example of the ironic figure of thought known as syncrisis (Latin, dissimulatio), or saying one thing and meaning another.

The correspondence of the mechanism of secondary revision to the
trope of irony is easily seen, for the play of contrasts between manifest and latent meanings is most easily discerned in the operations of both processes: contrasts between the true and the false, the desirable and the undesirable, appearance and reality, the logical and the illogical. If Freud is right in his general analysis of the nature and function of dreams, then all dreams are ironical—saying one thing but meaning another, in the way that poetic allegories are ironical. And condensation, displacement, and representation may be said to function in the service of this generally ironic purpose. But there is a double irony in the process of secondary revision; for as Freud notes, this is a process that operates on materials already distorted through the working of the other mechanisms of dream formation. Freud’s insistence that secondary revision not only works on preformed materials but also “operates simultaneously in a conductive and selective sense upon the mass of material present in the dream-thoughts” does not detract from the ironical nature of the process. On the contrary, this fact merely points to the similarity between the operations of the sleeping and the waking consciousness, in the latter of which irony is a primary, rather than secondary, function of discourse.

There can be no doubt, however, that Freud consigns to secondary revision and, a fortiori, to irony a second order of importance in comparison to the other mechanisms of condensation, displacement, and representation. This is suggested by his location of the operations of secondary revision on the threshold between waking and sleeping consciousness and his insistence on its predominance in that form of near-waking consciousness called daydreaming. Accordingly, we would be justified in concluding that from a Freudian perspective, this trope has to be accorded a privileged place in that form of conscious fiction making which includes art, speculative philosophy, poetry, all types of narrative, and even science—where systematization in response to some version of a reality principle is the conscious aim.

This is not to say, of course, that condensation, displacement, and representation do not have their place in waking thought. It is impossible to imagine it without them. Along with perception, they provide, as it were, the raw material out of which the waking consciousness makes its images of reality, which are then refined by secondary revisions more or less conscious and aim oriented. In the dream-work, however, the other operations are more important. The further we fall into dream-sleep, the less we revise; the less we revise, the more we allow the free play of primary figuration. Or, in Freud’s terminology, the less “wakeful” we are in dreaming, the
more easily we condense, displace, and represent in order to compose the structure of the dream-content.

Condensation is a process by which both the elements of the dream and the dream as a whole are charged or supercharged (overdetermined) with fictive force. Theorists of psychoanalysis now generally hold that the operations of this mechanism cannot be dissociated from those of the mechanism of displacement, since condensation occurs when a single idea comes to “represent several associated chains at whose point of intersection it is located.” In other words, a condensation occurs along a diachronic axis at the point where a number of chains of displacements meet. In The Interpretation of Dreams, however, Freud stresses the compressing or compacting function of this mechanism: “Dreams are brief, meagre and laconic in comparison with the range and wealth of the dream-thoughts” (313; 235). The dream-thoughts are packed or layered, creating an effect of depth along a vertical axis. Thus, Freud contrasts any written account of a dream which “may perhaps fill half a page” and the interpreter’s analysis of it, setting out the dream-thoughts underlying it and possibly occupying “six, eight, or a dozen times as much space.” But condensation is not to be confused with mere reduction of the “size” of the dream or, for that matter, with omissions in the dream-report (315; 234). On the contrary, the examples Freud gives to elucidate the process of condensation (puns, neologisms, and slips of the tongue) and his insistence that “the work of condensation in dreams is seen at its clearest when it handles words and names” (330; 248) suggest that the concept of condensation represents Freud’s reworking or rediscovery of the trope of metaphor.

In condensation, as in metaphor, it is the functioning of some third term, usually a shared attribute, which serves as the unspoken justification for the linking of two entities or events by the copula of equivalency. Just as the term beauty functions as the unspoken third term justifying the identification of the beloved with the rose in the metaphorical figure “My love is a rose” so, too, Freud, in his analysis of “The Dream of the Botanical Monograph,” writes that the botanical monograph appearing in the dream “turned out to be an ‘intermediate common entity’ between the two experiences of the previous day: it was taken over unaltered from the indifferent impression and was linked with the psychically significant event by copious associative connections” (316; 238). Moreover, he continues:

Not only the compound idea, “botanical monograph,” however, but each of its components, “botanical” and “monograph” separately, led by numerous
connecting paths deeper and deeper into the tangle of dream-thoughts. “Botanical” was related to the figure of Professor Gartner [Gardener], to the blooming looks of his wife, to my patient Flora and to the lady [Frau L.] of whom I had told the story of the forgotten flowers. Gartner led in turn to the laboratory and to my conversation with Königstein. My two patients [Flora and Frau L.] had been mentioned in the course of this conversation. A train of thought joined the lady with the flowers to my wife’s favourite flowers and thence to the title of the monograph which I had seen for a moment during the day. In addition to these, “botanical” recalled an episode at my secondary school and an examination while I was at the University. A fresh topic touched upon in my conversation with Dr. Königstein—my favourite hobbies—was joined, through the intermediate link of what I jokingly called my favourite flower, the artichoke, with the train of thought proceeding from the forgotten flowers. Behind “artichokes” lay, on the one hand, my thoughts about Italy and, on the other hand, a scene from my childhood which was the opening of what have since become my intimate relations with books. Thus “botanical” was a regular nodal point in the dream. Numerous trains of thought converged upon it, which, as I can guarantee, had appropriately entered into the context of the conversation with Dr. Königstein. Here we find ourselves in a factory of thoughts where, as in the “weaver’s masterpiece”—

\begin{quote}
Ein Tritt tausend Fäden regt,  
Die Schifflein herüber hinüber schiessen,  
Die Fäden ungesehen fließen,  
Ein Schlag tausend Verbindungen schlägt.  
\end{quote}

[A thousand threads one treadle throws  
Where fly the shuttles hither and thither  
Unseen the threads are knit together  
And an infinite combination grows.  
—Bayard Taylor’s translation of Goethe’s Faust, pt. 1, scene 4]

So, too, “monograph” in the dream touches upon two subjects: the one-sidedness of my studies and the costliness of my favourite hobbies. The first investigation leads us to conclude that the elements “botanical” and “monograph” found their way into the content of the dream because they possessed copious contacts with the majority of the dream-thoughts, because that is to say, they constituted ‘nodal points’ upon which a great number of the dream-
thoughts converged, and because they had several meanings in connection with the interpretation of the dream. The explanation of this fundamental fact can also be put in another way: each of the elements of the dream’s content turns out to have been “overdetermined”—to have been represented in the dream-thoughts many times over. (316–18; 238–39; my emphases)

We may add: overdetermined in the way that any metaphor must be; for to assert the identity of two entities or events manifestly different, as one does in metaphor, is not only a negative evasion of the literal but also a positive joining of that which God or nature has put asunder. Such joining is inevitably overdetermined, as the effort to leap any gap must be. And if this is the case with a single metaphor, how much more so must it be the case with chains of metaphors which, in allegory as in dreams, represent not only condensations of individual elements but a condensation of all of these condensations.

Not only are the elements of a dream determined by the dream-thoughts many times over, but the individual dream-thoughts are represented in the dream by several elements. Associative paths lead from one element of the dream to several dream-thoughts, and from one dream-thought to several elements of the dream. Thus a dream is not constructed by each individual dream-thought, or group of dream-thoughts, finding (in abbreviated form) separate representation in the content of the dream—in the kind of way in which an electorate chooses parliamentary representatives; a dream is constructed, rather, by the whole mass of dream-thoughts being submitted to a sort of manipulative process in which those elements which have the most numerous and strongest supports acquire the right of entry into the dream-content—in a manner analogous to election by scrutin de liste [vote by list].

In the case of every dream which I have submitted to an analysis of this kind I have invariably found these same fundamental principles confirmed: the elements of the dream are constructed out of the whole mass of dream-thoughts and each one of those elements is shown to have been determined many times over in relation to the dream-thoughts. (318; 239–40)

The crucial concept in this passage, for my purposes, is neither overdetermination nor determined but rather representation (Vertretung), for within this context it has a meaning quite different from that which it has in Freud’s discussion of representability (Darstellbarkeit) conceived primarily as pictorialization or more generally visualization of thoughts, words, and
ideas. He says that “the individual dream-thoughts are represented in the dream by several elements” which can be viewed as a kind of metaphorical conflation — in the way that Dante represents the Divine Presence in his *Commedia*. So, too, each individual element of the dream leads to “several dream-thoughts.” This characterization of the twofold relationship between an individual element of the dream-contents and a host of dream-thoughts, on the one side, and between an individual dream-thought and several elements, on the other, conjures up a complex web of relationships that are all conflated in the manifestly archetypal function of the two images “botanical” and “monograph.” They are metaphors of subsets of metaphors ("blooming looks," the names Flora and Gartner, “artichokes,” “studies,” “hobbies,” and so forth) which have literal referents, certainly, but are themselves charged with secondary or figurative meanings as well. *Conden-sation*, in short, is Freud’s term for those complex metaphors which gather other, simpler metaphorical images together into a chain of associations of the sort met with in allegory. His system gains in persuasive power by his invention of his own terminological system for designating the relationships between primary and secondary levels of dreams. But his characterization of those relationships is strictly analogous to that which conventional rhetoric designates as sanctioning the trope of metaphor and the construction of figures of thought by resemblance.

To be sure, Freud speaks only of “connecting paths,” “trains of thought,” “intermediate links,” and so on, which relate one image to another in “the tangle of dream-thoughts.” The elements “botanical” and “monograph” are said to have “found their way into the content of the dream” *because* they possessed “copious contacts with the majority of the dream-thoughts.” This adds little to our understanding of the nature of these contacts — as little as the appositive clauses that follow it: “*because*, that is to say, they constituted ‘nodal points’ upon which a great number of dream-thoughts converged, and *because* they had several meanings in connection with the interpretation of the dream” (my emphases). It must be granted, however, that in Freud’s characterization of the process, what he calls “trains of thought” are formed by chains of figures of speech which are both metaphorical and metonymical in nature.

Thus, for example, some of the connections are provided by the apprehension of generic similarities apprehended across species differences, that is, in the mode of metaphor. “Professor Gartner,” “the blooming looks” of his wife, Freud’s patient “Flora,” “his wife’s favourite flowers,” and the “title of the monograph” are generically related by virtue of their shared
florality. But florality is a species attribute only of the name of Freud’s patient and those flowers actually favored by Freud’s wife. Gartner, however, is related to flowers only as a gardener is related to flowers, that is, by contiguity rather than resemblance. Similarly, the “title of the monograph” is related to flowers only insofar as botany includes, among other things, the study of flowering plants, thus by a metonymy that characterizes a whole scientific discipline by only one of its objects of study.

We can say, then, that Freud, in his analysis of the dream, offers a chain of metaphors (connections made on the basis of resemblance) and metonymies (connections made on the basis of contiguity) which he interprets in the mode of metaphor alone. He assumes that all of the connections are formed by apprehensions of a resemblance to the “botanical monograph” which “turned out to be the ‘intermediate common entity’ between the two experiences of the previous day” (316). In his view, all of the metaphors in the dream were associated by their resemblance to that common entity. As we have seen, however, his examples include both metaphors and metonymies.

Before proceeding to an analysis of Freud’s conception of displacement, it will be well to point out an ambiguity in the terminology of conventional rhetorical theory. As I noted earlier, the terms metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony function in this theory both as names of specific figures of speech and as names of classes of figures of speech. Thus, for example, “roseate dawn” is a metaphor and “fifty sails” (for “fifty ships”) is a metonymy; but a paranomasia or pun (flower=flour) is metaphorical because its effect is based on the resemblance between two words; whereas an antonomasia, in which a proper name is substituted for a quality associated with the person bearing it (Jovian head=godlike head) is metonymical, because it is based on the contiguity of the name and a quality.

The ambiguity of these terms is heightened by the fact that in common usage the word metaphor is employed to designate figures of speech in general, and the adjective metaphorical is used to characterize any figurative usage. Thus, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony are all commonly called metaphorical, and so they are inasmuch as they consist of the transfer (Latin, translatio) of the name or word for one thing to some other thing. What should be borne in mind, however, in distinguishing between a given figure of speech and the class of figures to which it may be assigned is the modality presumed to characterize the relationship existing between the entities designated by the names or words being exchanged. If the transfer is effected on the presumption of the resemblance between the things being
compared, the resultant figure of speech will be classified as a metaphor; if on the basis of their spatial or temporal contiguity, as metonymy; if on the basis of shared essential qualities, as synecdoche; and if on the basis of a suggested contrast in the face of apparent similarity, as irony.

These considerations permit us to distinguish between specific kinds of figuration present in a dream-content and the general process by which a set of figurations condenses the dream-content out of the dream-thought—or conversely, gather up the dream-thoughts under the aegis of a specific element of the dream-content. This general process functions in the mode of metaphor, “metafiguratively,” as it were, gathering specific figurations together under the sign of resemblance and fusing them into the structure of the manifest form of the dream-content.

Condensation, like metaphor, functions synchronically—operating on the vertical axis of the dream structure, correlating the surface and deep levels of the dream. Displacement, by contrast, functions diachronically, operating on the horizontal axis of the dream narrative, in order to effect variations in the intensities of condensation at different places within the total structure. Freud states as much: “The dream [content] is . . . differently centered from the dream-thoughts—its content has different elements as its central point.” Thus, “in the dream of the botanical monograph, . . . the central point of the dream-content was obviously the element ‘botanical’; whereas the dream-thoughts were concerned with the complications arising between colleagues from their professional obligations, and further with the charge that I was in the habit of sacrificing too much for the sake of my hobbies” (340). This decentering of principal elements of the dream-thoughts in the dream-contents, a process that seems to act contrary to the process of condensation effecting overdetermination (i.e., as a kind of underdetermination), Freud calls displacement. Freud gives comparatively little space in The Interpretation of Dreams to the mechanism of displacement, but in his summary of chapter 6, he attributes to this mechanism the power to effect “a transvaluation [Umwertung] of all psychological values” (545; 413).

Certainly, Freud seems to conceive displacement within the context of what Laplanche and Pontalis call “the hypothesis of a cathetic energy ‘capable of increase, diminution, displacement and discharges,’” that is, as a kind of electrical field across which energy charges flow, collect, and fuse. As thus envisioned, the dream elements form a system of connections along which a charge can run, from idea to idea, from affect to idea, or from affect to affect, coming to rest on any element different from that which occupies
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a central place in the dream-thoughts. Thus, displacement, like symbol-
ization and secondary revision, effects a difference between the dream-
thoughts and the dream-content. But the final effect of the process is less
important than the means by which the effect is achieved: displacement
effects a shift of psychic intensities across a chain of elements by substitutions
on the basis of contiguity.

To speak of displacement is to speak of deferral and substitution not
on the basis of resemblance or similarity of the entities exchanged but,
rather, on the basis of contiguity. “The consequence of the displacement,”
Freud writes, “is that the dream-content no longer resembles the core of the
dream-thoughts [reflected in the effects of condensation] and that the
dream gives no more than a distortion of the dream-wish which exists in
the unconscious.” Note that here Freud has introduced another term, design-
nating a metaoneiric level of psychic activity, that is, the dream-wish. This
wish, he continues, must “escape the censorship imposed by resistance,” and one
way it does so is by displacement of the “elements of the dream-thoughts”
(344; 259; my emphasis).

Now, as Freud conceives the process of displacement, elements may
be moved along a horizontal axis forward or backward in the dream-narrative
(operations corresponding to the figures of metalepsis [transumptio] and
prolepsis [anticipatio]) or along a vertical axis such that they are over-
stressed or understressed (operations corresponding to the figures of hy-
perbole [exaggeratio] and litotes [diminutio]). These two kinds of move-
ment or substitution, the rhetoricians tell us, play upon the distinction
between the inside and outside of a plane of conceptual content such that
denominations can occur in the mode of metonymy. The term metonymy
literally means only “name change” but specifically indicates the substitu-
tion of the name of an entity by the name of another entity contiguous with
it in time or space.

The most common forms of metonymy are those which substitute the
name of a cause for the name of an effect (as when we substitute lightning
for flash of light, suggesting that the lightning caused the flash) or the
reverse; or the substitution of a proper name (Jove) for a quality (power)
which the nominal referent possesses, or the reverse. The notion of sub-
stitutions of names drawn from outside the plane of conceptual content,
used by Lausberg to distinguish between metaphor and synecdoche, refers
to the presumption of a distinction between causes and effects or parts and
wholes, on the basis of which the borrowing of terms for substitution can
be effected. Thus, for example, the use of the name of Shakespeare for his
works (as in “I love to read Shakespeare”) presupposes a relationship between the author (cause) and his works (effect) on the basis of which the substitution of the one for the other can be made. (Cf. bottle for wine, i.e., container for thing contained; arms for battle, i.e., instruments for an activity; or crown for monarchy, i.e., part for the whole). What metonymy does is provide a basis for the kind of distinction that Freud wishes to make between the ideational content of dreams and the affectual weights with which their several elements may be charged in the dream-report itself. It is in the relationship between ideation and affect that displacement does its principal work in the dream-construction.

That such is the case is shown by Freud’s centering of his own discussion of examples of displacement in the subsection of chapter 6 entitled “Affects in Dreams.” In dreams, Freud says, “the ideational content is not accompanied by the affective consequences that we should regard as inevitable in waking thought. . . . In a dream I may be in a horrible, dangerous and disgusting situation without feeling any fear or repulsion; while another time, or the contrary, I may be terrified at something harmless and delighted at something childish.” Analysis of situations such as these suggests that “the ideational material has undergone displacement and substitutions, whereas the affects have remained unaltered” (497–98; 375–76).

Unlike condensation, which strengthens psychic intensities by aggregation and cross-sorting, displacement reorders ideas in such a way as to disengage them from the affective charge they would normally have in waking consciousness. Like metonymy, in short, displacement smooths out the surface of ideational experience, dissolves the distinction between forms and contents or signs and references, and effects substitutions across the ideational chain syntagmatically.

Thus, for example, in the dream of the three lions, in which the dreamer felt no fear in their presence, Freud first separates the images of the lions from the idea “lion” in the manner of a distinction between a container and contained; next, likens the distinction to that between a lion figure and Snug, the joiner, who hides in such a figure in A Midsummer Night’s Dream; then identifies the true ideational content of the trio of lions with the dreamer’s father’s superior (who was a “social lion” but had been kind to her [the dreamer] nonetheless); and ends, finally, with a moral: “the same is true of all dream-lions of which the dreamer is not afraid” (499–500; 377–78). The substitution of one ideational content (that of the image in the dream) for another ideational content (that of the true referent) is effected by displacement in the mode of metonymy. In the dream cited,
Freud seizes upon a metaphor (father’s superior = a social lion) and a chain of resemblances between real and metaphorical lions to disclose the ideational content of the presiding image. But the relationship between the two ideational contents (apparent and real), on the one side, and the dominant affect (lack of fear), on the other, is interpreted metonymically: specifically, the substitution of an image of lions for that of a leonine person within the context of an affect (fear) associated by contiguity only with the latter. The affect, in other words, is borrowed from a domain extrinsic to that in which the manifest ideational content would normally be found; or conversely, the ideational content is imported from an affective domain in which the manifest ideational content would normally be located.

The above can serve as an example of Freud’s use of the mode of metonymy to explicate substitutions along a horizontal axis in the manner suggested by the following diagram:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ideational Content 1} &= \text{lions} \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
\text{Affect 1} &= \text{fear} \\
\text{Ideational Content 2} &= \text{“a social lion”} \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
\text{Affect 2} &= \text{lack of fear}
\end{align*}
\]

Affect 2 (lack of fear) remains constant, while Ideational Content 1 is substituted for Ideational Content 2. Content 1 is substituted for Content 2 by virtue of their similarity (i.e., metaphorically); but Affect 2 can be linked to Ideational Content 1 by virtue of its contiguity with the common term of both contents, that is, “leoninity.” In a word, Affect 2 is linked to Ideational Content 2, as a specific person might be linked to a specific affect, that is, by the presence of the two in the same place. The axis of the substitution is horizontal because the base of the dream, its affect, remains constant throughout the process of substitution.

As an example of substitution along a vertical axis, we may take those examples of dreams that Freud analyzes in terms of substitution by antithesis. Antithesis itself is a figure of rhetoric (contention, contraposition, opposition), but Freud uses the term to characterize a process in which an affect is transformed into its opposite (fear into courage, love into hatred, sadness into cheerfulness, etc.). In other words, whereas in the dream of the three lions, Freud has concentrated on the substitution of one ideational content for another, in the dream displaying evidence of antithetical trans-
formations, he is concerned with the substitution of affective states. In these dreams, to be sure, the ideational contents are masked by displacement— for example, in the dream of the enemy warships, the Herr P. who appears as the governor of the castle along with Freud at the beginning of the dream and later dies as a result of Freud’s questions to him is revealed in the analysis to be a surrogate or double of Freud himself (500–501; 378–79). But the death of the governor is notable to Freud the analyst of the dream inasmuch as it made no impression on Freud the actor in the dream. Since the analysis revealed that the death of the governor was a symbolic apprehension (prolepsis) of Freud’s own “premature death,” it should have been attended by feelings of terror or fright. But it was not, and Freud speculates “it must have been” from the death scene that “the fright was detached and brought into connection with the sight of some warships,” which subsequently are shown in the dream to represent no threat to the castle and its inhabitants (Freud’s family) at all (502; 379–80). Since Freud believes the image of the warships to have derived from his observation of a flotilla during a visit to Venice, the memory of which was “filled with the most cheerful recollections,” Freud concludes that the affect that should have been present in the death scene had been displaced onto the scene of the warships’ appearance in the dream. Thus, he writes: “Here, then, in the process of changing the dream-thoughts into the manifest dream-content, I have transformed cheerfulness into fear, and I need only hint that this transformation was itself giving expression to a portion of the latent dream-content.” And he concludes: “This example proves, however, that the dream-work is at liberty to detach an affect from its connections in the dream-thoughts and introduce it at any other point it chooses in the manifest dream” (502; 379–80).

Leaving aside the adequacy of the details of the analysis of the dream, what are the specific moves Freud makes in the analysis itself? What, in a word, does he presuppose about the dream that permits him to postulate the displacement of one affect by another? The answer to these questions has to do with the metonymical conflations operating on the vertical axis of the dream structure, between ideational contents on the upper level and affects on the lower. Thus, “wherever there is an affect in the dream, it is also to be found in the dream-thoughts, but the reverse is not true.” That is, the conjoining of an affect with an ideational content always proceeds from the dream-thoughts to the dream-content, or the conjunctive impulse may be blocked, so that the dream-contents appear affectively indifferent—but it is impossible “to enter into the dream-thoughts without being deeply
moved” (505; 381). Having said this, however, Freud does not so much analyze as simply describe a process of affective displacement. Tropological analysis shows that the process operates in the mode of metonymy. Thus, in the dream, the image of the warships is shown to be linked to real warships that Freud observed in Venice. But whereas the original experience had been attended by feelings of happiness, the image in the dream had been charged with feelings of fear. This fear, in turn, was related by similarity to thoughts Freud had entertained about “the maritime war between America and Spain and to anxieties to which it had given rise about the fate of my relatives in America” (501–2; 379).

In suggesting that the fear felt in the dream at the sight of the warships was the result of a displacement of affect from the death of the governor, Freud implicitly links death and fear by contiguity rather than causality. If they were considered to be linked causally, then wherever the one appeared, the other would be present too. That Freud conceives death and fear to be linked by contiguity rather than causality can be inferred from the fact that he construes the affect fear as being detachable from the event death and projectable onto another event, the appearance of warships in the dream. The true ideational content of the warship image, the British ships observed at Venice, had actually been associated with another affect, namely, happiness. That happiness is associated with warships at all is a consequence of a metonymic substitution of an element in a situation (British warships) with the situation itself (the visit to Venice), that is, a substitution of part for whole. The ideational content warships is metaphorically related to the thought maritime war of Freud’s waking consciousness; and the anxiety associated, in this instance causally, with maritime war became detached from its causal nexus and cathected onto another ideational content, the ships in the dream, thus reinforcing the fear already detached from the scene of the governor’s death. As for the happiness displaced by the attachment of the affect fear to the ships that had originally in waking life been associated with it, this must now be supposed to have migrated into the region of the death scene, offsetting the affect fear, which was potentially occupying that site, and creating the indifference which Freud claims he felt in its presence.13

We may now specify the nature of the movement of these displacements. First, it should be noted that the affects are conceived to move horizontally on the level of the dream-thoughts, before surfacing, as it were, as affective colorations of images in the dream-contents. But the images become affectively charged by a movement that is articulated along a verti-
cal axis connecting the dream-contents to the dream-thoughts beneath them, and to the dream-wish or fear on yet a lower level. The horizontal movements follow a chain of contiguity (rather than resemblances). The connection between a given ideational content and its affective coloration as it appears in the dream-scenario is anything but causal, being purely adventitious in nature—any image might have been seized upon by the vagrant affect. The causal connection between the image and the affect is a consequence of some compromise between the imperatives of the censor and the dream-wish. There is no essential connection between ideational content and affect at all. They are related in the dream-scenario by contiguity only (525; 398).

The longest section of chapter 6 of *The Interpretation of Dreams* is devoted to presentability (*Darstellbarkeit*), the means by which dreams present logical relations among the elements of the dream-thoughts and translate notions, ideas, concepts, and words into pictorial images, symbols, and so forth. Working in the service of condensation and displacement, presentation is conceived nonetheless by Freud as a mechanism or process of the dream-work in its own right. The relation between a presentation and what it presents is direct, but the purpose of presentation is to mask both the elements of the dream-thoughts and the relations between them. Condensation and displacement determine what might be called the gross structure of the dream, the syntax, as it were. The means and considerations (*Rücksichten*) of representability, by contrast, provide what might be called the lexical and grammatical components: images, on the one side, and categories of image, on the other.

The connectives *if* (conditional), *because* (causal), *just as* (simile), *although* (counterfactual), *either . . . or* (antithetical), and “all other conjunctions without which we cannot understand sentences or speeches,” by representing diverse elements simultaneously, by representing some parts more extensively than others, by giving them exactly equal weight, or by representing them as the same thing, and by superimposing two visual images upon each other or otherwise combining them by “reversal, or turning a thing into its opposite,” or by reversing chronological order so that, for example, an effect precedes its cause, and even producing a “dream within a dream” to express the wish that “the thing described as a dream had never happened” (347–53; 260–68)—these means of representation are to be distinguished from the more nearly conscious operations of secondary revision by which the dream-contents are further endowed with an explicit logical coherence or distanced ironically.
Such are the syntactical, or combinatorial, techniques employed in the dream-work, corresponding to the department of rhetoric called arrangement (dispositio, taxis). It will be noted that, for Freud, these techniques are always employed in the interests of unification or homogeneity of manifest contents. Thus, Freud remarks that “one and only one of these logical relations is very highly favored by the mechanism of dream-formation, namely, the relation of similarity, consonance, or approximation—the relation of ‘just as’” (354; 266–67). So, too, the dream-work takes place within a mood of positivity, even though it must use masking operations to achieve its aims. “‘No’ seems not to exist so far as dreams are concerned. They show a particular preference for combining contraries into a unity or for representing them as one and the same thing” (353; 265).

Now, it might be thought that here Freud has once more rediscovered the metaphorical elements of the dream, the trope that is likened to condensation, especially inasmuch as he stresses the preference of the representation for “similarity, consonance, the possession of common attributes.” But, in fact, Freud explicitly states that “the representation of the relation of similarity is assisted by the tendency of the dream-work toward condensation (355; 267). As was shown in our discussion of condensation above, the dream-work utilizes the similarity of images arising in the dream to effect condensations, and their dissimilarity to effect displacements. But what makes two things similar is not their shared manifest attributes but rather some “concealed common element” (357; 268–69) which oftentimes—as in the case of the construction of monsters in dreams—“could never have been objects of actual perceptions” (359; 270). The “concealed common element” that justifies identification and composition of different aspects of the dream-thoughts is less an external attribute (such as the warships in the dream of the castle) than a single essential quality, such that any object possessing that quality can stand for any other object possessing it. This relationship corresponds to the linguistic trope of synecdoche (and figure of thought by development: hypotyposis or intellectio, literally, “understanding one thing with another”).

Lausberg defines synecdoche as a “displacement of the denomination of the thing indicated onto the plain of conceptual content, i.e., from the greater to the smaller or the reverse or from the genus to species or the reverse” (e.g., “New York” for “the baseball team located there,” “arms” for “sword and gun both,” or “heart” for the quality of “generosity” attributed both to the person and the organ designated by that term (as in “he is all heart”). The distinctions between synecdoche and metaphor, on the one
hand, and between synecdoche and metonymy, on the other, are important not only for the understanding of the tropes themselves but also for understanding the distinction in Freud between condensation and representation, on the one side, and between representation and displacement, on the other. Here the differentia consist of identification by shared external attributes (metaphor and condensation), by contiguity (metonymy and displacement), and by shared essential qualities (synecdoche and representation). So much is obvious from the care that Freud gives to the means of representation used in the dream-work to produce the effects of identification and compositional integrity. And it becomes even more obvious when, in section D of chapter 6, he turns to the classification of the symbols actually appearing in dreams in the service of the considerations informing the dream-work.

In his introduction to section D, Freud contrasts displacements consisting in the “replacing of some one particular idea by another in some way closely associated with it . . . used to facilitate condensation insofar as, by their means, instead of two elements, a single common element intermediate between them found its way into the dream” (374; 282; my emphasis) and displacement in which “a single element has its verbal form replaced by another,” that is, “the abstract expression in the dream-thought” is “exchanged for a pictorial and concrete one” (375; 283). The relationship indicated here is that between an abstract and a concrete term (376; 284; my emphasis), a relationship that Freud likens to that implicit in hieroglyphic writing. Here the image and the thought are conceived to share an essential quality.

For example, in the dream of the lady at the opera, the tower in the dream is interpreted as standing for both the high social position of the man she desired and the place of his ultimate confinement, an insane asylum, commonly referred to as a “Fool’s Tower” (Narrenturm) (378; 285). So, too, in another dream analyzed by Freud, a lady’s hat is analyzed as a symbol of both the male genitals and the lady’s husband by virtue of the shape of the hat, on the one side, and its beauty, on the other (395–97; 299–300). In neither case is the adequacy of the symbol to that which it represents dependent upon the contiguity of the objects providing the terms of the equation. Towers and aristocrats and insane asylums are not related in part-whole relationships, nor do they normally appear together simultaneously. Nor can towers be said to resemble aristocrats or insane asylums. What they shared in the dreamer’s unconscious was the essential quality of height, physical, social, and cultural, respectively (Narrenturm being the associa-
tion supplied by Freud in this instance as a kind of folk memory element permitting understanding of the connection). And similarly for the hat with the uneven, drooping flaps in the second dream. The hat, the lady’s husband, and his genitals were associated in the lady’s unconscious by their shared essential quality of beauty, not because they were all normally contiguous with one another or because they all resembled one another in external attributes (although in this case, the uneven length of the hat’s flaps is interpreted as resembling the unevenness of the husband’s genitals). Similarly with neckties, which in Freud’s view not only resemble the penis, but even more importantly, “can be chosen according to taste—a liberty which, in the case of the object symbolized, is forbidden by nature” (391; 295).

The sharing of essential qualities by objects, their names, and their conceptual contents, Freud argues, derives from patterns of experience that are personal, on the one hand, and more generally public or cultural, on the other. And it is these patterns that make it possible for him to conceive of a science of dream interpretation that can disclose the essential quality types to be found in all dreams. In the personal domain, the somatic structure and individual life history of the dreamer (and especially the psychosexual development) are crucial. “The more one is concerned with the solution of dreams, the more one is driven to recognize that the majority of the dreams of adults deal with sexual material and give expression to erotic wishes” (431; 326–27). It is the predominantly sexual and somatic basis of dreams that makes a science of symbolism or representation possible (386; 291–92). Just as there are a topics of the body and a syntax of psychosexual development, there are a topics and syntax of a given individual’s dream patterns.

But on the public or cultural side, another shared base for symbolization can be found: symbolism, Freud says, “is not peculiar to dreams, but is characteristic of unconscious ideation, in particular among the people, and it is to be found in folklore, and popular myths, legends, linguistic idioms, proverbial wisdom and current jokes, to a more complete extent than in dreams” (386; 291–92). And the history of the race displays the same kind of continuity as that found in the history of the individual: “Things that are symbolically connected today were probably united in prehistoric times by conceptual and linguistic identity” (387; 292). It is this twofold order of experience that necessitates a twofold technique of interpretation: based, on the one hand, “on the dreamer’s associations” and, on the other, “on the interpreter’s knowledge of symbols” (388; 293). It remains to the interpreter’s discretion whether an element of the dream-content is to be taken
literally or figuratively (376; 283–84), but in the latter case, a symbolic interpretation proceeds on the basis of “established linguistic usage” (378; 285)—as in the Narrenturm example cited above.

Dreaming, Freud says, differs from waking thought in both degree and kind. “The dream-work is not simply more careless, more irrational, more forgetful and more incomplete than waking thought; it is completely different from it qualitatively and for that reason not immediately comparable with it. It does not think, calculate or judge in any way at all; it restricts itself to giving things a new form” (545; 413).

Freud’s omission from late editions of this work of two essays by Otto Rank which he had appended to chapter 6 in early editions, “Dreams and Creative Writing” and “Dreams and Myths,” indicates perhaps Freud’s apprehension of the extent to which he had imported traditional concepts of rhetoric and poetics into his analysis of the dream-work. The similarities between dreaming and poetizing had been remarked by him many times, with the suggestion that dreams and poems were informed by similar aims, mechanisms, and considerations. But although Freud tended in his writings on art and literature to view them as sublimations of the same materials present in the dream-thoughts and as governed by the same wish-fulfilling fantasies, he nonetheless continued to distinguish rigorously between the general aims of dreams and those of artistic products. Whereas the latter were concerned to communicate information, the former were concerned to mask it; and whereas art sought the appropriate form for the representation of ideational contents, the dream sought a form that masked much more than it revealed.

And it was the form of the dream that mattered most to him. This is why he considered the dream-work as the linchpin of his system. In a note added to The Interpretation of Dreams in 1925, Freud spoke of the confusion into which many analysts had fallen by “seeking the essence of dreams in their latent content.” This confusion betokened a failure to distinguish between the form and the content of the dream. “At bottom,” he said, “dreams are nothing other than a particular form of thinking, made possible by the conditions of the state of sleep. It is the dream-work which creates that form, and it alone is the essence of dreaming—the explanation of its peculiar nature” (544, n. 2; 413, n. 2; my emphasis). In other words, the form of the dream is itself a content, in exactly the same way that we conceive it to be in our assessment of the value of a work of art.

Needless to say, I am as little concerned to assess the validity of Freud’s notions about the relation between dream-work and art-work as I
am to assess the clinical utility of his theory of the former. What I have sought to do is to demonstrate that, in his efforts to identify the mechanisms by which the dream-work gives new form to the ideational contents and their attendant affective charges arising on the level of the dream-thoughts, Freud has reinvented, rediscovered, or simply recalled the traditional theory of tropes as found in nineteenth-century rhetoric and poetics. And not only has he recalled it, but he has recalled as well the relations among the tropes which that theory has presupposed. To say this, I hasten once more to stress, is neither to detract from the originality of Freud's achievement nor to suggest an influence on or borrowing by him from another field of inquiry. On the contrary, the fine distinctions that Freud draws and the attention to detail which he displays in his reflections on the dream-work permit us to view his chapter 6 of *The Interpretation of Dreams* as a contribution to the general field of theory of figuration. As long as that field had been limited to the analysis of high art, little progress could be made beyond the kind of tropological analyses which medieval and Renaissance rhetoricians used in order to discern the relation between literal and figurative dimensions of discourse. And this because those engaged in the analysis of a specific work inevitably had an interest in defending or undermining a particular interpretation of the semantic content of a given (especially classic) work. This was hardly the case with such personal or private productions as dreams, especially of persons openly described frequently as neurotics. Here the relation between form and content, between syntax and semantics, and the nature of their mediation could be removed from the question of the authority of the *analysandum* as a cultural paradigm or monument. So, too, the whole question of the quality of the creative psyche raised by Romanticist aesthetics in terms of the difference between genius and ordinary consciousness could be mooted and the mechanisms of transformational tactics studied as a topic *sui generis.*

Freud's use of literary examples to illustrate aspects of the dream-work indicates the affinity that existed in his own mind between dreaming and poetic creation. This presumed affinity itself would have provided the models necessary to suggest the tropological nature of the dream-work. His contemplation of writings composed by authors who consciously used the theory of tropes to guide their own composition (e.g., Chaucer, Dante, Shakespeare, Rabelais, Rousseau, Goethe, Schiller, and Heine, not to mention lesser lights such as Daudet, Dumas, and Rider Haggard) would have been enough to inspire his translation of the traditional principles of prose composition to the analysis of the principles of the dream-work.
I stress, too, that this analysis of the tropological nature of Freud’s conception of the dynamics of the dream-work says nothing at all about the validity or invalidity of other concepts used to explain the purpose, aim, and function of dreaming. Theories such as those of infantile sexuality, Oedipus complex, latency, return of the repressed, and so on have to do with the semantics of consciousness rather than with the grammar, syntax, and rhetoric of dreaming. It would be interesting, however, to undertake a tropological analysis of such diachronic compositions as *Totem and Taboo* or *Moses and Monotheism*, works that, precisely because they are metapsychological, must display the operations of the tropes for the mediation between data and plot structures which give them their specific narrative forms and mythic contents.

Such an analysis must wait, however, for we are less interested in explicating Freud’s *methodus interpretandi* than in suggesting the ways in which his version of tropology illuminates the conventional theory of figuration. Freud provides us not only with a terminology for characterizing the major terms of non- or extralogical thinking but also with a veritable psychology of figurative discourse. The classical and Renaissance rhetoricians had derived a taxonomy of figures of speech and a theory of the classes of such figures analytically—from the study of the structures of discourse but on the basis of an unquestioned distinction between literal and figurative meaning in speech. Freud’s tropological theory brings under question this distinction, at least in the domain of dreaming. To be sure, in his conception of the dream, the true, real, or literal meaning of the dream is given in the dream-thoughts; the dream-contents are a distortion of this meaning. This distortion, by contrast, is *literally* the literal level of the dream, that which is actually reported. And before its meaning can be disclosed, that is, before its relationship to the unconscious of the dreamer can be established, it must be decoded tropologically, that is, stylistically. It is for this reason that dream analysis in psychotherapy could profit from a study of the theory of tropes.

But whatever contribution the theory of tropes might make to psychotherapy, the gain to the theory of tropes to be had by study of Freud’s theory of the dream-work is even greater. For Freud’s work points to the grounding of the phenomena of style in the structures of unconscious ideation and to the solution of the problem of the logic of practical discourse.