

THE OCCURRENCE IN DREAMS OF MATERIAL FROM FAIRY TALES - (1913)

It is not surprising to find that psycho-analysis confirms our recognition of the important place which folk fairy tales have acquired in the mental life of our children. In a few people a recollection of their favourite fairy tales takes the place of memories of their own childhood; they have made the fairy tales into screen memories.

Elements and situations derived from fairy tales are also frequently to be found in dreams. In interpreting the passages in question the patient will produce the significant fairy tale as an association. In the present paper I shall give two instances of this very common occurrence. But it will not be possible to do more than hint at the relations between the fairy tales and the history of the dreamer's childhood and his neurosis, though this limitation will involve the risk of breaking links which were of the utmost importance to the analyst.¹

Here is a dream of a young married woman who had had a visit from her husband a few days before: She was in a room that was entirely brown. A little door led to the top of a steep staircase, and up this staircase there came into the room a curious manikin - small, with white hair, a bald top to his head and a red nose. He danced round the room in front of her, carried on in the funniest way, and then went down the staircase again. He was dressed in a grey garment, through which every part of his figure was visible. (A correction was made subsequently: He was wearing a long black coat and grey trousers.)

The analysis was as follows. The description of the manikin's personal appearance fitted the dreamer's father-in-law without any alteration being necessary.¹ Immediately afterwards, however, she thought of the story of 'Rumpelstiltskin', who danced around in the same funny way as the man in the dream and in so doing betrayed his name to the queen; but by that he lost his claim to the queen's first child, and in his fury tore himself in two.

¹ Except for the detail that the manikin had his hair cut short, whereas her father-in-law wore his long.

On the day before she had the dream she herself had been just as furious with her husband and had exclaimed: 'I could tear him in two.'

The brown room at first gave rise to difficulties. All that occurred to her was her parents' dining-room, which was panelled in that colour - in brown wood. She then told some stories of beds which were so uncomfortable for two people to sleep in. A few days before, when the subject of conversation had been beds in other countries, she had said something very *mal à propos* - quite innocently, as she maintained - and everyone in the room had roared with laughter.

The dream was now already intelligible. The brown wood room¹ was in the first place a bed, and through the connection with the dining-room it was a marriage bed.² She was therefore in her marriage bed. Her visitor should have been her

young husband, who, after an absence of several months, had visited her to play his part in the double bed. But to begin with it was her husband's father, her father-in-law.

Behind this first interpretation we have a glimpse of deeper and purely sexual material. Here the room was the vagina. (The room was in her - this was reversed in the dream.) The little man who made grimaces and behaved so funnily was the penis. The narrow door and the steep stairs confirmed the view that the situation was a representation of intercourse. As a rule we are accustomed to find the penis symbolized by a child; but we shall find there was good reason for a father being introduced to represent the penis in this instance.

The solution of the remaining portion of the dream will entirely confirm us in this interpretation. The dreamer herself explained the transparent grey garment as a condom. We may gather that considerations of preventing conception and worries whether this visit of her husband's might not have sown the seed of a second child were among the instigating causes of the dream.

¹ Wood, as is well known, is frequently a female or maternal symbol: e.g. materia, Madeira, etc.

² For bed and board stand for marriage.⁸

The black coat. Coats of that kind suited her husband admirably. She wanted to persuade him always to wear them, instead of his usual clothes. Dressed in the black coat, therefore, her husband was as she liked to see him. The black coat and grey trousers. At two different levels, one above the other, this had the same meaning: 'I should like you to be dressed like that. I like you like that.'

Rumpelstiltskin was connected with the contemporary thoughts underlying the dream - the day's residues - by a neat antithetic relation. In the fairy tale he comes in order to take away the queen's first child. In the dream the little man comes in the shape of a father, because he had presumably brought a second child. But Rumpelstiltskin also gave access to the deeper, infantile stratum of the dream-thoughts. The droll little fellow, whose very name is unknown, whose secret is so eagerly canvassed, who can perform such extraordinary tricks - in the fairy tale he turns straw into gold - the fury against him, or rather against his possessor, who is envied for possessing him (the girl's envy for the penis) - all of these were elements whose relation to the foundations of the patient's neurosis can, as I have said, barely be touched upon in this paper. The short-cut hair of the manikin in the dream was no doubt also connected with the subject of castration.

If we carefully observe from clear instances the way in which dreamers use fairy tales and the point at which they bring them in, we may perhaps also succeed in picking up some hints which will help in interpreting remaining obscurities in the fairy tales themselves.⁹

II

A young man told me the following dream. He had a chronological basis for his early memories in the circumstance that his parents moved from one country estate to another just before he was five years old; the dream, which he said was his earliest one, occurred while he was still upon the first estate.

'I dreamt that it was night and that I was lying in my bed. (My bed stood with its foot towards the window: in front of the window there was a row of old walnut trees. I know it was winter when I had the dream, and night-time.) Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window. There were six or seven of them. The wolves were quite white, and looked more like foxes or sheep-dogs, for they had big tails like foxes and they had their ears pricked like dogs when they pay attention to something. In great horror, evidently of being eaten up by the wolves, I screamed and woke up. My nurse hurried to my bed, to see what had happened to me. It took quite a long while before I was convinced that it had only been a dream; I had had such a clear and life-like picture of the window opening and the wolves sitting on the tree. At last I grew quieter, felt as though I had escaped from some danger, and went to sleep again.

'The only piece of action in the dream was the opening of the window; for the wolves sat quite still and without making any movement on the branches of the tree, to the right and left of the trunk, and looked at me. It seemed as though they had riveted their whole attention upon me. - I think this was my first anxiety-dream. I was three, four, or at most five years old at the time. From then until my eleventh or twelfth year I was always afraid of seeing something terrible in my dreams.'

He added a drawing of the tree with the wolves, which confirmed his description. The analysis of the dream brought the following material to light.

He had always connected this dream with the recollection that during these years of his childhood he was most tremendously afraid of the picture of a wolf in a book of fairy tales. His elder sister, who was very much his superior, used to tease him by holding up this particular picture in front of him on some excuse or other, so that he was terrified and began to scream. In this picture the wolf was standing upright, striding out with one foot, with its claws stretched out and its ears pricked. He thought this picture must have been an illustration to the story of 'Little Red Riding-Hood'.

Why were the wolves white? This made him think of the sheep, large flocks of which were kept in the neighbourhood of the estate. His father occasionally took him with him to visit these flocks, and every time this happened he felt very proud and blissful. Later on - according to enquiries that were made it may easily have been shortly before the time of the dream - an epidemic broke out among the sheep. His father sent for a follower of Pasteur's, who inoculated the animals, but after the inoculation even more of them died than before.

How did the wolves come to be on the tree? This reminded him of a story that he had heard his grandfather tell. He could not remember whether it was before or after the dream, but its subject is a decisive argument in favour of the former view.

The story ran as follows. A tailor was sitting at work in his room, when the window opened and a wolf leapt in. The tailor hit after him with his yard - no (he corrected himself), caught him by his tail and pulled it off, so that the wolf ran away in terror. Some time later the tailor went into the forest, and suddenly saw a pack of wolves coming towards him; so he climbed up a tree to escape from them. At first the wolves were in perplexity; but the maimed one, which was among them and wanted to revenge himself on the tailor, proposed that they should climb one upon another till the last one could reach him. He himself - he was a vigorous old fellow - would be the base of the pyramid. The wolves did as he suggested, but the tailor had recognized the visitor whom he had punished, and suddenly called out as he had before: 'Catch the grey one by his tail!' The tailless wolf, terrified by the recollection, ran away, and all the others tumbled down.

In this story the tree appears, upon which the wolves were sitting in the dream. But it also contains an unmistakable allusion to the castration complex. The old wolf was docked of his tail by the tailor. The fox-tails of the wolves in the dream were probably compensations for this taillessness.

Why were there six or seven wolves? There seemed to be no answer to this question, until I raised a doubt whether the picture that had frightened him could be connected with the story of 'Little Red Riding-Hood'. This fairy tale only offers an opportunity for two illustrations - Little Red Riding-Hood's meeting with the wolf in the wood, and the scene in which the wolf lies in bed in the grandmother's night-cap. There must therefore be some other fairy tale behind his recollection of the picture. He soon discovered that it could only be the story of 'The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats' Here the number seven occurs, and also the number six, for the wolf only ate up six of the little goats, while the seventh hid itself in the clock-case. The white, too, comes into this story, for the wolf had his paw made white at the baker's after the little goats had recognized him on his first visit by his grey paw. Moreover, the two fairy tales have much in common. In both there is the eating up, the cutting open of the belly, the taking out of the people who have been eaten and their replacement by heavy stones, and finally in both of them the wicked wolf perishes. Besides all this, in the story of the little goats the tree appears. The wolf lay down under a tree after his meal and snored.

I shall have, for a special reason, to deal with this dream again elsewhere, and interpret it and consider its significance in greater detail. For it is the earliest anxiety-dream that the dreamer remembered from his childhood, and its content, taken in connection with other dreams that followed it soon afterwards and with certain events in his earliest years, is of quite peculiar interest. We must confine ourselves here to the relation of the dream to the two fairy tales which have so much in common with each other, 'Little Red Riding-Hood' and 'The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats'. The effect produced by these stories was shown in the little dreamer by a regular animal phobia. This phobia was only distinguished from other similar cases by the fact that the anxiety-animal was not an object easily accessible to observation (such as a horse or a dog), but was known to him only from stories and picture-books.

I shall discuss on another occasion the explanation of these animal phobias and the significance attaching to them. I will only remark in anticipation that this explanation is in complete harmony with the principal characteristic shown by the neurosis from which the present dreamer suffered later in his life. His fear of his father was the strongest motive for his falling ill, and his ambivalent attitude towards every father-surrogate was the dominating feature of his life as well as of his behaviour during the treatment.

If in my patient's case the wolf was merely a first father-surrogate, the question arises whether the hidden content in the fairy tales of the wolf that ate up the little goats and of 'Little Red Riding-Hood' may not simply be infantile fear of the father.¹ Moreover, my patient's father had the characteristic, shown by so many people in relation to their children, of indulging in 'affectionate abuse'; and it is possible that during the patient's earlier years his father (though he grew severe later on) may more than once, as he caressed the little boy or played with him, have threatened in fun to 'gobble him up'. One of my patients told me that her two children could never get to be fond of their grandfather, because in the course of his affectionate romping with them he used to frighten them by saying he would cut open their tummies.

¹ Compare the similarity between these two fairy tales and the myth of Kronos, which has been pointed out by Rank (1912).²