

Going Home Again: Revisiting our Formal Residencies in Our Dreams

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Like many of the folks from whom I have collected dreams over the years, I often find that homes where I have previously lived show up in the images I produce while asleep. While Thomas Wolfe (2011) declares that “we can’t go home again,” there is a way in which we return home. It is through our dreams. However, Wolfe might be offered some important insights when he writes about the difficulties encountered in returning to one’s hometown or to one of the homes where we have resided during our life. Even in the more fanciful account of wanting to return home that we find in *the Wizard of Oz*, there are many obstacles for Dorothy to overcome and a malevolent force to contend with before she can arrive back in Kansas.

Can I Really Go Home Again?

While I often find a fanciful or nostalgic return to my previous homes when I am awake to be quite pleasurable—this fantasy and nostalgia can translate into something quite vivid and “lived in” when I am dreaming. However, these nighttime dreams cannot be as easily controlled as my daytime productions. Like Wolfe and Dorothy, I often encounter difficulties when I attempt to return in my dreams to homes where I have previously lived or to hometowns from early in my life. It is almost as if “I can’t go home again!”

It is often a problem when I return to one of my previous homes. I might be illegally returning to this home that I no longer own. Or this home is now in disrepair. I also find that this home is being pummeled by a storm or is caught on fire. Even that hometown where I lived in Illinois is sometimes being shaken by an earthquake during a dream or is invaded by sinister forces. I often find myself running away from this once-cherished home or once safe hometown.

Illegal Residency

I am in my previous home, but I know it is illegal, since I no longer own the home. I keep thinking that the new owners will show up and kick me out or report me to the police. This home is usually the one I previously owned in Gualala, a small town located on the North Coast of California. Typically, I am not alone in my former home. I usually have a gathering of folks with me (often my former students). We are involved in some project and are consuming food cooked in the small Gualala kitchen. We have made a mess of things. I am fearful that the current owners are soon to arrive. They will not only be upset that I am in their home without their permission but also that a large number of people are present who are trashing the place.

I find myself trying to make excuses for being in their home without their permission: “I tried to contact you but must have used the wrong phone number [or email address].” “I was just passing by your home and was curious about what you had done to improve it. I found the front door open and stepped in.” Obviously, these were absurd arguments--and I seem to be aware of the absurdity during the dream. I began planning for a fast exit if the current owners were reported coming down the long driveway to this home. Another absurd idea, since all of our cars would have to pass them coming to their home. I was often in a panic and typically awoke to a sense of relief that I was not spending time in a home I no longer owned.

It is not unusual for me to spend a few minutes when first waking up from this dream of illegal occupancy to reflect on the real-life time I spent in Gualala and the hosting I did at this home of family members, friends—and students. I briefly savored these memories and wondered if we could repurchase this home from the current owners. I then wake up a bit more and realized that we now live on the other side of North America from this California home and have absolutely no business considering the purchase of a home that we will never visit.

Natural Disaster

Frequently my previous home was hit by a flood, wind or tsunami. My home in Walnut Creek had an enclosed porch where not only was my bedroom located but also (on the other side of a wall-to-ceiling bookshelf) the office was located where I did all of my writing. In my dreams, a great storm would blow in and either rattle or shatter the windows of this porch. All of my writing would be blown away by this windstorm and I could never fall asleep in the bedroom portion of the porch.

My home in Gualala was located on a hill overlooking the Pacific Ocean. While there were many storms that blew in over the oceans and large waves pounded the shore, there was no way that the storms could threaten my well-built Gualala home, nor could waves ever reach our home on the hill that resided more than a mile from the ocean. Yet, in my dreams, the ocean was chewing up the hill on which my home was located. I was looking out over a steep cliff on which my home teetered precariously. The relentless storm was about to obliterate my home. I would usually wake up at this moment.

A variant on this nightmarish dream required that I create a new home that was located on the shore of an ocean. The ocean view from this home was lovely; however, I was soon facing a large wave that was racing in from the once serene ocean. This wave was going to destroy my home and probably take my life. I find that this particular variant on the Gualala dream is linked to actual fears in my life regarding large waves. I love to body surf and have done so riding waves on California, Hawaii and Maine beaches. The moments of “catching a wave” and skimming down the front side of the wave are splendid. However, the waves can sometimes be quite large. I either try swimming back to the shore (often unsuccessfully) or dip under the wave as it comes toward me (usually more successful). This same fear (as well as my enthrallment with the wave’s beauty and power) is replicated in my dreams of living in a seaside home that is about to be destroyed (can’t dip my home under the incoming wave).

Attach by Sinister Force

I walk from my home in Sycamore Illinois to the Main Street which is one block away from where my parents bought a house. As a child, I was always a bit weary of this short trip for I walked by a very “sleazy” bar where many drunks hung out. It was very dark inside the Bar, and the sounds of blurred voices rang out and frightened me.

Now, in my adult years, living many miles from Sycamore, Illinois, I have dreams of once again embarking on the dangerous trip to downtown Sycamore. However, when I now walk by the Bar, there are evil spirits that spring out of the dark recesses of the Bar and attack me. I have to run back home and only feel safe after closing the front door behind me. The evil spirits then appear at all of the windows around our Sycamore home. I am afraid to venture out.

Sometimes, I find that I can't remember my way back home (even though my Sycamore home was only half a block away from the Bar). I am running around, scared to death, confused, and feeling very childlike. I usually wake up sweating—and thankful that I am no longer a child and am living in a safe home far away from a menacing Bar.

However, the sinister forces didn't always remain in Sycamore. They often followed me to California. They were particularly prevalent in dreams when my wife and I were driving up to our home in Gualala. While the highway up to our Gualala home was somewhat treacherous in and of itself, and was sometimes washed out by a heavy rainstorm, the challenge was even greater when the large sea monsters reached up the cliff to snatch our car as we raced along the cliffs. I would borrow from all of the sea monster movies I saw as a petrified but enthralled viewer during my childhood years. My brother and I would find our accustomed seats at the State Theater in Sycamore, Illinois, and watch large octopus ensnare cars on the bridge leading into a coastal city or a massive squid attacks a submarine (Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* comes to mind). And now these monsters return to terrify me as an adult dreamer! I must remember to travel on the cliff road in my dreams when the sea monsters are out of season . . .

Yes, I Can Go Home Again

While many of my dreams that incorporate a previous home center on some threat to my life or some discovery of my illegal occupation of this home, I also find that a previous home offers the prospect of pleasant experiences. I can go home again and relive the sense of sanctuary I found in each of the homes in my life.

Safety and Celebration

I find that not all of my dreams about previous homes are anxiety-producing. Many of these dreams, like my daytime fantasies, are quite pleasant. I reenact scenes like that at the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, when Dorothy is once again with her family. I am having dinner with my mother, father, brother and sister at our dining table in Sycamore. I might instead be dancing on a beach with my wife and children.

It is not unusual that this dream segment, portraying safety and celebration, occurs at the end of a dream in which anxiety-provoking events occur. As in the case of *The Wizard of Oz*, there is a happy ending. Perhaps I am stealing the story line from the *Wizard* or many other Hollywood productions with endings that make us feel safe and secure, after scaring us to death!

Family, Friendships and Celebrations

I am diving into our California swimming pool with several of my teenage friends. I am playing "Marco Polo" with my own children at our home in Walnut Creek, California. I have driven up the Northern California coastline to our lovely home in Gualala with my wife and precious dog. There are no menacing waves or sea monsters challenging our trip up the coast. Our son and daughter suddenly are there at our Gualala home. We are all dancing around to the music of the Traveling Wilburys or simply feeling energized by the music of Handel or Bach.

These dreams usually are replicating actual events that occurred earlier in my life. I am being nostalgic and reminiscing about these former times. Typically, I have remade the actual event in my dream. For instance, I am sometimes playing a game of "Marco Polo" not only with my children but also with the

buddies I played this game with when a teenager in Van Nuys, California. It is not unusual for my deceased parents to be there to witness my grownup son and daughter dancing with me after arriving at our former home in Gualala.

Envisioning and Creating

As I noted in a previous essay (Bergquist, 2024), I used to fly quite a bit in my adolescent and early adulthood dreams. However, I only flew while living in Sycamore. Apparently, I was “grounded” when we moved to California. I would love soaring around the large trees by our home on Maple St. in Sycamore. I also flew inside our home, soaring around the various downstairs rooms. I wonder if my flying had anything to do with a lovely playful activity in which my father participated. As a very strong man (college wrestler), my father would lie on his back and lift me up and spin me around with wonderful airplane noises. Then he would get up and carry me above his head while raising through all of the downstairs rooms. Was I later (after leaving Sycamore) reenacting and expanding on the flying I was doing with my dad?

While I was no longer flying when we moved to California, I would have dreams in my later life of being creative and expansive while sitting at a table or resting on a lounge table. I recall dreams of my living room in Van Nuys, where our piano was located. I would love to sit under this piano when I was awake. I didn’t play the piano (one year of lessons didn’t stick with me). Later, I would dream of playing the piano, often working on some famous classical composition. I was particularly good in my dreams with the performance of Bach and Chopin. I even played some of my own compositions (which I could never recreate when I was awake).

These Van Nuys dreams often took place when I was going to graduate school in Boston and listening to classical music while working on a school essay. They also occurred later when I was an assistant professor and working on my next-day lecture. An often-stressful daytime requirement of productivity (and some creativity) that was transformed into a nighttime wistful display of musical skills and creativity. When I would wake up from one of these dreams, I was often wistful about not being a great composer rather than a graduate student or young professor.

Later, I had dreams where I am sitting at the window of my home in Berkeley, overlooking the San Francisco Bay or sitting at our dining room table in Gualala, California doing some writing. Often, I replicate a bit of what I dreamt about in Van Nuys. I am producing music rather than words (which is what I do when I am awake). The sounds are flowing out of my pen. Eventually, I am dancing to the music I have proposed. At other times, I am creating new projects while sitting in the loft of my home in Gualala. Lofty ideas are emanating from my loft! I am much more productive and creative in my dream-based homes in Berkeley and Gualala than I have ever been in my “real-life” homes.

Challenge and Bravery

The drive up along the coastline is actually a bit challenging and became even more challenging during my dreams when massive waves are crashing on the cliffs or a sea monster attacks my car as we drive along the cliff. Yet, my wife and I push on. We are willing to risk everything in order to reach our destination. This being our archetypal home on the hill in Gualala. It is at our home/castle that we can look out over the Pacific Ocean, which is now peaceful (pacific).

However, when awake, I am also aware, as I have already mentioned, that some of my dreams allow for no safety at our Gualala home. The waves that are crashing on the cliff as we drive up to Gualala are now chewing up our hill and are about to crash into our home. The challenge is great. I must be brave in confronting not just the threat of driving on the cliff but also living on a hill near the ocean.

Interpretations of a Residency Dream

Given that many of the folks I have interviewed report having previous homes in their dreams, it is not surprising that many interpretations have been offered over the years regarding the meaning of these revisited homes in our dreams. Here are some of the most widely shared notions about what our home(s) represents in a dream.

First, it should be noted that many dream interpreters are enthusiastic about speculating regarding this meaning. They declare that a dream about a former residence holds important symbolic meaning. These former homes can serve as a pathway to important insights regarding the content of one's subconscious or unconscious mind. Obviously, there is the strong possibility that dreams about a former home or hometown represents our journey to the past—much as is the case with our nostalgic daydreams. It is in our former homes that we find our personal history, our former relationships, our former emotions, and our aspirations regarding the future (where we are now living when awake).

As might be the case with my escape from the evil spirits in the Sycamore Bar, our old home might represent one of Carl Jung's archetypes, this being the sanctuary, refuge or safe haven. Much as Dorothy felt safe when returning to Kansas, finding that her travel companions and protectors (Scarecrow, Tin Man and Lion) were actually people in her waking life, we might find that our dreams of previous homes reveals something about what we are looking for with regard to safety, stability and continuity—and how we might find the primary sources of this safety, stability and continuity among people in our current, waking life.

Our dreams can also be containers for our memories. As I noted in one of my recent essays on dreams (Bergquist, 2025) some neurobiological researchers believe that we tend to sort through and organize our daytime memories when we are asleep. I have suggested that some of this sorting and organizing might occur via our dreams. This being the case, then a previous home would be a perfect location for storing memories of the life we lived when dwelling in this home.

While our dream-based home might serve as a repository for our memories, it can also serve as a repository for the “longings” of our previous life. Our youthful aspirations are vividly portrayed in the actions we take in our dreams and potentially provide us with guidance regarding where we want to go in our current future. We are “leaning” into the future (Bergquist and Mura, 2011) when we visualize taking action in our past. I was creative in my dream-based homes in Berkeley and Gualala.

Could I be just as creative during my waking life—and perhaps do something with the actual musical compositions I have set aside? Dorothy might have learned something about her own bravery in confronting the witch. She can use that bravery in confronting the real-life witch who threatens Dorothy (and her family) in Kansas. I also can learn about my bravery when reflecting on my dreams about driving up to Gualala on a very challenging road (which is made even more challenging in my dreams).

Another common feature in the presence of former homes in our dreams relates to the “honoring” or “fearing” of our former life. When we dream about a former residence, it can symbolize specific aspects

of our past that are “grounded” in this specific home. Our past homes hold profound emotional memories and emotions, making them powerful symbols in dreams. Dreaming about a former residence might represent nostalgia for a certain period in our lives or a longing for a sense of familiarity and comfort. Our past home can also provide a vehicle for our dream-based reflections on past experiences. We seek to understand how these experiences have shaped our beliefs, aspirations and sense of self. As I will soon note, a past home can also be the “battleground” for addressing long-standing, focal conflicts in our life.

Some of the more positive interpretations of the presence of past homes in our dreams feature a former home as a place (or at least symbol) of personal growth and transformation. Our past and present homes represent an important aspect of our identity. Our home tells us something about how we chose to see ourselves and how we hope other people will see us.

Revisiting a former residence in a dream can indicate that we have moved on from that previous version of ourselves. We have entered a new phase of life—whether or not this new phase is of our choosing or is forced upon us. The previous home may symbolize a desire for change, especially if this home is threatened with destruction (as was the case in some of my dreams) or is presented in a highly distorted manner. Our departure from this home in our dream might also represent our recognition of the progress we have made.

In addition, if the dream of a former residence is accompanied by a sense of unease or discomfort, it could point to unresolved issues from the past. This dream may be a reminder to address these unresolved emotions or circumstances and find closure. It could be an opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned from our past experiences and to let go of any lingering negativity. Additionally, the specific condition of a former home in one’s dream can offer further insights.

For example, if the house appears dilapidated or in disrepair, it may symbolize neglected aspects of one’s past life or more indirectly one’s present life. Feelings of regret might reside in this condition of neglect. On the other hand, if the former residence is well-maintained or renovated, it may indicate personal growth and positive changes that have taken place since that time. Feelings of success and care might reside in the portrayal of a home that has been well preserved.

It seems deep personal significance can reside in past homes about which we dream. We can relive our life in these homes and try out alternative behaviors. We can feel things that we never felt when actually living in these homes. Alternatively, we can savor how we actually lived our life in these homes and the rich emotions that accompanied our life in these homes. Dreams about former lives lived in former homes can yield valuable insights into our past, present, and future. Whether it evokes nostalgia, represents personal growth, or signals unresolved issues, our dreams that incorporate former homes may provide us with guidance as we seek to better understand ourselves and navigate our lives with greater clarity and purpose.

I pause at this point, because these often-optimistic perspectives on dreams incorporating former homes don’t always take into account our complex inner world of conflicting forces and deeply entrenched defensive mechanisms. We can’t completely ignore Sigmund Freud’s view that dreams are as much in the business of hiding as they are in the business of revealing or providing significant insights. As I turn to my own dreams, I need to remind myself that there is still much to be learned about dreams from Dr. Freud and other observers of all dimensions in the human psyche. So, before considering

dreams in which I have incorporated former homes, I wish to offer a brief review of dream structures as presented by Sigmund Freud and other psychoanalysts.

The Structure and Dynamics of Dreams

Sigmund Freud was very interested in structure and physical locations. He loved the field of archeology and had many archaeological artifacts in his Vienna office. Freud made extensive use of archaeological metaphors in his image of the human psyche. We have layers upon layers of memories and emotions. Psychoanalysts assist their patients in “digging deeper” into their psyche to reveal old relics. I begin the description of dream structures and dynamics by referring back to a critical concept offered by Sigmund Freud, the would-be archeologist.

Freud's Apparatus

In the middle of his massive and highly influential treatise on dreams, Freud (1900, pp. 536) provides a remarkable framework or apparatus for understanding the structure and dynamics of regression. In many ways, this framework moves well beyond the matter of dreams and dream interpretation. It offers a prescient view of the way in which our mind operates. Freud's framework is portrayed in spatial form; however, as Freud notes, it actually operates in a temporary manner, with one element of the psychological (Ψ) system that he describes being activated following another element. It is also important to note that Freud uses abbreviations when describing this framework: (1) perception (*Pcpt*), (2) memory (*Mnem*), (3) Motor (*M*), (4) unconscious (*Ucs*), and (5) preconscious (*Pcs*).

We first enter the world of Freud's apparatus with his observation that the psychic dynamics of this system move in a specific direction (Freud, 1900/1953, p. 537):

The first thing that strikes us is that this apparatus, compounded of Ψ -systems, has a sense of direction. All our psychical activity starts from stimuli (whether internal or external) and ends in innervations. Accordingly, we shall ascribe a sensory and a motor end to the apparatus. At the sensory end there lies a system which receives perceptions; at the motor end there lies another, which opens the gateway to motor activity. Psychological processes advance in general from the perceptual end to the motor end. Thus the most general schematic picture of the psychical apparatus may be represented thus (Fig. 1):

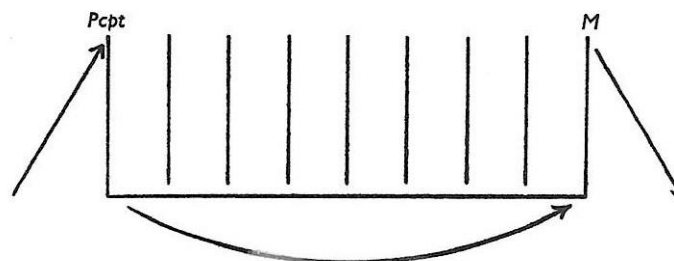


FIG. 1.

Freud (1900/1953, p. 538) now brings in the memory elements of his apparatus and differentiates between those memory elements that are transitory and those that are permanent (it is worth noting that contemporary neuropsychological findings similarly point to memories that are discarded at night and those that are retained and placed in long term storage]:

Next, we have grounds for introducing a first differentiation at the sensory end. A trace is left in our psychical apparatus of the perceptions which impinge upon it. This we may describe as a 'memory-trace'; and to the function relating to it we give the name of 'memory'. . . . [T]here are obvious difficulties involved in supposing that one and the same system can accurately retain modifications of its elements and yet remain perpetually open to the reception of fresh occasions for modification. In accordance, therefore . . . we shall distribute these two functions on to different systems. We shall suppose that a system in the very front of the apparatus receives the perceptual stimuli but retains no trace of them and thus has no memory, while behind it there lies a second system which transforms the momentary excitations of the first system into permanent traces. The schematic picture of our psychical apparatus would then be as follows (Fig. 2):

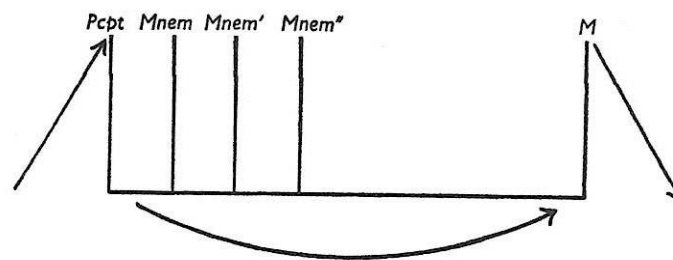


FIG. 2.

At this point, Freud (1900, pp. 538-539) reminds us that he still lives in a world when memories are linked by association [a concept that has since been replaced by Donald Hebb's (1949) neurobiological notion that memories (neurons) which "fire together will wire together." The important point to be noted in what Freud has suggested is that incoming perceptual information is "sticky." One piece of information will often link with another piece leading to what Jerome Bruner (1973) later identified as the human capacity to "go beyond the information given." The newly connected pieces of information lead to the construction of a reality that was not portrayed in any one of these pieces.

It is now time for Freud (1900/1953, p. 539) to introduce his first notions about conscious and unconscious processes as they pertain to our perceptual and memory systems:

It is the *Pcpt.* system, which is without the capacity to retain modifications and is thus without memory, that provides our consciousness with the whole multiplicity of sensory qualities. On the other hand, our memories—not excepting those which are most deeply stamped on our minds—are in themselves unconscious. They can be made conscious; but there can be no doubt that they can produce all their effects while in an unconscious condition. What we describe as our 'character' is based on the memory-traces of our impressions; and, moreover, the impressions which have had the greatest effect on us—those of our earliest youth—are precisely the ones which scarcely ever become conscious. But if memories become conscious once more, they exhibit no sensory quality or a very slight one in comparison with perceptions.

Thus, we find in Freud's apparatus an intriguing distinction to be made between the vibrance of incoming perceptions and the somewhat less vibrant nature of our memories. Is this actually the case?

Furthermore, might our dreams bring a vibrance to memories that are engaged in the creation of the dream?

Freud (1900, pp. 540-541) now applies his formulation specifically to the protective devices that are engaged in dreams. He is introducing the guardian function of the psyche that he would later label the “super ego”:

We [are] only able to explain the formation of dreams by venturing upon the hypothesis of there being two psychical agencies, one of which submitted the activity of the other to a criticism which involved its exclusion from consciousness. The critical agency . . . stands like a screen between the latter and consciousness. Further, we [can identify] the critical agency with the agency which directs our waking life and determines our voluntary, conscious actions. . . . [This being the case, we must] locate the critical system at the motor end of the apparatus. We will now introduce the two systems into our schematic picture and give them names to express their relation to consciousness (Fig. 3):

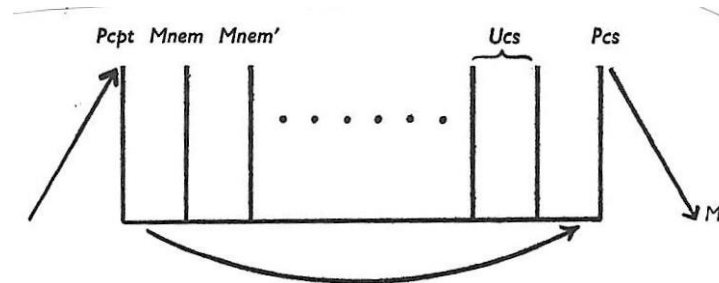


FIG. 3.

Freud (1900/1953, pp. 541-542) goes into further detail regarding dynamics operating at the motor end of his apparatus:

We will describe the last of the systems at the motor end as 'the preconscious', to indicate that the excitatory processes occurring in it can enter consciousness without further impediment . . . We will describe the system that lies behind it as 'the unconscious', because it has no access to consciousness except via the preconscious, in passing through which its excitatory process is obliged to submit to modifications.

In which of these systems, then, are we to locate the impetus to the construction of dreams? For simplicity's sake, in the system *Ucs* . . . the process of forming dreams is obliged to attach itself to dream-thoughts belonging to the preconscious system, But when we consider the dream-wish, we shall find that the motive force for producing dreams is supplied by the *Ucs*.; and owing to this latter factor we shall take the unconscious system as the starting-point of dream-formation.

Thus, to unbundle Freud's phrases a bit, it is proposed by Freud that the energy (and content) that initiate a dream comes from unconscious sources. Furthermore, intervention of the unconscious occurs just at the point when the dreamer is about to take action. Dream content is censored, according to Freud, precisely because the dreamer worries that action is about to take place —though we know that actions (and movements in general) are blocked when we are dreaming (other than some subtle movements of our larynx and sometimes our limbs).

Freud (1900/1953, p. 542) has more to say about the process of censorship:

Like all other thought structures, this dream-instigator will make an effort to advance into the *Pcs.* and from there to obtain access to consciousness. . . . [T]his path leading through the pre-conscious to consciousness is barred to the dream-thoughts during the daytime by the censorship imposed by resistance. During the night they are able to obtain access to consciousness If what enabled the dream-thoughts to achieve this were the fact that at night there is a lowering of the resistance which guards the frontier between the unconscious and the preconscious, we should have dreams which were in the nature of ideas and which were without the hallucinatory quality

Thus, according to Freud, a dream that was not guarded would probably involve concrete plans for initiating a desired (often forbidden) act. Evil blueprints would pervade our nighttime productions. However, these plans and blueprints are not what is to be found in our dreams. Rather, as Freud mentions, our dreams are “hallucinatory” in nature. We censor by transforming plans and blueprints into fanciful actions that often hide true intentions.

With this argument in favor of the censoring function of dreams, Freud (1900/1953, p. 542) speaks directly to the regressive dynamics that operate in dreams:

The only way in which we can describe what happens in hallucinatory dreams is by saying that the excitation moves in a backward direction. Instead of being transmitted towards the motor end of the apparatus it moves towards the sensory end and finally reaches the perceptual system, if we describe as 'progressive' the direction taken by psychical processes arising from the unconscious during waking life, then we may speak of dreams as having a 'regressive' character.

As often found in the Jungian description of Introversion during waking hours where thoughts and images are projected on a screen residing in front of the Introverts psyche, so Freud's dreams move backward through his psychic apparatus to appear as internal perceptions. Just as the Jungian introvert believes that the projected thought and images in front of them are “reality” the dreamer believes that the internal perceptions in front of their dream-state screen are real, external perceptions. It is only after the dreamer wakes up that they realize these perceptions come from inside their own psyche.

Freud (1900/1953, pp. 542-543) concludes his description of the proposed psychological apparatus and the process of regression by extending its application beyond the dream state:

This regression . . . is undoubtedly one of the psychological characteristics of the process of dreaming; but we must remember that it does not occur only in dreams. Intentional recollection and other constituent processes of our normal thinking involve a retrogressive movement in the psychical apparatus from a complex ideational act back to the raw material of the memory-traces underlying it. In the waking state, however, this backward movement never extends beyond the mnemonic images; it does not succeed in producing a hallucinatory revival of the perceptual images. Why is it otherwise in dreams? . . . It is probably this alteration in the normal psychical procedure which makes possible the cathexis of the system *Pcpt.* in the reverse direction, starting from thoughts, to the pitch of complete sensory vividness.

Thus, we are left with an important insight provided by Freud. The rational and largely conceptual facilities of the human mind that are needed to initiate and direct actions serve as a starting point for the formulation of a dream. However, our psyche moves us backward given the potentially threatening nature of the (not-so-rational) thoughts and desires that linger near the edge of action.

This turning away from action leads the dreamer to regress from thoughts to more primitive imagery (found in our preconscious mind). Eventually we regress as dreamers to the enacted narrative of our dreams—often borrowing from our long-term stored memories. These vivid enactments are experienced as real, perceived events occurring in our waking life. And then we wake up to find ourselves perceiving and confronting a quite different reality . . .

Regression

As we look beyond Freud at the structure of a dream, an important place to begin, as Freud did, is with the so-called regression that takes place in the dream. Classically, three types of regression have been identified by those engaged in so-called psychoanalytic theory.

The first type of regression concerns the type of defense being mobilized when we are anxious or when unwanted thoughts and feelings emerge (A. Freud, 2018; Vaillant, 1977/1998). The least primitive defenses such as sublimation are mobilized when the anxiety is minimal, while more primitive defenses such as projection and repression gain traction when we are highly anxious or when major threats emerge in our thoughts and/or feelings.

The second type of regression concerns the nature of imagery that is swirling around in our head. A regressed image is often quite vivid, quite bizarre, and even “childlike.” Freud is likely to link these images to the oldest stored memories in his psychic apparatus. The Jungian theorist would suggest that our regressive images are likely to be linked to specific archetypal forms, such as the evil witch, the serpent, or the figure of a god or goddess.

The third type of regression concerns the source of an image at a specific time in our life. More regressive images are based on our early life experiences. Freud would refer to his graphic portrayal of the psychic apparatus and point to the earliest memories we have stored long-term. Some psychoanalysts would even suggest that we have regressive images that relate to our birth experiences or even experiences anchored in tribal or cultural experiences that are embedded in a collective unconscious or in unconscious experiences (usually traumatic) that reside in our specific society (Hooper and Weinberg, 2019).

All three forms of regression are to be found in our dreams. And studies of dream content reveal that our dreams tend to become increasingly regressed later in the night. While early night dreams tend to be rather “drab” in terms of the vividness of the dream imagery, late night dreams tend to be filled with color and drama. Deep archetypal dreams also tend to dwell in the late night.

The defensive structure of dreams also tends to regress from early night to late night. Our early night dreams tend to involve fairly “reasonable” expression of desires and needs, such as showing affection for someone in our life that we love. By contrast, our late-night dreams—that often wake us up—are more likely to involve major disguises and diversions, such as dreaming about a wolf or evil spirit that is attacking our long-deceased parent.

And, bringing us back to the focus of this essay, our early night dreams tend to be filled with experiences from recent times—even the previous day (called “day residue”). Our late-night dreams, on the other hand, tend to be filled with experiences from earlier in our life. Thus, we are likely to find early night dreams incorporating our current home, while late night dreams incorporate homes in which we lived earlier in our life. To complete the picture regarding regression, we are also likely to find that all three forms of regression play out in our late-night dreams.

Dreams that occur after many hours of sleep may not only incorporate one of our earlier homes, quite vivid and even bizarre portrayals of this home or what occurs in this home are likely to occur in late-night dreams. In these dreams, the home might come to represent a variety of thoughts and feelings that are usually not accepted by us. Layers of meaning and representation are embedded in the image of our home, and our home might even be representing powerful archetypal themes (such as sanctuary, fortress, Eden, mother’s breast or womb).

Movement of Content and Energy

The intricate processing of our brain when faced with an anxiety producing challenge involves not just the tendency to regress; it also includes the intertwined movement of content and energy. When we regress, our attention and motivation move away from matters of the present moment to matters associated with the content of our regression. Freud would suggest that the boundaries between our preconscious state and our state of action become particularly strong when we are anxious (threatened by unacceptable thoughts and wishes). Our energy is moving us forcefully backward on Freud’s psychic apparatus.

At a mild level, we find this joint movement of content and energy in our daydreams. During a dull meeting, our attention shifts to a pleasant memory of our latest fishing trip or to a sometimes pleasurable and sometimes disturbing interaction we had last night with our adolescent son. At a less mild level, our attention while trying to fall asleep shifts to that horrible fight we had several hours ago with our life partner. Primitive images of revenge or escape swirl around our head and are accompanied by shifting feelings of rage and fear that swirl around our heart. This intertwined movement of content and energy is particularly pronounced during our dreams. It is important to gain a sense of the way that our psyche tends to move within a dream or over a sequence of dreams during the night.

Interpreting My Own Dreams

How then do these concepts of regression and movement apply to actual dreams? We are accustomed to applying Freud’s obsession with sexuality to all of our dreams: “That dancing and swimming are actually an indirect expression of sexual intercourse.” “The tentacles of the sea monster are actually phallic representations and suggest that sexuality can be threatening.” However, we can also apply concepts regarding the structure and dynamics of dreams to our everyday dreams. I will use my own dreams to illustrate these insightful applications.

Regression and Progression

As my night moves on, the dreams (like those of most dreamers) tend to regress. However, those dreams that incorporate my previous homes tend to be quite realistic. The third form of regression does not exist with regard to distortions of the dream image of my former home. While my dreams may incorporate powerful, archetypal images, my home is usually portrayed in accurate (and often quite

detailed) manner. These dreams often get bizarre only with regard to the negative, destructive forces that act upon them or upon me as I seek refuge. It is when my memories of past homes in the middle of Freud's apparatus are associated with negative affect that the third form of regression is engaged.

I do find that the first type of regression is present in my dreams about former homes. Symbolic representations of my previous home are rarely present; however, the role played by my former homes as refuge from a threatening external force or entity is clearly a defensive representation of the numerous ways in which I "hide" from real or imagined threats in my life. The dreams in which I am creative might also represent my use of sublimation as a defense against feelings of helplessness or hopelessness that are often represented in my more negative dreams about getting attacked and finding nowhere to hide—my home is not present.

The third form of regression is clearly present in my dreams incorporating former homes. This slipping back in time is prevalent. However, the interesting observation for me is that the extent of regression to old homes tends to shift over time. The dreams associated with my childhood home in Sycamore are now infrequent, while the dreams of Gualala are becoming more frequent. It seems that I am leaving behind my early homes in order to re-visit the home in which I lived a few years ago. While the archetypes being represented in my dream might have quite primitive origins, they are increasingly being represented in more recent locations.

There seems to be a Progression (rather than regression) in the content of my dreams about homes over time. Why this progression: (1) I am moving on to more "mature" focal conflicts, (2) I am "bored" with the old memories and am looking for new content to "interest" or "entertain" me, or (3) my dream "manufacturing" facility is a bit lazy and picks material that is more immediately available.

The first of these perspectives on locations in my dream is based on an important (and controversial) assumption that focal conflict or at least aspects of focal conflicts can be successfully addressed during our lifetime. As I noted in my first essay on dreams (Bergquist, 2023a), Thomas French and Erika Fromm (French and Fromm, 1964) proposed that a primary psychological function being served by dreams resides in the difficult process of bringing forth and seeking to resolve focal issues that emerged early in our life. While Freud views the function of dreams as being primarily one of guardianship, censorship, indirect-representation and protection, French and Fromm view dreams as serving a much more proactive and problem-solving function. What if, this French and Fromm function is sometimes successful?

A maturational approach to the focal conflict theory suggests that we can achieve success in resolving these issues in our waking life, perhaps in conjunction with work we do in our dreams. Perhaps, I have done a good job of addressing some of my focal issues during my adult years, as represented by the absence of old homes in my dreams. This same outcome might be present in the dreams of other people. This being the case, then the presence or absence in our dreams of homes in our life history might be important to consider when analyzing one's dreams.

The second perspective is based on an assumption I articulated in one of my earlier essays (Bergquist, 2023b) that dreams primarily serve the function of entertaining us. In our past, we sat around a fire and told stories to entertain one another; today, we sit around a TV set or look at our mobile device to be entertained. Our dreams might also have been of evolutionary benefit to us precisely because they offer us new experiences that can't be found when we are awake. Much as we grow tired of the same old

movies playing late at night or the same old sitcom premise acted out earlier in the evening on our cable channel, we might grow tired of always portraying the same home where we dwelled twenty years ago.

It is time for a change in our dream content—just as it was time to move on when we decided to leave this home many years ago. We are entertained by something new and surprising in our life and in our dreams. So, let's bring into our dreams that home we lived in five years ago. While this home resides in our past and therefore can be the source of many lingering memories that are interesting and entertaining, this home can also be new enough to offer a refreshing, new set of images and insights.

The third perspective is based on the assumption that dreams are no more than the random portrayal of memories or fragments of memories. Much as we are (not wisely) inclined to pick out the more recently purchased asparagus when preparing dinner rather than the asparagus located at the back of our vegetable drawer in the refrigerator, so we might be inclined to sample more recent and more readily accessible memories when generating our dreams.

Lingering Concerns and Insights

Where then is the energy and movement in dreams that contain representations of my former homes? How is this energy and movement related to content of my dreams regarding homes and hometowns in which I have lived? How does the Freudian apparatus work when there is a push backwards in the energy and movement of this apparatus as related to my memories of and feelings about past homes?

In response to these questions, I would once again note that many of the traditional interpretations of the occurrences of homes in dreams apply to my dreams. There is a large chunk of nostalgia, safety, and aspiration in my dreams. These chunks have certainly provided both energy and movement at certain points in my life. Ironically, I think these chunks often enter my dreams not when my life is challenging and I am in need of some escape; rather, they seem to occur most often when I am feeling good about myself and my life prospects. The nostalgia, safety and aspirations in my dreams tend to reinforce the momenta that is already found in my waking life.

At this point, I come to the realization that much of the energy in my dreams comes from and resides in the more negative portrayals of my former homes. The predominant movement is away from the positive and optimistic to the negative and pessimistic. Furthermore, it is during times when I am challenged that these more negative portrayals of my former homes are prevalent. In bringing forward his 1900 psychic apparatus, Freud is likely to indicate, first, that the barriers are firmly established at the threshold between the preconscious state and the state of action, given that my former homes are evoking some threatening feelings. Second, there is a strong incentive for me to move backward from the preconscious state to an earlier state when I am dreaming. The negative portrayals of my home might be dramatized. Storms are impacting on the former home or this home is deteriorating. These portrayals are distracting and defensive because I have not been the source of the storm or deterioration. The cause is externalized. I am "not to blame."

Once again, I can move beyond Freud's rather passive and protective portrayal of dreams. My focus on negative portrayals when things are not going well, as well as the use of positive portrayals when things are going well, serve the function of valuable insights regarding what is working and/or what is not working. The dream can provide guidance as to how best to address these difficult challenges. For instance, I find the appearance of some very dramatic images of illegality and destruction to be

potentially of greatest importance as a source of continuing concerns in my life and as a potential source of insights regarding the focal conflicts that continue to linger in the recesses of my heart and soul.

Why do I live illegally in my old homes and envision them being destroyed by a great wave or storm? It might be because I have often regretted having to leave a home that I love. When I was young, my family had to move because of my father's new employment opportunities. As an adult, I have also moved fairly often and frequently across large distances either because of employment opportunities or because of shifting family priorities.

We now know that regret is a very strong motivator. It is stronger than either the prospect of success or failure. Do I destroy old homes in my dreams because I want to remove a strong feeling of regret? Do strong pulls between priorities in my life leave lingering feelings of anger and conflict? Do I take out these feelings in my dreams by destroying the homes I have left? Do other people similarly destroy their old homes in their dreams as a way to fancifully "resolve" their struggles regarding life priorities?

What then about my dreams of living illegally in one of my old homes? I bring people from my past life into my former residence even though it is now owned by someone else. My current home is perfectly adequate for entertaining friends and family; why then do I entertain them in a home I no longer own? I suspect that this illegality might represent my own self-image of being a fraud.

Like many people, I am not sure that I "deserve" the moderate success I have had in my career or the secure socio-economic position I now have in mid-21st-century society. The "Imposter Syndrome" resides in my heart and soul as it does in the heart and soul of many "successful" acquaintances. Perhaps, I am living illegally in an old home because I am living "illegally" in my current position in life. I might get discovered by the current owners of my former home, just as I might get discovered by "owners" of the society in which I now live.

Furthermore, at some level I want to be the young man who owned the home where I now illegally entertain people. This young person was filled with energy and aspirations. He could do a better job of impressing other people than the current version of myself. While this young man was probably just as much an "imposter" than the current me (and perhaps even more fraudulent), he was sometimes an impressive actor on the stages of higher education, professional psychology and institutional leadership. Today, my stage is much smaller in size. I am primarily a writer of books and essays (such as this one).

Conclusions

Might Freud provide us with insights about old homes in our dreams? Might he suggest that emotionally laden memories associated with former homes get linked with home-related threats in our current life? Would these current-day threats provide a strong incentive for us to move backward at night in our processing of these threats? We distort and exaggerate in our dreams so that we might protect ourselves from the actual threat. Does Freud have something to tell me about my nightmarish portrayals of former homes that relate in some way to challenges I am now facing?

Stepping aside from Freud, do most of us as older versions of ourselves live illegally in old homes or destroy them? Is this one of the ways we come to terms with difficult transitions in our life (Bridges, 1980; Bridges, 2001) and with concerns about our legitimacy (Kets de Vries, 2003)? I'm not sure; however, this exploration of my own dreams about former homes provides me with rich food for thought.

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