

WHEN MINDS MEET

The Work of Lewis Aron

EDITED BY GALIT ATLAS



Relational Perspectives Book Series



When Minds Meet

This extraordinary volume offers a sampling of Lewis Aron's most important contributions to psychoanalysis.

One of the founders of relational thinking, Aron was an internationally recognized psychoanalyst, sought after teacher, lecturer, and the Director of the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. His pioneering work introduced and revolutionized the concepts of mutuality, the analyst's subjectivity, and the paradigm of mutual vulnerability in the analytic setting. During the last few years of his life, Aron was exploring the ethical considerations of writing psychoanalytic case histories and the importance of self-reflection and skepticism not only for analysts with their patients, but also as a stance towards the field of psychoanalysis itself. Aron is known for his singular, highly compelling teaching and writing style and for an unparalleled ability to convey complex, often comparative theoretical concepts in a uniquely inviting and approachable way. The reader will encounter both seminal papers on the vision and method of contemporary clinical practice, as well as cutting-edge newer writing from the years just before his death. Edited and with a foreword by Galit Atlas, each chapter is preceded by a new introduction by some of the most important thinkers in our field: Jessica Benjamin, Michael Eigen Jay Greenberg, Adrienne Harris, Stephen Hartman, Steven Kuchuck, Thomas Ogden, Joyce Slochower, Donnel Stern, Merav Roth, Chana Ullman, and Aron himself.

This book will make an important addition to the libraries of experienced clinicians and psychoanalytic scholars already familiar with Aron's work, as well as students, newer professionals or anyone

seeking an introduction to relational psychoanalysis and one of its most stunning, vibrant voices.

Galit Atlas is on the faculty of the NYU Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. She is the author of *The Enigma of Desire: Sex, Longing and Belonging in Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 2015) and *Dramatic Dialogues* (co-authored with Lewis Aron, Routledge, 2017). She is a faculty member at the Four Year Adult and National Training Programs at the National Institute for the Psychotherapies (NIP). She serves on the editorial board of *Psychoanalytic Perspectives* and is a psychoanalyst and clinical supervisor in private practice in New York City.

RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVES BOOK SERIES

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The Relational Perspectives Book Series (RPBS) publishes books that grow out of or contribute to the relational tradition in contemporary psychoanalysis. The term *relational psychoanalysis* was first used by Greenberg and Mitchell¹ to bridge the traditions of interpersonal relations, as developed within interpersonal psychoanalysis and object relations, as developed within contemporary British theory. But, under the seminal work of the late Stephen A. Mitchell, the term *relational psychoanalysis* grew and began to accrue to itself many other influences and developments. Various tributaries—interpersonal psychoanalysis, object relations theory, self psychology, empirical infancy research, feminism, queer theory, sociocultural studies and

1 Greenberg, J. & Mitchell, S. (1983). *Object relations in psychoanalytic theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

elements of contemporary Freudian and Kleinian thought—flow into this tradition, which understands relational configurations between self and others, both real and fantasied, as the primary subject of psychoanalytic investigation.

We refer to the relational tradition, rather than to a relational school, to highlight that we are identifying a trend, a tendency within contemporary psychoanalysis, not a more formally organized or coherent school or system of beliefs. Our use of the term *relational* signifies a dimension of theory and practice that has become salient across the wide spectrum of contemporary psychoanalysis. Now under the editorial supervision of Adrienne Harris, Steven Kuchuck and Eyal Rozmarin, the Relational Perspectives Book Series originated in 1990 under the editorial eye of the late Stephen A. Mitchell. Mitchell was the most prolific and influential of the originators of the relational tradition. Committed to dialogue among psychoanalysts, he abhorred the authoritarianism that dictated adherence to a rigid set of beliefs or technical restrictions. He championed open discussion, comparative and integrative approaches, and promoted new voices across the generations. Mitchell was later joined by the late Lewis Aron, also a visionary and influential writer, teacher and leading thinker in relational psychoanalysis.

Included in the Relational Perspectives Book Series are authors and works that come from within the relational tradition, those that extend and develop that tradition, and works that critique relational approaches or compare and contrast them with alternative points of view. The series includes our most distinguished senior psychoanalysts, along with younger contributors who bring fresh vision. Our aim is to enable a deepening of relational thinking while reaching across disciplinary and social boundaries in order to foster an inclusive and international literature.

A full list of titles in this series is available at <https://www.routledge.com/mentalhealth/series/LEARPBS>.

“This welcome book will bring both satisfaction and pain to all of us who have long admired the work of Lew Aron. Reading his words, we can still hear his enthusiastic yet measured voice; witnessing his posthumous engagement with the other fine minds represented here, we again mourn his loss. More than a festschrift, this book captures Dr. Aron’s remarkable professional journey, insatiable intellect, and big heart.”

Nancy McWilliams, Rutgers Graduate School of Applied & Professional Psychology

“The experience of reading *When Minds Meet* is reminiscent of listening to a concerto in which a solo instrument is answered and highlighted by an orchestra. Here, the soloist is Lewis Aron whose pioneering work is answered by an orchestra of commentaries written by a selection of highly distinguished psychoanalysts. The sounds they produce together give life to novel and unforgettable melodies that will continue to resonate in readers’ minds long after they have put the book down...”

Antonino Ferro, M.D. Training and Supervising Analyst in the Italian Psychoanalytic Association, APsaA and IPA



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by Galit Atlas

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Author biographies

Lewis Aron (1952–2019) was an internationally recognized psychoanalyst, sought after teacher, lecturer, and the Director of the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. He was a past President of the Division of Psychoanalysis (39) APA; founding President of the International Association for Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy (IARPP); and founding President of the Division of Psychologist-Psychoanalysts of NYSPA. Aron was also the co-founder and co-chair of the Sándor Ferenczi Center at the New School for Social Research, and Adjunct Professor, School of Psychology, Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya, Israel; a co-founder of Psychoanalytic Dialogues; and the co-editor of the Relational Perspectives Book Series. He is the author and editor of numerous articles and books, including *A Meetings of Minds*, *A Psychotherapy for the People* (co-authored with Karen Starr), and *Dramatic Dialogue* (co-authored with Galit Atlas).

Galit Atlas is on the faculty at NYU Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, and faculty at the Four Year Adult and National Training Programs at NIP. She is the author of *The Enigma of Desire: Sex, Longing and Belonging in Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 2015) and *Dramatic Dialogues* (co-authored with Lewis Aron, Routledge, 2017). Her next book, *The Secrets of Others*, will be published in Spring, 2021. Atlas serves on the editorial board of *Psychoanalytic Perspectives* and is the author of articles and book chapters that focus primarily on gender and sexuality. Her *New York Times*

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Michael Eigen is the author of 29 books and many papers. He has been giving a private seminar on Winnicott, Bion, Lacan, and his own work for over 45 years and teaches in the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis and the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis. He has been the Editor of *The Psychoanalytic Review*, Director of Educational Training at the Institute for Expressive Analysis, and started a training program for working with creative people at the New York Center for Psychoanalytic Training. He was given the Lifetime Achievement Award by the National Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis.

Jay Greenberg is a Training and Supervising Analyst, William Alanson White Institute; Editor, *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*; former Editor for North America, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*; and former Editor, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*. He is the co-author with Stephen Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*; author: *Oedipus and Beyond: A Clinical Theory*; and author of more than 80 papers on aspects of psychoanalytic history, theory, and technique. He was the recipient in 2015 of the Mary S. Sigourney Award for Outstanding Achievement in Psychoanalysis.

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Foreword

Galit Atlas

Lew and I started working on this collection of his articles in February 2018, in retrospect exactly a year before his death on February 28th, 2019, at the age of 66 years old. Our first step was to choose the chapters for this volume. Given the breadth of his publishing history, the difficult part for us was to pare down the 112 published papers to 12 chapters. Lew's original plan was to write a short introduction to each chapter. He began with the one on dreams, a paper that he presented for the first time in 1987, after he graduated from NYU Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, a program he later directed for 21 years.¹ Lew expressed his gratitude to his mentors and colleagues who had encouraged him to publish that paper, which he believed launched his career. Unfortunately, he never completed the introduction to that chapter, the first in this collection. I decided to publish his incomplete introduction the way it is, and in the spirit of Lew's original vision for this book, I invited a number of colleagues who worked closely with him to write the introductions to the rest of the chapters.

Inspired by Lew's teaching style, I would like to reflect here on the chapters in this book and on Lew's thinking, as they connect to his personal as well as professional history.

Anyone who knew Lewis Aron was familiar with his compelling teaching and writing style as well as with his unparalleled ability to convey complex, often comparative theoretical concepts in a uniquely inviting and approachable way. One of Lew's main focuses, as Steven Kuchuck describes in his introduction to [Chapter 6](#), was on the way one's personal dynamics influenced his or her theoretical formulations

and practice technique. Lew believed that theory doesn't exist in a vacuum but rather must be understood within a historical, political, and sociological context. Therefore, he made sure to know everything about the theory he was planning to teach. Lew strove to master his field of study. As a young man, he had a black belt in martial arts, and for many years he practiced the guitar every single day. He believed in hard work and dedication and therefore thoroughly prepared for every talk he gave, studied for every class he taught, practiced even for presentation he gave many times before. As Don Stern mentions in his introduction to [Chapter 8](#), Lew was interested in every school of psychoanalysis, and it was not a myth; he indeed read every journal and psychoanalytic book that was published. He would sit every day, for hours, yellow marker in hand, immersing himself in reading and preparing for teaching. His weekly private study groups included about a 150 students. Lew believed teaching was the best way to learn. He aspired to be "Talmid Chacham," a Hebrew title given to a Torah scholar who studied day and night to become skilled in Jewish law. Teaching was what Lew loved most and what he insisted on doing until the last weeks of his life, when he became too sick to get out of bed. "When I stop teaching you'll know that I'm about to die," he told me. Three weeks after he made the decision to stop meeting with his study groups, he passed away.

Lew dived very deeply into the lives of the people whose theories he taught. I remember when he was teaching the work of Harold Searles: He thoroughly studied Searles's biography and read every paper he had written or that was written about him. Not long before Searles's death, Lew contacted him, and Searles gave him some unpublished videos and papers that Lew then used in his teaching. After Searles' death in 2015, Lew got in touch with his family. He met with his daughter, Sandra Dickinson, and learned more about the family's history. When teaching Searles, Lew spoke about Harold, the little boy who used to model clothes for his father's clothing store and who ended up being a performer, demonstrating controversial therapy techniques on stage. In his teaching and in the chapter Lew wrote for our co-authored book *Dramatic Dialogue*, Lew discussed the sadomasochistic dynamic Searles reenacted on the stage and connected it with the biographical details he had learned about him. This was the way Lew used to think and teach every topic: from inside the mind and life of the person.

Inspired by Lew's interest in integrating a theory with social context and the theorist's personal history, I would like to briefly explore the person of Lew and how it influenced his thinking.

Lewis (Eliezer) Aron was an only child to his parents, Gertrud and Rubin. From a very young age, Lew called his parents by their nicknames: Gitt and Ruby. Ruby was a butcher, and Lew often described the way he used to visit him at work and how his father would go to the back of the store, choose and then cook for him the best piece of meat he could find. Lew felt that his father always gave him the best part of himself. He loved his father deeply and described him as traumatized from World War II, where he had fought the Japanese in the battle in central Burma and was awarded a good conduct medal. His father was a warrior and Lew identified with him.

His mother, Gitt, had lost her mother when she was 12 years old. Her mother had been sick for a few years, and Gitt was her caretaker. Lew used to say that his mother never got over that loss and especially never recovered from the years of taking care of her dying mother. After her mother passed away, Gitt was the one to take care of her father. Lew often described his mother as a talented pianist² who had given up on her own career to care for her father (his grandfather lived with them until the day he died). Later on, she transferred that dedication to Lewis, her only son, whom she greatly admired. Lew described the relationship between his mother and her father and subsequently between his mother and him, as one of the reasons he was initially so drawn to the Oedipal complex and to the many configurations of the Primal Scene, a concept Stephen Hartman will elaborate on in his introduction to [Chapter 3](#).

Lew was very attached to his mother, and throughout his life he struggled to separate and differentiate from her. He reenacted that dynamic with the historical figures he taught—he identified with them, immersed himself in them—but then always rebelled against and differentiated himself from them. This cycle was played out over and over: identifying with his ancestors, followed by a wish to differentiate and break apart from them, and then reuniting with them. We can easily recognize that cycle in his internal relationship with Freud's legacy, which he admired and mastered, but then rebelled against and came back to again and again. This was the way Lew connected with every theorist he taught, and his students often

commented on the love and hate relationships he demonstrated with those figures: While he clearly admired them, he was also renown as the critic of those very same people. In a similar way, and as Joyce Slochower describes in the introduction to [Chapter 11](#), Lew was encouraging critique from within. His last book project (2018), with Sue Grand and Joyce Slochower, was editing *De-Idealizing Relational Theory* and *Decentering Relational Theory*, in which the three co-editors invited relational thinkers to critique relational psychoanalysis. Lew believed that self-reflection and self-critique were the essence of healthy development.

A similar cycle played out in Lew's relationship with Judaism as well. Lew was raised in a religious Jewish household. In his introduction to [Chapter 4](#), Michel Eigen discusses Lew's religious beliefs as an influence on his psychoanalytic vision and values. As a teenager, Lew studied in a Yeshivah in Jerusalem and had a very special connection to Israel and later on to the Israeli psychoanalytic community, as is noted in Chana Ullman's introduction to [Chapter 7](#) and Merav Roth's introduction to [Chapter 9](#).³

While his family was religious, as Lew grew up and tried to separate from his mother, he pushed himself to become more and more orthodox. His mother followed him and turned more religious herself, until at some point Lew decided to rebel against religion and became secular. He often mentioned that his psychoanalytic journey was similar. As a student, Lew entered a Freudian analysis, looked for the most Freudian supervisors, and tried to be even more orthodox than they were, but then he reached a point where he rebelled against classical theory and joined his friend and mentor Stephen Mitchell in pushing against psychoanalytic orthodoxy. For Lew and many others, as Adrienne Harris describes in her introduction to [Chapter 2](#), the relational turn was both an evolution and a revolution; it went against and simultaneously was a development born out of classical psychoanalysis. In the last 10 years of his life, and especially after his mother's death, Lew went back both to reading Freud and to Judaism. He opened a few reading groups on Freud, and he started studying the Torah again.

Lew loved being an only child. He used to say that he never regretted not having siblings but that as a child he didn't have mutual relationships; the closest people to him were his parents and his

grandfather, who all looked up to him and in some ways lived through him. “Because of my childhood, mutuality doesn’t come naturally to me,” Lew said, “I find hierarchical relationships like being a son, or a father, a teacher or a mentor, much more simple.” In his theory, Lew challenged hierarchies as he was reflecting on his childhood experience, often stating that what people write about is what they struggle with most.

In his first book, *A Meeting of Minds*, and as Thomas Ogden discusses in his introduction to [Chapter 5](#), Lew emphasized the difference between symmetrical and mutual relationships. Mutuality implies reciprocation, sharing together and unity through interchange. It emphasizes what the patient and the analyst have in common or between them. Symmetry, in contrast, implies equality or similarity, a correspondence in form or arrangement. Lew argued that the analytic relationship is not a symmetrical one, in the same way that a parent-child relationship is not symmetrical, but that mutuality is necessary for psychological growth. As Jessica Benjamin emphasizes in her introduction to [Chapter 10](#), for Lew, mutual vulnerability became the heart of psychoanalytic theory and practice and an essential part of broader moral, social, philosophical, and human concerns.

As an analyst and Talmudic scholar, Lew believed in dialogues and debates. He used to say that when reading Winnicott, for example, one has to read him as if he is arguing with Klein. When reading Mitchell, he should be seen as debating drive theory, Sullivan, and Fairbairn. Theory, he believed, must be understood as part of an ongoing conversation, an endless dialogue. Lew was one of those people who lived the theory he believed in, and his teaching style was very much in the spirit of the discussion and debate he theorized. His goal as a teacher, a supervisor, and a writer was not so much to teach his students the right theory, but rather to help them struggle and ask the hard questions. The intellectual exploration he encouraged and engaged in always ended up being a personal inquiry. In the same way, Lew believed that the essence of clinical work is that there is never only one answer. As Jay Greenberg so well articulates in his introduction to [Chapter 12](#), Lew was unique in his investment in exploring difficult issues without demanding closure.

Sitting in his office with students, Lew often said that he could picture among them Freud, Jung, Ferenczi, Klein, Winnicott, and

Bion, and furthermore he could imagine what each of their arguments would be, who would argue with whom. Lew would joke that it doesn't matter which of those figures were dead and which were alive, because we tend to argue mostly with those who are not with us. That was surely true for Lew, who constantly dialogued with the dead.

Steve Mitchell was Lew's closest friend, and his sudden death in 2000 was a traumatic event that Lew tried to process for years. Steve died on December 21st, Lew's birthday. Steve called Lew that same morning to wish him happy birthday and asked if he would read and give him feedback on the first draft of *Can Love Last?* Lew told him that he couldn't think of anything better to do on his birthday, and they agreed to speak again later that night, when Lew finished reading the book. A few hours after they spoke, Steve died from a heart attack. Lew was heartbroken.

Lew often mentioned how much he missed Steve, and it was comforting for him to imagine their reunion: a study group after Lew's death, with his best friends Steve Mitchell, Jeremy Safran, and with Freud and Ferenczi, Searles and Loewald, drinking bourbon and arguing amongst themselves. One of the hopes I have in editing this book is to keep alive the dialogue that Lew loved so much—a dialogue that will last and last.

Notes

- 1 Spyros Orfanos, the man Lew called his brother, worked closely with him as the clinic director at NYU Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis.
- 2 Lew was also a musician and played guitar in the band Sig with his friends and colleagues Steven Knoblauch, Steve Solow, Andrew Tatarsky, John Shaw, Frank Bosco, and Victoria Mierlak.
- 3 *A Psychotherapy for the People*, a book Lew co-authored with Karen Starr, presents an important historical framing of psychoanalysis as it is related to the trauma of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, as well as issues around race, homophobia, and misogyny. Lew worked with Jill Salberg on topics of psychoanalysis and Judaism, and with Libby Henik he edited the Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Judaism Book Series.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all the contributors to this collection: Adrienne Harris, Thomas Ogden, Jessica Benjamin, Merav Roth, Chana Ullman, Jay Greenberg, Donnel Stern, Stephen Hartman, Joyce Slochower, Michael Eigen, Nancy McWilliams, and Antonino Ferro.

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And to Lew, whom I miss so much.

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Part I

Psychoanalytic vision



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Dreams, narrative, and the psychoanalytic method (1989)

Introduction by Lewis Aron

This chapter was first presented when I was a recent graduate of the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy & Psychoanalysis at their annual weekend retreat, “The Postdoc Weekend” in 1987, along with a warmly engaging and encouraging discussion by Ben Lapkin. It was my first psychoanalytic presentation and one could not find a more welcoming and hearteningly receptive audience of colleagues. Such a boosting experience is particularly suited to launch a professional career. I then presented the chapter at the Spring Meeting of the Division of Psychoanalysis (39) of the American Psychological Association in San Francisco in 1988, where Harriette Kaley offered a deeply appreciative, stimulating, and clinically useful discussion. In those years, I was working as a supervising psychologist at the Roosevelt Hospital in NYC. The psychology department at Roosevelt was in those years an ideal teaching center that provided the time and resources for thinking, scholarship, and research as well as it was a first-rate teaching faculty. I had worked on the clinical use of dreams with Lee Caligor, who was from the William Alanson White Institute, and who had written a book on dreams with Rollo May, and taught an interpersonal and existential approach to dreams. Lee was a close friend of Philip Bromberg, who also taught at Roosevelt, and he gave a copy of my chapter to Phil, who enthusiastically, but without telling me, showed it to his friend, Art Feiner, then the Editor of *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*. The next day Art contacted me to offer to publish it in the journal.

**Aron, L. (1989). Dreams, narrative,
and the psychoanalytic method.**

Contemporary Psychoanalysis, 25(1), 108–126.

“I had a dream. You always write down dreams. This one is disgusting! I was in a restaurant and I ordered a certain dish made up of certain types of meats, delicacies, kidney, prosciutto, sautéed in urine. I thought it was disgusting, but they said try it, and I did, and I liked it. I thought it was gruesome. I heard that dreams are wish fulfillments; is that true?”

Mrs. D. is an attractive, married, woman in her early thirties. She has been in psychoanalytic treatment for three years sorting out a chaotic and horrendous life history. Raised by a strict, puritanical, rigid Catholic mother who could tolerate no disagreements or any attempts at autonomy or disobedience and by a distant, working class, sometimes alcoholic father who was prone to physically abuse her brothers and to sexually abuse her. While the specifics of the sexual abuse remain unclear, there now seems little doubt that she was repeatedly abused between the ages of five and eight.

A younger sister, having dropped out of college, returned home following a dramatic suicide attempt. Mother now spends much of her time taking care of this daughter. From a young age, Mrs. D. attempted to defy her mother, to challenge her views on religion, and to struggle for some measure of autonomy. Her experience has been consistent: mother loves, nurtures, and protects at times of weakness, neediness, and compliancy. She becomes cold and distant with the least sign of strength and independence.

In her early 20s Mrs. D. married an Asian professional. Her family was outraged. But her marriage has deteriorated as her husband would like to have a child, and Mrs. D. has not, or has not felt ready. Three “accidental” pregnancies have been terminated by abortion. It was her concerns about the repeated abortions and her sense that not wanting children might be indicative of underlying problems, and finally her sister’s suicide attempt, which precipitated her decision to enter treatment.

The dream (introduced above) occurred in the third year of treatment, on a week in which she had made an appointment to begin marital counseling with her husband. I had made the referral to a

male therapist after much discussion with the patient about her marital concerns.

Mrs. D. is a psychologically unsophisticated patient who has recently begun to read psychologically oriented self-help books. When she introduced the reported dream by noting my interest in dreams, I took this to be the first association to the dream. Was she attempting to cater to me, to serve me a dish, and would it be a delicacy or something less appetizing? When she bracketed the dream with a reference to wish fulfillment, I thought, how sensitive of her to tune into my area of interest. How could she have known I was looking for just such a dream “specimen”?

My first response to the dream was simply to wait in silence. The manifest theme of the dream, the dream story which I had been told, had a clearly organized structure. This was a story of being told to do something, to swallow something, and of being disgusted but enjoying it. This simple theme resonated with my knowledge about this patient and in particular with my experience in the transference-countertransference. What was it she was serving me? More to the point, what was it she felt that I was trying to shove down her throat? Mrs. D.’s dream and its analysis will be further reviewed after an examination of some theoretical issues.

Dreams have a special significance for all psychoanalysts and to some they are still regarded as the most important source of material provided by patients. For many years, psychoanalysis was identified with dream analysis, and dreams were exploited by analysts as “the royal road” to the unconscious. For Freud (1900), dream analysis revealed hidden and disguised childhood sexual wishes. Through the method of free association, the analyst could unearth the buried but preserved infantile past and bring to consciousness the derivatives of the drives.

Freud recognized and described the dramatic quality and composition of dreams. He elaborated that they have plots, characters, settings, beginnings, middles, and endings. Freud believed that the narrative coherence of dreams argued against their being considered the product of random neurological processes. In clinical work with dreams, however, Freud argued that analysts “should disregard the apparent coherence between a dream’s constituents as an unessential illusion” (Freud, 1900, p. 449). For classical psychoanalytic theory,

dreaming is both meaningful and motivated, but the meaning and motivation are to be found *not* in the manifest content, but in the dreamer's associations.

Freudian technique has always been cautious and reserved about the clinical use of manifest content. Attention to manifest content was thought to lead the analyst astray and to divert attention from the unconscious depths. However, from the beginning of the history of psychoanalysis there have always been some dissenting opinions regarding manifest content. Some early analytic writers suggested that the manifest content itself be viewed as an important communication.

As early as 1916, Jung focused attention on thematic aspects of dream structure. He suggested looking at dreams as forms of drama (1916, p. 266) and thought that most dreams had a discernible structure to which the analyst could attend as an aid to interpretation. The dream structure included the exposition (consisting of the identified characters, the setting, and the initial problem), the development of the plot, the climax of the action or the culmination, and the solution or final result. It was because of Jung's interest in narrative themes and dream structure that he recognized the potential for studying dreams in series.

While controversy has continued, there seems to be a growing consensus among analysts on the value of manifest content (Panel, 1984). Erikson's (1954) examination of the Irma dream alerted analysts to the clinical usefulness of manifest content. Pulver (1987) recently described how analysts condemn the interpretation of the manifest dream while they belie that position in their clinical behavior. He points out how psychoanalytic training texts emphasize the dangers of working from manifest content, but that many analysts are convinced of its great value. Pulver outlines many ways in which the manifest dream contributes to our understanding of the dreamer.

Kohut's description of self-state dreams has once again brought the controversy regarding the clinical use of manifest content to the center of analytic debate. Kohut (1977) described the existence of two types of dreams, structural-conflict dreams and self-state dreams. Structural-conflict dreams are described in the terms of classical theory. According to Kohut, they are dreams which express verbalizable latent content. They are the dreams of "guilty man," and they are interpreted along the traditional lines of drive and defense. The

analyst follows associations, which lead to latent dream thoughts derived from conflict between id, ego, and superego. Self-state dreams are those in which the meaning of the dream can be understood with only a knowledge of the dreamer, but with little associative activity, on the basis of manifest content alone. These dreams are attempts to bind the nonverbal tensions of traumatic states with the aid of verbalizable dream imagery. They are adaptive attempts to master the anxiety generated by a disturbing change in the state of the self.¹

Kohut's approach has once again brought up the controversial question of how much to pay attention to the manifest theme of the dream and how much to rely on a detailed pursue of the patient's associations to dream elements. Kohut advised that with self-state dreams "free associations do not lead to unconscious hidden layers of the mind; at best they provide us with further imagery which remains on the same level as the manifest content of the dream" (Kohut, 1977, p. 109). Kohut (1977) argues that urging a patient to free associate to a dream, that is to break it up into its parts and to associate to each component, can be a disorganizing experience to some patients. This type of analysis can feel to fragile patients as if they themselves are being taken apart. Self-psychologists believe that it is not necessary to pursue the patient's associations, day residue, or the various dream details. The dream is understood directly, from manifest content, as a portrayal of the dreamer's dread of threats to the integrity of the self. More traditional analysts have expressed concern that an approach which relies on manifest content is superficial, and that it may lead to interpreting the dream material in accordance with preconceived ideas about the patient or in line with prior theoretical convictions. Attending to the patient's associations more rigorously serves to keep the analyst in touch with the meaning of the dream to the patient, and it allows the patient to play a more active role in the psychoanalytic process.

Slap and Trunnell (1987) criticized the self-psychology literature for not providing associations to dreams. They felt that this reflects the self-psychologist's conviction that these data do not contribute to the understanding of dreams. Because these data are not reported, any attempt to validate the concept of self-state dreams is made difficult.

Why has there been so much controversy about the clinical value of manifest content? To understand the debate, we need to examine the place of the dream in Freud's theoretical model. Psychoanalytic

dream theory and the technique of dream interpretation developed in such intricate connection with psychoanalytic theory and technique as a whole that dream interpretation became the Shibboleth of classical psychoanalysis. Freud's discovery of the psychoanalytic method and his own self-analysis centered on the investigation of his own dreams. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud presented his theory of dreams embedded in a general theory of mind, a theory of the structure of neurosis, and a theory of psychoanalytic methodology. What characterizes the Freudian point of view is that the manifest dream is seen as a facade whose purpose is to conceal and disguise and *not* to reveal the inner psychological life of the dreamer.

Freud explained the phenomena of dreaming in terms of the topographic theory. The dream work took place in the system Ucs, and was governed by the laws of the primary process. Freud considered the distinction between primary and secondary process thought to be among his most important contributions. He considered these two modes of thought to be antagonistic. Primary process thought was associated with the unconscious and was characterized by symbolization, displacement, and condensation. It tended to be visual rather than verbal and to disregard the laws of syntax, time, and place. In contrast, secondary process thought was characterized by logic and rationality and tended to be verbal and associated with the ego.

It has largely been assumed that Freud considered dreams to be brought about through the primary process exclusively. Any aspect of dreams that reflected more organized thought reflected secondary process thinking tacked onto the dream as part of secondary revision. At times Freud did write as if secondary revision did its work after the dream "has already, in a certain sense, been completed" (Freud, 1900, p. 313). But later, in the same work, Freud's position vacillated, and he wrote:

We must assume rather that from the very first the demands of this second factor constitute one of the conditions which the dream must satisfy and that this condition, like those laid down by condensation, the censorship imposed by resistance, and representability, operates simultaneously in a conductive, and selective sense upon the mass of material present in the dream-thoughts.

(p. 499)

But in the very next sentence Freud again depreciates the organized aspect of the dream by saying that of the conditions involved in the formation of dreams, secondary revision is “the least cogent.”

Why did Freud wish to minimize the importance of secondary revision and of the organized quality of dreams, and why have analysts since Freud continued to disparage the organized narrative quality of dreams? Because Freud used dreams as his talking-point in describing the functioning of mind, the method of free association and the topographic theory, he emphasized a certain view of the dream. Freud was determined to use dreams to prove the topographic model of the mind, the primary process functioning of the unconscious, the importance of infantile sexuality, as well as the usefulness of the free-association method. Even after the development of structural theory, Freud continued to view dreams in much the same way.

Free association is the technical term for the method used to uncover the hidden meaning of the dream. In dream interpretation, the dream must first be broken up into its component parts, that is, it must be “analyzed.” The method is very specific in breaking down the dream into its parts and not treating it as a whole. “Our first step in the employment of this procedure teaches us that what we must take as the object of our attention is not the dream as a whole but the separate portions of its content” (Freud, 1900, p. 103). The assumption is that the free associations to the various details will ultimately converge on a common theme.

The dreamer’s associations begin by diverging widely from the manifest elements, so that a great number of subjects and ranges of ideas are touched on, after which, a second series of associations quickly *converge* from these on to the dream-thoughts that are being looked for.

(Freud, 1923, p. 110)

In describing Freud’s position that the dream needs to be analyzed into its components to be interpreted, I am referring to an aspect of method and not to technique. By method I mean a mode of pursuit, a way of approaching the dream, in contrast to technique which refers to practical details. Freud was capable of great flexibility regarding the technique of analyzing a dream as can be seen in his description of “several technical procedures” (Freud, 1923, p. 109). However, from a

methodological viewpoint, he argued the need to take the dream one piece at a time and to disregard its apparent coherence. Freud described his method as employing interpretation “*en detail* and not *en masse* ... it regards dreams from the very first as being of a composite character, as being conglomerates of psychical formations” (Freud, 1900, p. 104).

It can be seen that to focus on manifest content was not only to be seen as superficial and missing the psychic depths, but more importantly it represented a challenge to the psychoanalytic “method” of investigation. Freud insisted that the dream be broken up into its parts and *not* treated as a whole. He was adamant about this because he needed to be certain that the insights into the unconscious would not be lost or trivialized. Freud anticipated, quite correctly, that if the dream were not broken up into its constituents, if it were taken as a whole, as a story, that the distinction between primary and secondary process would break down.

Seeing the manifest content of the dream as resulting from secondary elaboration which occurs after the dream is completed has enormous clinical consequences. The manifest dream story is then seen *not* as the “real” dream, but as an added on afterthought. It is seen as nothing but a false impression, a concocted story to disguise and mislead. This view of manifest content is in accord with the dichotomies that Freud was constructing at this early point in the history of psychoanalysis. Thus, manifest hides latent, conscious conceals unconscious, surface buries the depths, defense distorts wish, and present reenacts the past. It can quickly be seen why anyone focusing on the manifest dream story would be suspected of heresy. Clearly, to focus on manifest content was to be neglecting the unconscious, drives, the psychic depths, the nature of primary process thought, the past, and in particular infantile sexuality. A focus on manifest content would clearly mark anyone as a revisionist. This was especially true since Jung did focus on manifest content and also did dissent in regard to sexuality and other basic psychoanalytic tenets.

In my view, this aspect of the history of the development of psychoanalytic theory has had a stultifying effect on progress in dream theory and in the clinical technique of dream interpretation. Specifically, it has led to a false polarization between work with dream associations and attention to the manifest dream theme. Classical analysts have tended to neglect the coherently organized dream narrative. This is a result of the broader trend to neglect and minimize all of

the more organized, structured, developmentally mature aspects of dreams. Any organized aspect of a dream is dismissed as due to the results of secondary elaboration or secondary revision, but not really a part of the dream. It is as if it could be assumed that the “real” dream is a result of primary process and that all of the seemingly organized aspects of dreams are added on after the fact.

I have been describing Freudian dream theory as it emerged in the context of the topographic theory. Arlow and Brenner (1964) set out to revise dream theory in accordance with the structural point of view. They argue that the dream, like all other thoughts, is the result of an interaction of the workings of all three psychic structures: id, ego, and superego. Since the dreamer is asleep during dreaming, this compromise formation is effected by the regressed state of the ego and superego, and only a small role is played by the claims of external reality. This leaves a relatively large part to be played by infantile, wish-fulfilling fantasies. The dream is therefore largely influenced by id wishes and by the regressive alterations of the ego and superego.

Arlow and Brenner are very clear in arguing that dreams are constructed from both primary and secondary process mentation simultaneously. According to the topographic theory the dream is created in the system Ucs., that is, according to the primary process. How, they argue, can this be when we know that dreams are also the result of the censor and the need for secondary revision? They conclude that the topographic theory does not fit the facts. Structural theory explains the dream work as an interplay among id, ego, and superego. Thus, it postulates that ego functions, including defensive and integrative functions, participate in the dream work throughout.

Despite this recognition, Arlow and Brenner (1964) continue to emphasize the regressed quality of dreams. They write:

despite many exceptions, dreams are not as a rule harmonized and integrated with respect to their various component parts to nearly the same degree as we expect ordinary waking thoughts, or even daydreams, to be. The dreamer, like the child, is less concerned with unity and consistency than is the waking adult, even though, as Freud noted, the integrative function of the ego plays a part in dream formation.

(p. 125)

From a methodological point of view, they continue to disregard the manifest theme of the dream, although Brenner (1976) acknowledges that a psychoanalyst may know enough about a patient so as to be able to understand a dream even without associations.

The trend in much of the contemporary psychoanalytic literature has been to stress the adaptive and communicative functions of dreaming. Fosshage (1987) is the most recent of many analysts who propose revising psychoanalytic dream theory in order to highlight the adaptive, regulatory, and organizing functions of dreaming. Once again, it can be seen in his work, that in order to view dreams as primarily adaptive, one needs to reexamine the nature of primary process thought. In contrast to Freud, Fosshage defines primary process not as a primitive form of mentation, but as a form of cognition which uses visual and sensory images in the service of integrative and synthetic functioning. Once dreams are viewed as serving adaptive, self-regulatory functions, then there is no theoretical reason to insist on the ubiquitous operation of disguise and defense in dreams, and therefore the distinction between manifest and latent content breaks down. As a result, Fosshage ends up advocating the abandonment of the free-association method. He writes:

To view dreaming as a form of mentation positions us in the clinical setting to listen to the major themes or meanings communicated, as we would with waking mentation. Just as persistent attempts to isolate elements in the patient's waking mentation for associational purposes would detour and disrupt the patient's waking communication, so it does in approaching the dream.

(p. 306)

For many classical analysts, despite the contributions of structural theory and ego-psychology, the primary impetus for dreaming remains the infantile drive or wish seeking discharge or gratification. The focus remains on the regressed and primitive qualities of the dream. It is for these reasons that classical analysis has always been skeptical toward any view of dreams, which sees them as problem-solving or in any way too much like waking thought. For if dreams are seen to be more organized and developmentally more complex, then we can no longer equate dreams with the unconscious, the primary process, the psychic depths, or the primitive, bestial core of man. The distinction