Dreaming Scientists and Scientific Dreamers: Freud as a Reader of French Dream Literature

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Argument

The argument of this paper is to situate The Interpretation of Dreams within an historical context. It is, therefore, impossible to believe Freud entirely when he staged himself in his letters to Fliess as a mere discoverer. In reality Freud also felt he belonged to a learned community of dream specialists, whom I call “dreaming scientists” and “scientific dreamers.” Instead of speaking, as Ellenberger does, in terms of influence, I will be offering as an example a portrait of Freud as a reader of two French authors, Maury, and indirectly, Hervey de Saint-Denys. I will analyze how Freud staged himself as replacing Maury and dreaming sometimes like Hervey de Saint-Denys. My premise in this work is that we must forget Freud, in order to adventure into a learned dream culture peculiar to the nineteenth century. Only afterwards can we come back to Freud and place him in this context as a creative heir.

In a historiographic tradition inaugurated by Ernest Jones, Freud only became Freud from the moment he began self-analysis and discovered at the same time the meaning of dreams and of his dreams, thus opening up a “royal road.”¹ Jones maintained that The Interpretation of Dreams was “Freud’s most original work” (Jones [1953] 1954, 384). He underlined some youthful letters to Freud’s fiancee, in which he recalled his dream book, and narrated some of his dreams. A letter dated 1885 mentions “a dream within a dream” (ibid., 386). This early interest in dreams, presented as characteristic of Freud, heralded a future discovery. Jones then meticulously followed the development of the writing of the book, up until December 1898, when Freud was faced with the “frightfully tedious task of making a review of previous literature on the subject.” Jones quoted a letter from 6 August 1899, in which Freud described the progress of his book in these terms: “At the beginning, the dark forest of authors [who do not see the trees], hopelessly lost on wrong tracks. Then a concealed pass through which I lead the reader – my specimen dream with its peculiarities, details, indiscretions, bad jokes – and then suddenly the right view” (Freud [1887–1904] 1985, 365). Freud used this metaphor again at the beginning of chapter 3, before finally setting out his cardinal thesis which

¹ For a similar view in France, see for example Anzieu 1959 and 1975. For a view, inspired by Lacan, on Freud’s reception in France, see Scheidhauer 1981.
stated that the dream was “the fulfillment of a wish” (Freud [1900a] 1964, 122). Yet according to Jones, Freud was joking when he talked about the “dark forest of authors” for his first chapter was “a masterpiece in itself . . . above all he selected from diverse sources all that has positive value and wove the whole into a narrative that is an excellent introduction to his own contributions. His capacity for mastering and giving order to a mass of heterogeneous material was never better displayed” (Jones [1953] 1954, 393). In Jones’ opinion, Freud had had no real forerunners on the subject of dreams, contrary to what had previously happened when he had attended Charcot’s lessons in Paris, or when Breuer had brought the case of Anna O to his attention. He had rather created forerunners worthy of him by putting in order a mass of heterogeneous and superficial writings. After Jones, indeed, many scholars have refurbished this story. But his perspective remains, I believe, emblematic. It is therefore important to focus on his narrative recognized as classic.

While Jones is rather hagiographic, we have also to take issue with the opposite position. For instance, against Freud, the neurobiologist Hobson tries to rehabilitate nineteenth century scientists. For him, The Interpretation of Dreams stood in the way of scientific research on dreams and dreaming – that is to say, in his view, on the “dreaming brain” (Hobson 1988). Against both Jones and Hobson, we have to situate Freud within an historical context. It is, therefore, impossible to believe Freud entirely when he staged himself in his letters to Fliess as a mere discoverer.

In reality, despite what he maintained in some of these letters, Freud also felt he belonged to a learned community of dream specialists. Even if he claimed, provocatively, to belong to a tradition held in contempt by his colleagues, he did not quote any popular contemporary Traumdeutung, but rather put the spotlight on an older author, Artemidorus of Daldis, and made a long and thorough inventory of the erudite literature of his age. What is more, he did not end his “tedious task” in 1900: he finished his first chapter entitled “The scientific literature on dreams,” and also his bibliography, during successive reprints of the book. Even if this underwent great transformations in relation to what was currently at stake in an effervescent and contradictory psychoanalytical movement – as Lydia Marinelli and Andreas Mayer have shown – Freud continued to refer to a past existing well before the birth of this movement.

The first chapter of The Interpretation of Dreams, devoted to dream literature, is often difficult to understand for a contemporary reader. The works and their authors are not easy to identify. In choosing to treat his first chapter thematically rather than author by author, unlike some of his predecessors, Freud often dislocated and atomized their contributions by obscuring their own works: in certain respects, he himself transformed the science of dreams of his time into a “dark forest.” Yet in return, Freud appropriated

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2 For a general survey on dreaming, experiments, and learned culture on dreams in the nineteenth century, see Ellengerber 1970; Rapa 1988; Sand 1992; Métroix 2000; and Shamdasani 2003, 100–162. For a survey on the impact of German dream literature on Freud, see Goldmann 2003.
this science, making of it an introduction to his work as Jones maintained, from an angle which is obviously different from my own.

Instead of speaking, as Ellenberger does, in terms of influence, I will be taking a viewpoint similar to the Belgian psychoanalyst Francois Duyckaerts, who published an article in 1989 entitled “Sigmund Freud: reader of Joseph Delboeuf.” I will be offering as an example a portrait of Freud as a reader, in 1899, 1909 and 1914, of two French authors, Maury, and indirectly, Hervey de Saint-Denys. I will analyze how Freud staged himself as replacing Maury and dreaming sometimes like Hervey de Saint-Denys.

My premise in this work is that we must forget Freud, in order to adventure into the dark forest of a learned dream culture peculiar to the nineteenth century. Only afterwards can we come back to Freud and place him in this context as a creative heir.

**Dreams and scientific self-observation in nineteenth-century France**

During the first half of the nineteenth century, sleep and dreams became a field of investigation claiming to be positive and secular, rejecting any religious or magical approach. Night was not a potential bringer of supernatural messages, whether divine, like prophetic dreams, or diabolical, like nightmares, nor did it send premonitory messages, such as those explained in the popular keys to dreams. Neither did it constitute another world, superior to the real one, which was the Romantic point of view. Sleep and dreams were to become a subject for “science.” The study of dreams, phenomena banal and intriguing which affect all human beings and which anyone can talk about on waking, constituted an intermediary field in which philosophers, doctors and amateurs, sometimes famous or prestigious, had a vested interest.

Why do we sleep and dream? They wondered, often worried by the question. More exactly, what, or who, sleeps and dreams? Cabanis ([1802] 1980), Maine de Biran ([1809] 1984), and Jouffroy ([1827] 1979) put these questions, which continued to be asked throughout the nineteenth century. Cabanis, whose works constituted a major medical reference, believed that dreams reflected the relationship between the physical and the moral in man, and were essentially an expression of the body and the mind. Cut off from external sensations and the outside world, the sleeping brain amplifies internal feelings from the body, notably those from the genital organs. Far from being taboo, the subject of erotic dreams already raised by Plato, Saint Augustine, and the fathers of the Church became a classic theme in nineteenth-century medico-psychological literature, after Cabanis. The brain, moreover, was not a simple, passive organ for recording sensation; according to Cabanis, it functioned spontaneously without either internal or external sensations, during sleep and in states of ecstasy or delirium. Cabanis

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thus asserted that there was a strong link between dreams and madness. His disciple, the alienist Moreau de Tours, pushed this thesis to the limit, maintaining the identity of dreams and madness (Moreau de Tours 1855).

Maine de Biran, who appeared posthumously as the master of official French spiritualist philosophy, took up most of Cabanis’ views. In his opinion, dreams came from organic life, and the dreamer was only a body incapable of an effort of will, and consequently abandoned by its ego. Dream life thus came within the scope of physiology or psycho-physiology, rather than of psychology, strictly speaking. Nevertheless, certain spiritualists, disciples of Cousin, like Theodore Jouffroy, did not follow their master Maine de Biran, but on the contrary insisted on the continuity between the waking state and sleep. Dreaming was more than a simple organic phenomenon. For Jouffroy, it was fully a matter of psychology, for when dreaming, all our faculties were active, especially that cardinal faculty, the will. During sleep, the mind did not slip away, the self remained present, identical to itself, in the background. To support his statements, Jouffroy called on examples in which the dreamer is conscious that he is dreaming (Jouffroy [1827] 1979, 337). Scientists tested and illustrated these hypotheses with the help of their own dreams, for during the nineteenth century the practice of scientific self-observation of dreams developed in a new way, giving rise to what I will call “dreaming scientists.”

In 1820, in the entry “dreams” of the Panckoucke, the medical dictionary accepted as an authority at that time, the doctor Moreau de la Sarthe who maintained that his views on the relationship between human physical and moral aspects during sleep were backed up by “extracts from a journal or chronicle” in which he noted his dreams together with those of patients and colleagues (Moreau de la Sarthe 1820, 245). Antoine Charma, professor of philosophy at the Faculty of Caen, disciple of Victor Cousin but also a scholar and an archeologist, followed his example, and kept a nocturnal, this invented French term referring to the nightly journal of his dreams (Charma 1851, 378).

The best-known author is still Alfred Maury (1817–1892), who kept a nocturnal for over thirty years, from around 1844 to 1878. He won academic renown as a historian and archeologist, was laden with honors and titles: member of the Institute in 1857, professor at the College de France in 1862, and general director of the National Archives from 1868 to 1888. Maury was a respected scientist and scholar.5

Maury was neither a philosopher nor a doctor. From his youth onwards, he was nonetheless a friend of such “physiological” alienists as Lelut, Baillarger, and Moreau de Tours, and was one of the first contributors to the Annales medico-psychologiques, the French psychiatrists’ review. In 1848, 1853, and 1857 he published

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4 The term “spiritualist” is used here in the French sense, meaning a philosophy separating two substances, one spiritual, the other material.

5 On Maury, see Paz 1964; Bowman 1978; Dowbiggin 1990; Carroy 2006 (forthcoming). Subsequently I will criticize Dowbiggin’s reading of Maury and Freud and propose another point of view.
three articles based essentially on his own nocturnal productions. These texts were the starting-point for a book which made him famous, *Le sommeil et les rêves*. Psychological studies of these phenomena and the various states attached to them. Published by Didier, a classic academic publisher, *Le sommeil et les rêves* reached an audience beyond medical circles and acquired a wider public of cultured readers. The book was first published in 1861, and was reissued three times, in 1862, 1865, and 1878. In the 1878 version, “reviewed and considerably added to,” which Freud read, Maury enriched his text with new dreams, and started an argument with his colleague at the College de France, the sinologist marquis Hervey de Saint-Denys (1822–1892), who also observed his own dreams.

For all the “dreaming scientists” I have just mentioned, dreams were not only intimate objects but also social ones. They provoked exchanges and discussions between families, friends, and colleagues. Several times, Maury mentioned a circle of friends and relatives who were also interested in their nocturnal life, and whose experience he elicited. He was also able to test his scientific views with a group of doctors found at the *Société medico-psychologique*. Hervey de Saint-Denys seems to have moved in more artistic and literary circles. He often quoted writer and artist friends in his book, like the cartoonist Honoré Daumier (Hervey de Saint-Denys [1867] 1964, 245), who narrated their dreams or talked about them with him. Generally speaking, nineteenth-century dream science brought into play both informal and formal societies, mainly male, their members being the curious and other amateurs who collected and exchanged their dream narratives and discussed them among themselves.

### A classic general survey of dreams: Alfred Maury

Maury’s book appeared as a general survey dealing not only with sleep and dreams, but also with similar phenomena, mental derangement, natural or magnetic sleepwalking, ecstasy, hypnotism, states linked to drug-taking. Going back to Cabanis and Maine de Biran, Maury insisted on the physiological psychology of dreaming. Drawing his inspiration from his friend Baillarger, he described the dreamer as a prey to automatisms which took him back to the distant past and instinctive states. Maury suggested “an embryogeny of the intelligence” barely outlined at one point in the work (Maury [1861] 1878, 119) but which forms the subject of a long appendix presented as speculative and hypothetical, “Of sleep, in its relationship to the development of instinct and intelligence” (ibid., 375–424). In it, he developed an extensive table of the development of intelligence and instinct, supposed to help us understand how we go from sleep to a state of watchfulness. He thus established a parallel between the development of each of the following: the nervous system, reproduction and sexuality, the embryo, animals, the human psyche and sleeping states.

Like Cabanis, Maury did not hesitate to bring up the subject of erotic dreams in 1848, and more specifically, his own erotic dreams (Maury 1848, 39). In 1861, he
deleted an evocation acceptable in a medical review but inappropriate for a book published by Didier. After the end of the Second Empire, he reintroduced some nocturnal sexual visions in the 1878 edition. Thus he made a hermaphrodite woman appear out of his nights: “Under the influence of excitement in the genital organs, of which I was aware, being still awake, a woman appeared to me with the signs of a hermaphrodite” (Maury [1861] 1878, 65); or a sex change, in a dream where he thought he “had become a woman, and what is more, was pregnant: this form of delirium existed in a lunatic I had been told about” (ibid., 141); or yet again, an undressed woman “someone I knew . . . naked up to the chest” (ibid., 452).

Maury’s book would seem to be pioneering, as much for its theories as for its inauguration of a method, a mode of self-presentation and a dream anthology.

In a first methodological chapter, Maury compared his method to that of a doctor, who notes his observations of patients from day to day. He presented himself as a kind of alienist examining his own case and treating himself like a patient. Indeed, to his mind, the dreamer was similar to a lunatic prey to hallucinations, but also to an old person become childish, a child, a hashish-taker, a sleepwalker, or someone in an ecstatic state. Maury also claimed to be an experimenter, for example, asking to be made to hear noises or breathe perfumes while asleep, to see how sounds and smells could be a starting-point for his nocturnal visions. Some later readers (Egger 1895, 43) felt this method called to mind Maury’s professional activity, since like Charme (who was also an archeologist) he treated his own dreams as the equivalent of vestiges and archives, to collect and keep.

Maury not only observed and made notes, but also analyzed. Using his nocturnal and his memories, he devoted some of his mornings to understanding the association of ideas that explained the form of his nightly scenarios. He went back through his written and mental records to older dreams, connecting them with those of that night. Sometimes he even went back to the beginning of his notebooks, to childhood or youthful dreams.

Secondly, Maury inaugurated a style of self-presentation based on the unveiling mode. In using himself as an object for study, he displayed himself not as an impersonal and general subject, but as a particular individual, nervous but a good sleeper, suffering from digestive troubles, headaches and “daydreaming.” Maury thus underlined the remarkable nature of his project: “Now the public know my method, and have been trusted with my temperament, I am going to appear before them dozing or sleeping in turn, and tell them what happens to me then. What is more, I will need to let them even further into the secret of my faults and weaknesses” (Maury [1861] 1878, 5). This declaration showed the similarity between the man who studies his dreams and a new Rousseau who would undertake a nocturnal rather than diurnal autobiography, scientific rather than literary. Explaining why he quoted his own dreams, Maury spoke

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6 Maury never explicitly named the people who allowed him to observe and experiment. We suppose they were his servants, or his wife.
of breaking the conventions and risking oneself: this rhetoric was taken up by many of his successors.

Thirdly Maury’s book played the role of an anthology princeps for his successors, from which any narrative could be extracted with the help of one’s own anthology. Maury was not the first to keep a nocturnal for scientific ends, but he based his analyses on accounts supposed to correspond to observed and tested facts. He only quoted his own dreams, or those of his friends and trustworthy close relations. Although he instanced his contemporaries’ theories, Maury refused to quote the traditional or legendary dream narratives, sometimes dating from Antiquity, that doctors and philosophers of his time continued to mention, often together with their own dreams. He put together archives, releasing from them a new corpus of supposedly trustworthy documents between 1848 and 1878. This corpus in its turn became traditional. A lot of Maury’s dreams were widely quoted and commented on, and some of them became famous, sometimes to the detriment of their author’s analyses and theories, as the psychologist Nicolas Vaschide remarked (Vaschide [1911] 1914, 114–115). Maury was indeed not only a dreamer, and a great dreamer at that, as he was at once both happy and afraid to recognize. By publishing some of his dreams, he became as it were their author. More precisely, he was the author of an anthology of images and dream narratives.

In 1878, in a new preface to his classic book De l’intelligence, Taine presented “Monsieur Maury’s process” as one of the methods that scientific psychologists could and should apply (Taine [1870] 1911, I, 13). Le sommeil et les rêves was often quoted in De l’intelligence. Nevertheless, Taine put forward a very different psychology from Maury’s. Following the example of Maine de Biran and Baillarger, Maury contrasted two types of psychological functioning, one based on automatism and pathology, the other on conscience and will: this concept was adopted by Pierre Janet in L’automatisme psychologique. Taine, conversely, showed that natural and elementary psychic functioning was hallucinatory. This is why he asserted, in a celebrated phrase, that perception was a “true hallucination” (Taine [1870] 1911, II, 10). Dreaming and automatic phenomena thus potentially acquired a general psychological significance, later developed by Freud. We know from a letter to Fließ that Freud had closely read Taine in 1896: “I am continually occupied with psychology – really metapsychology: Taine’s book L’intelligence suits me extraordinarily well. I hope something will come of it” (Freud [1887–1904] 1985, 172).

Le sommeil et les rêves served as a model, so that during the second half of the nineteenth century many psychologists, philosophers, doctors, amateurs, and psychology-lovers began to note their dreams in order to understand the mechanisms. At the end of the nineteenth century and between the wars, a lot of scientists thus kept collections of their dreams, more or less regularly: the philosophers and psychologists Gabriel Tarde, Joseph Delboeuf, Victor Egger, Marcel Foucault, Henri Piéron, the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, the scientific philosophers Edmond Goblot and Paul Tannery, and the biologist Yves Delage. This seemed to be useful standard practice for any psychologist. It is significant that in 1889, in L’automatisme psychologique, Pierre Janet
felt the need to justify himself for not talking about his dream output, by explaining why he “found it very difficult to remember his dreams” (Janet [1889] 1919, 119).

*Le sommeil et les rêves* thus had many uses. It acquired the particular and privileged status of classic work, and anthology. It served as a manual for managing “closely watched nights” (Pachet 1980): many scientific dreamers in the late nineteenth century dreamed with Maury. Moreover, many learned nervous people, after Maury, could have scrutinized their own dreams as if they were symptoms. It is not, therefore, surprising that Freud’s patients “spontaneously” recounted to him their nightly visions.

**Maury’s memories and ghosts**

Beneath the surface of his scientific text, Maury himself conducted a kind of self-analysis, which showed through already in some of his dreams, and which was revealed in certain chapters of his *Souvenirs*. Before publishing the version of *Le sommeil et les rêves* to which he had added material, he drafted several volumes of *Souvenirs* intended for publication but still unpublished to this day.

In these volumes, Maury confided some painful secrets. The building of the Trilport bridge by his father, a Polytechnician and an engineer, which appeared in a “hypermnesic” dream taken up by Freud after many other authors (Maury [1861] 1878, 92–93), played an important role in the story of his childhood. The laying of the first stone sparked off a political conflict between the mayor and the entrepreneur who was against the Restoration’s royalist regime. Finally, the young Alfred Maury and the entrepreneur’s pretty little girl had the honor of laying that first stone. Maury’s father gave a royalist and anti-bonapartist speech (Maury 1871–1873, I, 116). The bridge brought back a childhood memory which not only combined politics and early love, but also anguish, for that inauguration happened just before the father’s death. The mortal illness that killed him was thought to result from his staying too long in the sun while building the scale model for the bridge (ibid., I, 138).

Maury told of the suffering he experienced at his father’s symptoms, and at the autopsy, which revealed a brain tumor. Maury traced his interest in medicine back to this event. His father came back to haunt his nights: “The empty place left by this death closed up yet did not heal, and my father’s figure appears to my imagination with such undying emotion, reviving my grief, which was not dead but only slumbering. For a long time, and sometimes still today, the ghost of this beloved being came into my dreams. It appeared there surrounded by fanciful circumstances which betrayed all the anguish I felt during the illness that killed him” (ibid., I, 139–140). Maury thus divulged the personal reason for his uneasy fascination with medicine, and also with dreams, both his own and others’.

In the next part of his *Souvenirs*, Maury portrays the 1848 Revolution and the Second Republic (1848–1851) as being a time of political disillusionment, family drama, and marriage. He describes in dark and anguished terms the part he played in
the days of June 1848, when he was in the National Guard with his younger brother Hyacinthe. This “melancholic” brother committed suicide in 1849, and it was Maury who discovered his body (ibid., II, 481–483). The “brother dead for over ten years, and sadly mourned” appeared in a dream on 6 April 1861 (Maury [1861] 1878, 122). In his *Souvenirs*, Maury tells how in June 1850 he nevertheless married the young English girl he was engaged to before the suicide. However, this happy event was followed by a “sad event” concerning his mother: “Deeply shaken by the terrible death of my brother, she became mentally disturbed, causing us a lot of worry” (Maury 1871–1873, II, 523). She finally died of gangrene in one leg. These two deaths of brother and mother left “an appalling emptiness” and a “profound emptiness” (ibid., 483, 535). They called to mind mental illness, as did the death of his father. It seems to me that for Maury, the political disillusionment of the years 1848 to 1851 was inseparable from these family events. Dowbiggin has made therefore a partial and anachronistic reading of Maury’s *Souvenirs*, which is purely sociological and political, as he mentions neither the brother’s suicide, nor the wedding, nor the mother’s death (Dowbiggin 1990, 269).

In certain chapters of his *Souvenirs*, Maury had felt the need to reveal more precisely what kind of past had produced some of the ghosts populating his published nocturnal life, in an undertaking full of emotion and personal stakes. Nevertheless, he had not given his family history the status of model to be generalized by all dreamers, as Freud was to do after 1900. Maury probably analyzed himself “scientifically” according to the criteria of the age, as a man fleeing hereditary nervous illness and threatened by degeneration. In 1860 he devoted an article to this theme in *La Revue des deux mondes*. He summarized three alienists’ books (Morel’s, Moreau de Tours’, and Lucas’). After having portrayed degeneration very darkly, he finally concluded we must trust science and progress.7

**Hervey de Saint-Denys and the directing of dreams**

From the age of 13, Hervey de Saint-Denys kept a notebook in which he narrated and drew his dreams. In 1867, he published anonymously *Les rêves et les moyens de les diriger* (Dreams and how to guide them). Like Maury, he insisted on the importance of memories, and kept well away from any supernatural interpretation: dreams did not predict the future, but they could call up the past, sometimes quite distant.

Yet, unlike his colleague, he refused see a link between dreaming and pathological phenomena, or to use hypothetical physiology in order to understand dream mechanisms. These could be explained in purely psychological terms. What is more, while Maury quoted almost exclusively involuntary dreams whose contents cannot be mastered, Hervey valued a kind of dream in which we are conscious of dreaming, and which were christened “lucid dreams” in 1913 by the Dutch doctor Van Eeden.

7 For a closer analysis of Maury’s text, see Coffin 2003, 54–58.
Consciousness of dreaming could be developed with practice, and with a little more effort, the dreamer would manage to direct his dream, at least partially. Hervey quoted as an example one of his nocturnal visions in which he was on horseback and he decided, in his dream, to follow one path rather than another (Hervey [1867] 1964, 240–241).

Thus going back to a spiritualist view inherited from Jouffroy, Hervey asserted, against Maine de Biran and Maury, that awareness, attention, and will continue to exist at night. The dreamer could observe himself, and experiment on himself inside the dream scene, while it was actually happening. Without maintaining that they could direct their dreams, many nineteenth-century self-observers, Charma and Delboeuf for example, instanced reflexive dreams in which they were aware of dreaming and they analyzed their dreams. Thus, by scrutinizing their nights, the dreaming scientists could become scientific dreamers.

Hervey often quoted Maury’s observations. While he criticized his colleague’s so-called “materialism,” he recognized his method was “new” and “excellent” (ibid., 212). In 1878, Maury complimented Hervey and cited his dreams in a similar manner. But in order to criticize his colleague’s spiritualist theses, he disqualified his experiments, insisting: “The curious examples quoted by the learned specialist in Chinese affairs only show us that his preoccupation with freedom and will while dreaming led him to go on in his dreams with those thoughts that occupied his mind before he fell asleep. This is quite a common phenomenon. I have noticed it two or three times in myself” (Maury [1861] 1878, 20–21). Thus Maury admitted he could have dreams similar to those of his colleague, and he published a few personal examples in 1878. Yet to his mind, these phenomena were experienced in close to a waking state, and not, therefore, real dreams. In certain respects, however, Maury too became an introspective dreamer.

Replacing Maury

Although it was not totally ignored, Hervey de Saint-Denys’ book achieved neither the fame nor the circulation of Maury’s. Le sommeil et les rêves had indeed become a classic reference work at the end of the nineteenth century. Freud was bound to read it, precisely, and to refer to it often. If we consult the index to The Interpretation of Dreams, we notice that Maury, together with Scherner and Strumpell, is the most-quoted author of those published before 1899. What, then, did Freud make of Maury’s text?

He criticized him strongly for associating dreams with physiological and bodily causes, and for portraying them as disturbing phenomena of little value (Freud [1900a] 1964, 56–57, 77). He supposed that this insistence on bodily phenomena was linked to Maury’s own state of health (ibid., 35). Yet he quoted Maury very often in The Interpretation of Dreams. This was not only for opportunistic reasons, for Freud did not hide his esteem for Maury’s “penetrating reflections.”
He drew on *Le sommeil et les rêves* in a classic manner, like many of his contemporaries, to find examples of experimental dreams (ibid., 25) or associations of ideas (ibid., 59; Freud [1900b] 1964, 523). Sometimes he even dreamed with Maury, adding a dream from his collection to the hypermnescic dream about the Trilport Bridge. In the same way that Maury, following the example of a dreaming cousin from Montbrison, had questioned an old servant to find out who the man seen in the dream at Trilport was, so Freud questioned his mother to discover the identities of one-eyed characters appearing in his childhood town (Freud [1900a] 1964, 16–17). Maury was useful to illustrate the fact that dreams relate to the past and not to the future, on which there was a consensus among Freud’s colleagues.

Maury acquired a more important status in two passages of *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The part of the first chapter entitled “The moral sense in dreams” was crucial, as it touched on a theme which had been traditional since Plato, and was close to the central thesis of Freud’s book: “a dream is a (disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish” (ibid., 160). Maury was very highly spoken of by Freud in this part of the book: “No-one who believes in the capacity of dreams to reveal an immoral tendency of the dreamer’s which is really present though suppressed or concealed, could express his view more precisely than in Maury’s words” (ibid., 73) For a confirmation of this claim, Freud quoted three passages from Maury’s book (ibid., 73–74; Maury [1861] 1878, 113, 115, 462).8

The first two quotations were taken from several very somber pages of chapter 5 of Maury’s book, already presented in the first edition. Maury showed how the dreamer became dissolute, criminal, or gullible, and how he showed certain types of behavior, which he believed to have repressed during the waking state, and which reappeared once the will was abolished. He confessed: “I let myself go in the most violent fits of temper, the most unbridled passions, and when I wake up, I am almost ashamed of these imaginary crimes” (Maury [1861] 1878, 112). Freud deleted that more personal phrase. The theme of the shameful dream was taken up by Delboeuf, in a more impersonal mode, in the introduction to his book on sleep and dreams, which was also rather dramatic, and in which he described the dreamer as sometimes being “a murderer, incestuous, faithless” (Delboeuf [1885] 1993, 11). Maury used the French verb *refouler* (for “repress”), which was later to catch on in psychoanalysis, when the word *refoulement*, or repression, was chosen to translate *Verdrängung*, and this verb probably awakened echoes in Freud. It is important to emphasize, however, that Freud quoted Maury in French: we cannot know for sure how he would have translated the French verb *refouler* in 1899.

The third quotation was extracted from a note at the end of Maury’s book, added in 1878 and entitled “On the intervention of instinct and passion in the dream.” Maury went back to the themes developed in chapter 5, illustrating them with one of his

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8 The Standard Edition indicates incorrect pagination for Maury’s second extract.
more shameful dreams which damaged his public image of the scientist combating superstition (Maury [1861] 1878, 462–463; Freud [1900a] 1964, 73–74). Maury saw himself cured of his eye trouble (he had in fact become nearly blind) by a saint; during this nocturnal scene, he rediscovered the Catholic faith of his childhood at the same time as seeing his father again.9 The dream developed according to a complex scenario of real and false awakenings, and it was probably one of those dreams with consciousness that Maury mentioned to rival Hervey de Saint-Denys. Like in *Hamlet*, he was staging his father’s ghost. Freud must have been struck by both these aspects. Finally, this superstitious dream taught Maury a lesson in humility.

After having quoted Maury at length, and presented him as a real forerunner, Freud added his reservations about Maury’s theory of automatism. Going beyond Maury, he was probably criticizing his rival Pierre Janet, who had become famous with the publication of *L’automatisme psychologique* (1889). As we have seen, Freud placed himself rather on Taine’s than Janet’s and Maury’s side, and his criticism of the theory of automatism was therefore coherent. Nevertheless, he was careful not to take up a passage coming just after the paragraph he quoted, in which Maury corrected his impressive assertions on the dreamer-automaton: “I associated two strongly discordant words when I said; a consciousness unconscious of itself (une conscience insciente d’elle-même).10 Dreams are the theatre of contradictions; the most conflicting actions happen in such a way as to disconcert all our psychological theories” (Maury [1861] 1878, 116). In using the oxymoron “consciousness unconscious of itself,” Maury put forward a psychology which perhaps resonated more with Freudian psychology.

Maury’s best-known and most striking dream, the guillotine dream (Appendix 1) raised a long-lasting controversy in *La Revue philosophique*, started in 1894 by Jacques le Lorrain, writer and disciple of J.-K. Huysmans, and carried on by Victor Egger, professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne. Le Lorrain and Egger challenged Maury’s account, maintaining that he could never have had such a long dream in such a short time. Freud was interested in this controversy, and he was one of those who, like Bergson ([1901] [1919] 1985, 101–102), defended the likelihood of this dream, which he summarized in the first chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* ([1900a] 1964, 26–27) and commented on in chapter 6, “the dream-work.”

In this commentary – using Victor Egger11 as support – Freud portrayed Maury as a young historian “gripped by narratives of the Reign of Terror.” The guillotine dream represented “a fantasy which had been stored up ready-made in his memory” (Freud [1900b] 1964, 496). In a new “fantasy,” Freud relived Maury’s dream in his own

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9 Maury was a friend of Ernest Renan. Like him, he had lost the Catholic faith of his childhood, and attacked superstitions. Also like him, he had an ambiguous attitude towards religion. In the epitaph inserted at the beginning of Volume V of his *Souvenirs*, Maury wondered for instance if the soul were immortal or not, and could not come to a decision.

10 “Inscient” is synonymous with “inconscient” (unconscious), and it is an old-fashioned and unusual French adjective.

11 Victor Egger himself was the son of the Hellenist scholar Emile Egger, a friend of Maury’s.
way, and he exclaimed, “How tempting for a young man to plunge into all this in his imagination – to picture himself bidding a lady farewell – kissing her hand and mounting the scaffold unafraid!” (ibid., 497). Now, this episode does not appear at all in Maury’s works. Contrary to Freud, Maury never mentioned Danton, nor the Girondists, in his narrative, but rather “all the most wicked figures” of the Reign of Terror. Freud superimposed a stereotyped vision of a gallant and heroic French eighteenth century onto the guillotine dream. He transformed a dream that caused “the deepest anguish” into a dream of love and ambition, turning it into a Freudian dream. Freud was dreaming instead of Maury rather than with him. According to Dowbiggin, “There is much truth to Freud’s interpretation that Maury’s dream expressed an ‘ambitious’ wish” (Dowbiggin 1990, 284). Unlike Dowbiggin, I think we must take into account the fact that Freud added personal interpolations to Maury’s dream, thus changing its meaning. Consequently, in my opinion, the Freudian interpretation does not reflect Maury's scientific ambition, but Freud's own.

More hypothetically, we can suppose that Freud was struck by other nocturnal visions of Maury’s. In his first chapter, Freud spoke briefly about the erotic dreams, without developing the subject and without giving any examples, arguing that the organicists favored this type of dream (Freud [1900a] 1964, 35). This remark was true, but paradoxical: while emphasizing the sexual interpretation of dreams, Freud never quoted a dream with sexual content, even in chapter 3 where he dealt with what were obviously wish-fulfillment dreams.

In a note in the first edition, Freud justified himself for not having fulfilled his reader’s expectations by narrating sexual dreams. He rejected accusations of excessive modesty and explained his silence as follows: “What governed my decision was simply my seeing that an explanation of sexual dreams would involve me deeply in the still unsolved problems of perversion and bisexuality” (Freud [1900b] 1964, 606–607). He was of course referring to his discussions about bisexuality with Fliess. Yet we can also suppose that he was alluding to Maury's bisexual dreams, well known to his earliest readers, and that he tried to justify himself for not having been – apparently – as daring as his predecessor. Indeed, as we have seen, Maury did not merely talk generally about the shocking nature of certain dreams, but had quoted some of his own dissolute or superstitious dreams in the 1878 edition. With one exception that I will talk about later, the dream narratives accompanied by erection and often followed by ejaculation, which appeared in later editions of The Interpretation of Dreams, came from the dream collections of other authors or Freud’s disciples, chiefly Otto Rank. Freud himself never made a complete analysis of his dreams and did not publish his shameful dreams, and Jung for instance criticized him for this (Marinelli and Mayer [2002] 2003, 103; Mayer 2004, 123). Whether my hypothesis concerning that note is true or not, it seems to me that Maury’s sexual frankness may have been a model but also a problem for Freud.

More generally, it could be thought that Freud’s ambition in drafting his book was to write a text with similar status to that acquired by Le sommeil et les rêves, and which would take its place. In many respects, even if the two works put forward
different theories, there are striking similarities between them. Like Maury, Freud published a general survey aiming to link dreams and pathological phenomena, and also to insert these dreams into the framework of a general theory of development and evolution. Like him, Freud offered his reader a practical experience and a method of analyzing dreams in an initial chapter. Again like him, he turned “a specimen dream with its peculiarities, details, indiscretions, bad jokes” into a classic. This is why the psychologist Nicolas Vaschide, one of the first French readers of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which he described as “a classic book, too little-known in France” was able to assert: “Freud’s work on dreams, together with Maury’s, represent the most complete and best systematized corpus on dream psychology” (Vaschide [1911] 1914, 175). Freud thus became a sort of German Maury in Vaschide’s eyes. Today, we could add another point of comparison, unknown to Freud of course. Maury had also formed a link between his personal history and his interest in dreams.

**Dreaming like Hervey de Saint-Denys?**

Paradoxically for today’s reader, however, Freud preferred Hervey de Saint-Denys, an author whom he had not read directly, and whose dream narratives and analyses may seem far from a psychoanalytical view which favors the unconscious.

In the first edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud mentioned Hervey in the context of a summary made by Maury in 1878. Freud credited Hervey with having actualized dreams by showing that the same faculties function during sleep as in wakefulness or dreaming. Hervey was one of those authors, usually non-doctors, who, like Delboeuf in particular, maintained that dreaming was a psychological phenomenon in its own right – to their credit, in Freud’s opinion.

In 1914, Freud felt the need to add references to Hervey. He still had not managed to get hold of his book, but he had read Vaschide’s, published in 1911 in a collection of popular bestsellers edited by Gustave Le Bon. Vaschide devoted two long chapters to Maury (ibid., 114–135) and to Hervey (ibid., 136–174), followed by a substantial chapter devoted to Freud (ibid., 175–196). Vaschide affirmed his preference for Hervey de Saint Denys’ little-known psychological work (ibid., 169). Nevertheless, he criticized it rather as Maury did, notably envisaging that the directing of dreams could be the effect of auto-suggestion, more precisely of a “subconscious systemization that turns us into half-conscious actors” (ibid., 170).

In 1914, Freud added a quotation of Vaschide’s to Maury’s, summarizing Hervey: “Dream-images are copies of ideas. The essential thing is the idea, the vision is a mere accessory. When this is once established, we must know how to follow the sequence of the ideas, we must know how to analyze the texture of dreams” (ibid., 146; Freud [1900a] 1964, 61). Although the relationship between the image and the idea was conceived in terms of a copy, and thus in a very different way from what was described concerning the dream work, Freud rather generously granted Hervey the status of a
precursor who sensed the opposition between manifest content and latent ideas or thoughts in dreams (Hervey 1867, 85–86). Still in the first chapter, in 1914, Freud added a seductive hypermnestic dream of Hervey’s where “a young woman with golden hair” appeared (ibid., 265; Vaschide [1911] 1914, 232; Freud [1900a] 1964, 13).

Yet Hervey was still more important in Freud’s eyes. Freud maintained that in most cases, the most coherent dreams were only the most craftily deformed ones by a secondary revision. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the passage on secondary revision, he also claimed that there were exceptions. Certain manifest dream elements corresponded to no latent idea whatsoever, in particular the thought “This is only a dream,” about which he said: “Here we have a genuine piece of criticism of the dream, such as might be made in waking life” (Freud [1900b] 1964, 488). Thus there were manifest elements that went against the rule according to which dreams were answerable to an interpretation deciphering them like puzzles. The existence of these introspective dream fragments could be explained from a metapsychological viewpoint. Still in the first edition, in a passage emphasized in italics of the chapter entitled “Psychology of the dream-processes,” Freud justified the existence of such dreams theoretically: “I am driven to conclude that throughout our whole sleeping state we know just as certainly we are dreaming as we know that we are sleeping” (ibid., 571).

In 1909 Freud conceded that Stekel’s assertion that the oneiric statement “after all, this is only a dream” could be interpreted (ibid., 338). Nevertheless, he maintained his initial position and did not modify the beginning of his development of secondary revision. In fact he went further; no doubt so as to answer Stekel’s examples, he added a precise illustration in “Psychology of the dream-processes” to corroborate the thesis according to which we are aware of dreaming in all our dreams: “On the other hand there are some people who are quite clearly aware during the night that they are asleep and dreaming and who thus seem to possess the faculty of consciously directing their dreams. If, for instance, a dreamer of this kind is dissatisfied with the turn taken by a dream, he can break it off without waking up and start it again in another direction – just as a popular dramatist may under pressure give his play a happier ending. Or another time, if his dream had led him into a sexually exciting situation, he can think to himself: “I won’t go on with this dream and exhaust myself with an emission; I’ll hold it back for a real situation instead” (ibid., 571–572). Freud conjured up a dreamer very close to Hervey de Saint-Denys; more exactly, this dreamer was capable of controlling his erotic dreams. The example is really remarkable in The Interpretation of Dreams, and we obviously wonder if this anonymous dreamer is not Freud himself.

In 1914, Freud seized on the end of a quotation by Vaschide, who was himself quoting Hervey de Saint-Denys: “He noticed again – an interesting fact to note – that he managed to have acquired the power ‘of accelerating the course of his dreams at need

12 In the text paraphrased by Vaschide, Hervey compared dreaming to a magical lantern. On this comparison, see Chaperon 2002.
and of giving them any direction he chose’’ (Vaschide [1911] 1914, 139). Contrary to Vaschide, Freud had no reservations about the directing of dreams, and he described the dreamer that, to his mind, Hervey de Saint-Denys must have been, as follows: “It is as though in his case the wish to sleep had given place to another preconscious wish, namely to observe his dreams and enjoy them” (Freud [1900b] 1964, 572). Hervey de Saint-Denys as a self-observer could seem to herald Silberer (Marinelli and Mayer [2002] 2003, 88–99). Though he criticized the latter in his 1914 edition, Freud granted that “in certain circumstances, a species of self-observation plays a part . . . and makes a contribution to the content of the dream” (Freud [1900b] 1964, 505). It was not Silberer, however, but the orthodox disciple Ferenczi that Freud quoted to support Hervey. Indeed, in a short article, while taking up Stekel’s interpretations of dreams within dreams, Ferenczi had described a particular type of dream, “dirigible dreams,” in which the dreamer was not only conscious of dreaming, but could also change the direction of his dream to satisfy his desire, or decide to wake up to escape from a painful dream. Ferenczi’s publication thus authorized Freud to quote the Marquis, who, in exchange, was perceived as the forerunner of dirigible dreams. Psychoanalysis had now become a movement, and was in a position to acknowledge precursors more easily.

As Freud’s commentary shows, in 1914 “the Marquis” personified what was in his eyes an introspective and happy use of dreams. This display of fellow-feeling probably stemmed from similar personal experiences. In 1885, as Jones recalls, Freud had already told his fiancee about a dream within a dream he had had. In a letter dated 9 June 1898, where the subject was a dream that Fliess had made him withdraw from the manuscript of his book, Freud answered with humor: “So that I can omit what you designate in a substitute dream, because I can have dreams like that to order” (Freud [1887–1904] 1985, 315). Like many of his predecessors, through observing his dreams, Freud may therefore have become a scientific dreamer and he may have dreamed (sometimes? often?) like Hervey de Saint-Denys. This hypothesis would explain why he always gave favored treatment to an author who at first sight does not now seem very Freudian, and who has been raised to the status of founding father by anti-Freudian movements looking to promote lucid dreams (Bouchet 1994; Chérit 2002).

Even if we remain cautious about this hypothesis, it must be noted that Freud always claimed to prefer Hervey de Saint-Denys. In my opinion, he crystallized around an author’s name a part of the actualization of the dream as a phenomenon close to

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13 Vaschide’s quotation is taken from the end of a long sentence in the first person singular by Hervey de Saint-Denys, situated at the beginning of his book. He was explaining how his dreams changed from the moment he started keeping an oniric diary: “At the same time, under the influence of habit, I saw a faculty developing in me, to which I owe the greatest part of the observations recorded hereafter: the faculty of being often conscious of my real situation while sleeping, to retain the sense of my waking preoccupations during my dreams and to keep enough influence over my ideas to accelerate their course at need and give them any direction I chose” (Hervey de Saint-Denys 1867, 59).
wakefulness that meant so much to him. In 1923, going back in certain respects to a
traditional distinction in Western dream history he claimed there were “dreams from
below” and “dreams from above” (Freud [1921] 1964, 111; emphasis in original). He
got back on that distinction in a letter about a dream attributed to Descartes by his
biographer Baillet, which was published in 1929 by Maxime Leroy. In his third dream,
Descartes woke up inside the dream and interpreted it while continuing to sleep.
Freud asserted that he could not help following Descartes’ interpretations “given that
the content of the dream is very close to the conscious thoughts.” He thus took up the
idea once again that in certain dreams, there could be “a genuine piece of criticism.”
Nevertheless, according to Freud, oneiric elements “from below” remained, that the
dreamer was unable to interpret because “they belong to the unconscious and . . . are
in many respects the most interesting” (Freud [1929] 1964, 203) and these could not
be interpreted without questioning Descartes himself.¹⁴

In the retrospective light of this distinction, Maury could have seemed like the
representative of dreams from below to Freud, and Hervey de Saint-Denys, of dreams
from above. The Freudian preference for the latter therefore reveals the complexity of
The Interpretation of Dreams. In certain respects, many commentators have reduced the
Freudian dream to merely the expression of an unconscious wish, without registering
the fact that Freud himself had also emphasized its stemming from a preconscious wish.
The invocation of Hervey de Saint-Denys in 1914 recalls a theme developed briefly but
recurrently by Freud, yet seldom underlined by traditional, usually psychoanalytical,
readings of The Interpretation of Dreams.

Conclusion

I thought it would be interesting to situate The Interpretation of Dreams within the cultural
and intellectual history of dreaming in the nineteenth century. A walk through the
dark forest of two French authors quoted by Freud allows us to analyze the complex
relations he kept up with some of his predecessors. In 1899 he sought to replace
Maury in various ways, including by dreaming in his place that he was a Frenchman
bravely mounting the scaffold to the guillotine. By mentioning the name of Hervey de
Saint-Denys, beside his most celebrated theses, he supported the theory that we can
sometimes observe ourselves dreaming, and play with our dreams.

Looking at The Interpretation of Dreams from the viewpoint of nineteenth-century
dream science, the book in its turn can seem occasionally like a dark forest full
of unexpected paths as compared to a royal road. If we adopt this view, certain
historiographic quarrels lose much of their pertinence. In the light of Maury’s Souvenirs,

¹⁴ For a commentary of this letter, see for example Assoun 1976, 161–169. Assoun speaks of Freud’s “strange
analysis of Cartesian dreams.” I think Freud’s analysis is coherent, as for Freud dreams wishes are not only
unconscious but preconscious.
it is important to recognize, as Jones did not, that Freudian self-analysis was not a brand-
new heroic undertaking. Yet we cannot agree with Sulloway, who saw in this a pretext
invoked afterwards by Freud and his disciples. Maury’s example suggests, against both
Jones and Sulloway, that Freudian self-analysis reinvented and developed, in an original
way, a scientific experimenting with the self that already existed with certain dreaming
scientists of the nineteenth century. It can therefore be important to “forget” Freud so
as to see him with new eyes upon coming back to him.

Still to be analyzed is the question of how and why psychoanalysis became a new
culture in the end, changing our attitude to dreams – but that is another story.

Appendix

*Le rêve de la guillotine*

J’avais il y a environ quarante ans l’habitude de lire tout haut à ma mère, et il arrivait
souvent que le sommeil me gagnait à chaque pause, à chaque alinéa; cependant je me
réveillais si vite, que ma mère ne s’apercevait de rien, si ce n’est qu’elle observait que je
lisais parfois plus lentement. Eh bien ! durant ces secondes d’un sommeil commencé et
chassé aussitôt par la nécessité de continuer ma lecture, je faisais des rêves fort étendus,
rêves qui embrouillaient ma pensée et nuisaient d’ordinaire chez moi à l’intelligence
du livre.

Mais un fait plus concluant pour la rapidité du rêve, un fait qui établit, à mes
yeux, qu’il suffit d’un instant pour faire un rêve étendu, est le suivant : j’étais un peu
indisposé, et je me trouvais couché dans ma chambre, ayant ma mère à mon chevet.
Je rêve de la Terreur; j’assiste à des scènes de massacre, je compars devant le tribunal
révolutionnaire, je vois Robespierre, Marat, Fouquier-Tinville, toutes les plus vilaines
figures de cette époque terrible; je discute avec eux; enfin, après bien des événements,
que je ne me rappelle qu’imparfaitement, je suis jugé, condamné à mort, conduit en
charrette, au milieu d’un concours immense, sur la place de la Révolution; je monte
sur l’échafaud; l’exécuteur me lie sur la planche fatale, il la fait basculer, le couperet
tombe; je sens ma tête se séparer de mon tronc, je m’éveille en proie à la plus vive
angoisse, et je me sens sur le cou la flèche de mon lit qui s’était subitement détachée,
et était tombée sur mes vertèbres cervicales, à la façon du couteau de la guillotine.
Cela avait eu lieu à l’instant, ainsi que ma mère me le confirma, et cependant c’était
 cette sensation externe que j’avais prise, comme dans le cas que j’ai cité plus haut, pour
point de départ de rêves où tant de faits s’étaient succédé (1). Au moment où j’avais
été frappé, le souvenir de la redoutable machine, dont la flèche de mon lit représentait
l’effet, avait éveillé toutes les images d’une époque dont la guillotine a été le symbole.

(1) M. le marquis d’Hervey ([1867] 1964, 320) a très bien fait voir que dans de
tels rêves, ce qui en est la conclusion en avait appelé les préliminaires, et que cette
conclusion a pour origine une sensation. » (Maury [1861] 1878, 160–162)
The guillotine dream

About forty years ago, I used to read aloud to my mother, and I was often overcome by sleep at each pause, each new line; however, I woke up so quickly that my mother noticed nothing, only observing that I sometimes read more slowly. Well! during those seconds of sleep begun and immediately chased away by the need to go on reading, I had very extensive dreams, that muddled up my thoughts and usually interfered with my understanding of the book.

Yet the following fact is much more conclusive for the rapidity of dreams; to my mind, it establishes the idea that one can have a lengthy dream in an instant. I was rather unwell, and was lying down in my room, with my mother at my bedside. I dreamed of the Reign of Terror; I witnessed massacres, I was appearing before the Revolutionary tribunal, I saw Robespierre, Marat, Fouquier-Tinville, all the most wicked figures of that terrible era; I talked to them; finally, after many events that I only partly remember, I was judged, condemned to death, taken out in a tumbril through a huge throng to the Place de la Revolution; I mounted the scaffold; the executioner tied me to that fatal plank, he tipped it up, the blade fell; I felt my head separating from my body, I woke up racked by the deepest anguish, and felt the bedpost on my neck. It had suddenly come off and had fallen on my cervical vertebrae just like the guillotine blade. This had only just happened, as my mother confirmed, and yet it was this external sensation that I had taken as a starting point, like in the case I mentioned earlier, for dreams where so many things happened one after the other (1). At the moment I was hit, the memory of the fearsome machine, whose effect was represented by my bedpost had awakened all the images of an era symbolized by the guillotine.

(1) The Marquis d’Hervey ([1867] 1964, 320) has shown very effectively that in such dreams, it is the conclusion that triggers off the preliminaries, and that conclusion originates with a sensation.

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