Title: "I Wish to Dream" and Other Impossible Effects of the Crypt

Contributor:

Dr Laurence Johnson (PhD, MA, BA Hons, BA, Diploma of Teaching) is Lecturer in English and Cultural Studies at the University of Southern Queensland. He is the author of *The Wolf Man's Burden* (Cornell University Press, 2001) and articles on the work of Abraham and Torok, Derrida and Levinas, philosophy, and cultural and literary theory. He is a member of the Cultural Studies Association of Australia and a non-practising associate of the Brisbane Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies.

Contacts:

Dr Laurie Johnson
Lecturer in English and Cultural Studies
Department of Humanities and International Studies
Faculty of Arts
University of Southern Queensland
Toowoomba QLD 4350 Australia

johnsonl@usq.edu.au

Abstract:

The writings of Nicolas Abraham (1919-75) and Maria Torok (1926-98) are presented as 'renewals of psychoanalysis' yet their treatment of dreams in revising Freud's Wolf Man case history poses significant problems for one of Freud's principal claims for the dream work: that it presents as the fulfilment of a wish. Reviewing the development of their theory of the crypt in the ego, this paper proposes ultimately that a renewal of the theory of the crypt can invigorate, rather than invalidate, our received picture of dream work.

'I Wish to Dream' and Other Impossible Effects of the Crypt

In celebration of the centenary of the publication of Sigmund Freud's *Traumdeutung*, the Australian Society for Continental Philosophy held a special panel at their annual conference, at which I was invited to speak on what Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok have had to say on the subject of the 'interpretation of dreams.' I begin now, as then, with an equivocation, by stating that I wish to be able to put together a few words on these matters. From the great dream book itself, of course, we learned that wishes never come true, save in dreams, the function of which is just this: wish-fulfilment. Thus, by stating that *I wish* to write about Abraham and Torok and *The Interpretation of Dreams*, I suggest at the outset that the task is an impossible one.

To explain what I mean by this, I will add a few words by way of introduction for the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with these theorists. Of Hungarian Jewish origins, Abraham and Torok emigrated to France on either side of the Second World War, and both lost their family to the genocide. They met in Paris in 1950, gained memberships of the Société Psychanalytique, and began clinical practice as psychoanalysts in 1956. Over the next twenty years, they collaborated on a number of essays (half of which are contained in translation in *The Shell and the Kernel*, 1994) and produced a major book, *Cryptonymie: Le Verbier de l'Homme aux Loups* (1976, translated into English in 1986 as *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*). The collaboration concluded with Abraham's unexpected death in 1975, prior to the publication of their book, although we may now think that their collaboration has been reinvigorated on a higher level, as Torok herself passed away in 1998.

The pair did not easily fit into the puzzle of psychoanalytical schools of thought in the 1950s, based in part on apprehensions about the clinical value of organised structuralist activity. They cultivated an ignorance of Lacan's teachings and included commentaries against the systematic character of Kleinian investigation in some essays. Accordingly, therefore, they never pieced together a coherent body of theories that we might call an 'approach,' or which could be mobilised against dominant schools of psychoanalytical thought. Instead, they committed themselves to interrogating the approaches that had been handed down to them in the light of evidence gained in their immediate analytical situations and critical practices. As Nicholas Rand observes in his introduction to *The Shell and the Kernel* (1994), their writings were guided by a belief that received theories can be 'abandoned or revamped if inconsistent with the actual life experience of patients or the facts of a text' (1).

There is a sense in Abraham and Torok's writings that no singular program is at work behind their words, and Rand himself admits that the essays collected within *The Shell and the Kernel* 'expend little rhetorical energy in promoting the novelty of an idea or explaining how an approach departs from standard modes of thinking' (1994, 7). Yet if there is a thread holding their work together, it is what Elisabeth Roudinesco (1990) has called their 'idiosyncratic reading of Freud's discovery' (599). As practicing analysts themselves, there is no doubt that Abraham and Torok had no desire to undermine the ideas and methods developed by Freud. What is idiosyncratic about their reading of Freud is their willingness to re-invent a vocabulary of psychoanalytical concepts for each instance in which the explanatory function of these concepts must be mobilised in discourse. This is to say that they develop new words (or, to be precise, new meanings for existing words) or revisions of old concepts in response to each case (patient or text)

for which a psychoanalytical explanation or treatment is sought. Thus, in a phrase which resonates in contrast with Lacan's famous 'return to Freud,' Rand confidently subtitled the collection of essays by Abraham and Torok as 'Renewals of Psychoanalysis.'

If continual renewal of psychoanalysis is the *modus operandi* espoused by Abraham and Torok, we may wonder what value there is to be had from a reading of their works, least of all from the perspective of the institution of psychoanalysis. The training of analysts, the transmission of methods, models and concepts from one generation to the next, and, perhaps most importantly, the sense of the reliability of the method from one analysis to the next – all rely on a kind of repetition, rather than on a making anew in each instance. For my own part, as a non-practitioner, the more general philosophical value of their work is at issue here as well. If I can only wish to cover their work in the context of its relation to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, I do so in order to extrapolate from their self-imposed limitations a sense of the boundaries of our knowledge of that which stands in opposition to knowledge: the unconscious.

Jacques Derrida – himself having recently renewed his conversations with Abraham and Torok, so may he rest in peace – made some initial steps in this direction in 'Fors,' his foreword to *Cryptonymie: Le Verbier de l'Homme aux Loups*. Derrida's description of Abraham and Torok's achievement in this book includes recognition that the very act of theorising the crypt involves a rupture at the heart of the Freudian topography, based on confounding any distinction between interior and exterior, and calls into question the status of the word as it passes before the analytical ear. Elsewhere (see Johnson 2000), I have discussed Derrida's role in filtering the work of Abraham and Torok to scholars in English and, in particular, to non-practising theorists, by foregrounding the 'secret' –

the key to the crypt – as a topic for discussion, but also by calculating secrets of his own in relation to the authors of the 'Verbier.' Here it is sufficient to note that what Derrida says on the subject of Abraham and Torok's achievement is extrapolated, as the authors themselves make no such claims for *Cryptonymie* in their own writing.

My task here is similar, or at least follows the same contours as Derrida's, in its relation to the work of Abraham and Torok. In order to explain what I mean about only being able to wish to speak about the relation between this work and *The Interpretation of Dreams*, this process of extrapolation must extend to their collection of essays. The title Rand chose for this collection is taken from an essay written by Abraham in 1968. It is in 'The Shell and the Kernel' that Abraham comes closest to spelling out a single and coherent programmatic statement, and the ideas developed in this essay can be read as a justification for the ongoing renewal undertaken in their other writings. In what is ostensibly a review of Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis's *Language of Psychoanalysis* – still regarded by many as the standard dictionary of Freudian terms and concepts – Abraham situates the scope and originality of Freud's discovery in what he calls the *anasemic* character of psychoanalytical language.

Citing Daniel Lagache's preface to *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Abraham (1994) agrees that 'ordinary language has no words for the structures and psychic movements which, in the eyes of common sense, do not exist' (qtd. 85). Anasemia is that structure, proper to psychoanalytical speculation, which proceeds entirely from the discovery of the Unconscious. It is what enables any word mobilised as a psychoanalytical concept to be *designified*; that is, to be stripped of its normal capacity for meaning and to allow

it to point instead to that which escapes or lies outside conscious expression, as its very source, in the Unconscious.

Thus, the originality of Freud's discovery resides in part on its capacity to be original, time after time, with respect to each new moment of engagement with the Unconscious that it plays out. The scope of psychoanalysis is not to be constrained by a single set of concepts and methods. Instead, it is renewable from one case to another. In order for a vocabulary to maintain an index of the Unconscious it must, like the Unconscious itself, be untimely, in the sense of being unbound by time. Renewal of this order means that there will be little if any sustained engagement with the old, and certainly there are few instances in their writings when either Abraham or Torok revisit Freud's own cases or examples directly.

We therefore arrive at the reason why I might only wish to write about what Abraham and Torok have to tell us about *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Throughout the essays Rand collected together in *The Shell and the Kernel*, there are only three references to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, a work thick with examples and specimen analyses. Two of these references are in an essay – 'Theoretra: An Alternative to Theory' (253-56) – written by Torok some seven years after their collaboration had been concluded in such untimely fashion. Furthermore, in *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*, there are no direct references to Freud's dream book at all, this despite the fact that the vast majority of their interest in this book is in dream analyses.

Although Abraham and Torok do not refer to *The Interpretation of Dreams* in *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*, it is to this work that I want to turn my attention in the remainder of

this paper, since it is in the 'Verbier,' more than in any other work, that the idiosyncratic character of their reading of Freud hinges on dreams and dream interpretation as a mode of analysis. Although they do not refer to Freud's dream book, I intend to bring us back once more to *The Interpretation of Dreams* if only at least through the filter of one of its central tenets: 'When the work of interpretation is completed, we perceive that a dream is the fulfilment of a wish' (1900, 121).

The Wolf Man's Magic Word is, as the title suggests, clearly concerned with the famous 'Wolf Man' who is the subject of Freud's most detailed case history, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis' (1918). Yet this book does not necessarily reverse the pattern of earlier essays. Rather than seeking to re-analyse the Wolf Man himself, Abraham and Torok seek to renew psychoanalysis *through* the figure of the Wolf Man. The basis for this renewal is the claim that the case history represented a momentous 'break' between the 'first or second topography—the early or later Freud' (1986, 2). It was the analysis of the Wolf Man which sowed the 'seeds of doubt in Freud's first views' (2).

Their stated aim is therefore to 'link the theories, the two eras' and to produce a 'more unified view of psychoanalysis' (2). With this in mind, we might argue that the subject of their investigation was not the subject of the case history; rather their 'subject' is the case history itself, as the representative of a pivotal moment in the whole development of psychoanalysis. Yet this claim ignores the fact that Abraham and Torok themselves were, first and foremost, analysts. To their analytical sensibilities, a case history matters not one iota if it fails to point to the clinical reality of an analysis. Thus, in reading the case history anew, they are concerned not only with the hand of Freud at work in the

polemical writing, but also with the voice of the patient with whose words the analyst's pen resonates.

To understand the role played by the Wolf Man in the 'break' between the earlier and later Freud, at least as Abraham and Torok picture it, we shall renew our acquaintance with one of the most significant dream analyses published by Freud, second perhaps in importance only to the dream of Irma's injection. We may recall that it was through his interpretation of the dream of the wolves that Freud purported to finally have put to rest the dissensions of Carl Gustav Jung and Alfred Adler. Moreover, his interpretation of this dream provided support for the theory of deferred effect, which served as a corner-stone for the hypothesis of infantile sexuality at the core of the aetiology of neuroses.

According to Freud, the wolf dream as it was recounted in analysis manifested anew a primal scene in which the patient as an infant had witnessed his parents engaging in the sexual act *a tergo*. While Freud's polemical tone in 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis' suggests a firm conviction of the validity of his interpretation, Abraham and Torok read beyond the polemic to locate signs of contradiction and doubt, suggesting instead that this case history marks a shift in psychoanalytical thought. They had been aided in this exercise by the release of the Wolf Man's memoirs by Muriel Gardiner in 1971, which revealed aspects of Pankeiev's childhood that Freud had not discussed in the case history.

In particular, they revealed that in addition to the Russian that Pankeiev had spoken as a first language and the German he used in therapy, a third language, English, had been at work in a rudimentary form in the child's earliest linguistic experiences, on the basis

that the child's governess had been bilingual, with English as a first language. Taking this polyglottism into account, Abraham and Torok contend the concealment that may be attributed to the dream work was then also evident in the speech act of recollecting material in analysis. When the patient spoke in German, he was already also speaking English or Russian, or, more precisely, words compiled from his secret 'Verbier,' the lexicon consisting of words from all three languages and behind which was concealed (by any number of possible modes of encryption) the unspeakable phrase referring to an altogether different primal scene.

The 'talking cure' was thus stymied by the capacity of the patient to find ways to say nothing. In the five years that Abraham and Torok spent studying this Verbier, true to their desire to ground theory in individual contexts, they developed an explanation of the mechanism which produced the Wolf Man's secret world: they called it the *crypt*. They explain that the splitting of the ego, a process normally associated with libidinal development in the Freudian model, may be undermined by a defence mechanism not recognised by Freud. If the subject loses an object which is indispensable in the early organisation of the psyche, or if the idealised relationship with this object is threatened, the object may be incorporated into the ego, meaning the subject presumes the object itself, rather than the words representing it, to have been completely internalised.

A crypt is this monument of a lost object preserved intact within the split ego, although the ego continues to function as though it were intact. The subject cannot be allowed to expose to his or her self that the reality of the object is in fact a fantasy so representation of the object is censored. The crypt is not unconscious although it functions as though it were, filtering all material bubbling up from this nether realm before any may submit to

the secondary processes. When a cryptophoric subject speaks, then, it is only on behalf of the incorporated object. In place of words, a cryptophoric subject speaks cryptonyms or word-things whose relation to each other is determined less by laws of syntax or lexis than by their relation to the object itself.

Thus, Freud's interpretation of the dream, as it was recounted in analysis, may be valid enough to support his conviction *and yet*, at the same time, he could legitimately doubt that what he was actually dealing with was dream work as he had understood it at the time he published his great dream book, almost two decades earlier. What Abraham and Torok describe, in other words, is a blueprint for a revised topography of the mind, according to which it may be possible to understand *in psychoanalytical terms*, how the psychoanalytical ear may be deceived by an intermediary between the primary and the secondary processes. Yet we have already noted that this blueprint is never spelled out so explicitly in so many words. It is in Derrida's foreword that our attention is drawn to this broader implication of the theory of the crypt.

Now, such extrapolation brings me to the question of another more general implication of the 'Verbier', which frames this paper: does explanation of how the psychoanalytical ear may be deceived by the cryptophoric patient on the couch add anything to received knowledge about dreams? I will argue in closing here that it does, precisely because it radically alters the status of the dream work from the perspective of analysis, and, by extension, in our broader conception of dreams. For the cryptophoric subject, according to Abraham and Torok, the dream work is identical to the development of symptoms, in so far as both 'form one and the same double fantasy life, a double fantasy life that cannot coalesce into a unity unless it is transformed into an absurd thought and, thereby,

turned into something acceptable to both halves of the Ego' (1986, 82).

Both halves of the split ego produce fantasies, the function of which is 'to maintain the topographical status quo,' yet this produces continual conflict in the degree to which all fantasies preserve the split within the ego by opposing themselves to fantasies produced by the other half of the ego. Of course, an index of internal division is a dead giveaway for the crypt, so there must be fantasies which maintain this division (the topographical status quo) while suggesting at the same time an altogether different status quo: the ego intact.

Dreams which have their origin in fantasies of this kind have a somewhat altered status vis-a-vis the psychoanalytical ear. We see that these dreams are symptomatic in so far as they are an effect of the need to preserve the very topography of the crypt by denying its presence within the ego. For the cryptophoric subject, dreams do not simply screen repressed materials (memories or traces of past scenes and their deferred effects). They screen from conscious detection the topographical reality of the crypt and the split ego.

In the Freudian model, dreams represent one of the ways in which the ego and superego maintain the status quo during sleep by enabling the fulfilment of wishes in such a way that they prevent us from waking and acting upon them directly. Thus, dreams are an effect of one of the components of the psyche. According to the logic of a cryptonymy, dreams can be *located topographically* on this side of the crypt, as the screen which the crypt presents to consciousness. Indeed, everything of which the cryptophoric subject is conscious must, by definition, be situated on this side of the crypt, therefore, outside the ego. Thus, the status attributed to dreams themselves need really be no different to that

attributed to the manifest content that is recounted upon waking. Both are merely layers stacked upon the exterior of the crypt, the one more 'exterior' than the other.

This observation does lead us to reconsider the implications of one of the central tenets of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which I shall reiterate once more: 'When the work of interpretation is completed, we perceive that a dream is the fulfilment of a wish' (1900, 121). James Hopkins (1991) links both of the components of this formula, 'the work of interpretation' and wish-fulfilment, through a logic of intentionality. Wishes can be expressed in the form of an articulation of motive which must contain a content – as in the statement, 'I wish for A' – thereby satisfying both a hermeneutic compulsion in the work of interpretation and the causal aspects directing our inner motivations towards objects in the world around us.

Might this logic lead us to ask whether the statement 'I wish to dream' is an altogether impossible one? If a dream is the fulfilment of a wish that is directed toward a content, expressed in the form of the statement 'I wish for A,' then this content can not be the dream itself. In order to arrive at this conclusion, we utilise what Hopkins (1991) calls 'our commonsense psychological explanation,' according to which 'our understanding of linguistic meaning and motivational cause work in natural harmony' (91-92). 'I wish to dream' is thus an impossible statement where we employ a 'commonsense' mode of explanation delimited according to linguistic meaning and intentionality as expressed normally in the content of statements.

We might recall here that the anasemic structure of psychoanalytical language, as it is described by Abraham in 'The Shell and the Kernel' (1994), provides for understanding

of aspects of the psyche which, in the eyes of common sense, do not exist. Certainly, it is fair to say that the Wolf Man's crypt would have been inaccessible to the common sense mode of psychological explanation attributed to Freud by Hopkins. Yet it also stands to reason that for Abraham and Torok to have identified the crypt on the other side of the master's own writing, the psychoanalytical language employed by Freud must have had sufficiently 'uncommon' sense (that is, anasemia) to retain a trace of the crypt in the first instance. Analysis itself, in this respect, then, can be seen to be a layer posited by the Wolf Man's crypt as its own exterior surface, on the other side of the dream.

According to the anasemic discourse which gives rise to the theory of the crypt, then, an expression of motive and content in the form of a statement such as 'I wish for A' is as likely to be the product of secondary process as any other form of conscious expression. The dreams of the cryptophoric subject, in particular, simply reiterate time and again, in a myriad of guises, the statement concealed within the crypt. As such, they are unable to be expressed as a wish at all – that is, perhaps, except for the possibility of a wish to be able to function on the basis of an intact ego which can be turned toward the outside world. This is to say in closing that the dreams of the cryptophoric subject may well be expressive of a wish to be allowed to wish, to have at least one wish, an object toward which the dream work might be oriented.

In their renewal of the Freudian picture of dream work, is it possible then that Abraham and Torok might have foreclosed on the possibility of wish fulfilment, rendering invalid the principal contention underlining *The Interpretation of Dreams*? In another renewal – a strategic revision of Freud's incomplete picture of the splitting of the ego in primary

defence mechanisms – Melanie Klein (1975) suggested that the splitting of the ego is necessary in the formation of our earliest libidinal attachments (70). Should we consider the two renewals together, and conclude, therefore, that we are all, if healthy, also in some degree cryptophoric? Instead, we might not wish to deny Abraham and Torok of their insistently isolationist approach: always orient thought away from programmatic statements. Yet I would caution against allowing their renewals of psychoanalysis to be left in the moment of renewal, as a thing of the past, irrelevant. In uttering at the death the utterly impossible, I hope once more to make new anew: 'I wish to dream.'

Total Word Count of Essay = 3896

Works Consulted

Abraham, Nicolas and Maria Torok. 1986. *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*. Trans. Nicholas Rand. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

---. 1994. *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Nicholas T. Rand. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1986. "Foreword: *Fors*: The Anglish Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok." Trans. Barbara Johnson. *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. xi-xlviii.

Freud, Sigmund. 1900. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. *Standard Edition*. v.4-5.

---. 1918. "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis." *Standard Edition*. v.17:3-123.

Gardiner, Muriel ed. 1973. *The Wolf-Man and Sigmund Freud*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Hopkins, James. 1991. "The Interpretation of Dreams." *The Cambridge Companion to Freud*. Ed. Jerome Neu. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 86-135.

Johnson, Laurence. 2000. "Tracing Calculation [*Calque Calcul*] Between Nicolas Abraham and Jacques Derrida." *PMC* 10.3.

Klein, Melanie. 1975. *Envy and Gratitude*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Laplanche, Jean, and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. 1988. *The Language of Psycho-analysis*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: Karnac Books and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

Rand, Nicholas. 1994. "Introduction: Renewals of Psychoanalysis." *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1-22.

Roudinesco, Elisabeth. 1990. *Jacques Lacan & Co. A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985*. Trans. Jeffrey Mehlman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Total Word Count plus Works Consulted = 4123