



Controversies in the English publication of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1913–1933

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ABSTRACT

The transition of Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* into its first English language incarnation as *The Interpretation of Dreams*, translated by A.A. Brill, took several years to effect, the process being beset with conceptual, practical, legal, and political obstacles. Anxieties over possible obscenity charges in Britain led to novel forms of censorship being applied to the first edition by its London publisher in 1913, while issues relating to the politics of translation and local British efforts to standardise psychoanalytic nomenclature would bedevil the text over its first two decades. In the context of the launch of the *Revised Standard Edition (RSE)*, the present paper reveals these earlier issues for the first time. Having then considered the book's reception in both Britain and the United States, its sales and varying editions, the paper concludes with a discussion of the covert and contentious reediting of the work's third English edition, published in 1933. The shadow of this history inevitably falls on the *RSE*.

KEYWORDS

The Interpretation of Dreams; censorship; translation; psychoanalytic politics

Introduction

With this special issue marking the launch of the *Revised Standard Edition (RSE)*, it is opportune to look back to the first authorised English translation of Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*) to better contextualise and understand its early politics, the legacy of which casts a certain shadow over today's translation. Originally published in German on 4 November 1899 (with the title page post-dated "1900" by the publisher), *Die Traumdeutung* had an inauspicious start. Although receiving favourable notices in the popular press, reviews in scientific journals rarely lived up to Freud's elevated expectations (Kiell 1988, 87–222; Kramer 1994, 47–52; Zwettler-Otte 2006, 2008, 23–37), and the initial print run of 600 copies would take nine years to sell. It was a disappointing start for its ambitious author. However, the subsequent decade would see sales soar by a factor of 10 (with 6214 German language copies sold between 1910 and 1919), and over the course of the century the book came to be recognised by a wide public as a landmark in the psychological sciences, the cornerstone text of psychoanalysis, and a key volume of contemporary modernism (Carter and Muir 1967, 233–34; Grinstein 1977, 90; Willoughby 2022, 347). Freud's own verdict, over three decades after the original publication, was

that the volume: “contains ... the most valuable of all the discoveries it has been my good fortune to make. Insight such as this falls to one’s lot but once in a lifetime” (Freud 1932, 9; Freud 1953, *SE*, 4, xxxii; Freud 2024, *RSE*, 4, xxxvii).

By no means Freud’s easiest book to read, it outlines his argument that dreams are meaningful ideographic psychological creations that typically offer covert subjective triumphs over adversity, an understanding of which may be discovered through a process of free association. An inspired, rather open text (Eco 1979), the book falls into three main parts: a review of the scientific literature on dreams, an elaboration of the methods of dream interpretation and the mechanisms of their formation, and a general model of the mind. In the course of this, the book introduced readers to a myriad of concepts, such as manifest and latent content, wish fulfilment, regression, displacement, censorship, symbols, the Oedipus complex, and the primary and secondary processes, ideas which would over time offer new ways of conceptualising the self (see e.g. Quinodoz 2005, 36–44).

In developing these ideas in the 1890s, Freud drew heavily on his own lived experience, his private phantasies, and fears, which he saw hidden remnants of in his dreams. Reflections on these allowed Freud to posit that dreams were typically governed by wish fulfilment, and the narratives that might be reconstructed from them were the royal road to understanding disowned, unconscious aspects of our nature. In partly illustrating *The Interpretation of Dreams* with his own manifest dream texts and showing both the rudiments of dream interpretation and what such a process might reveal of the latent ideas hidden beneath the remembered dream, Freud’s text was not merely a pioneering psychological work, it was also an inadvertent autobiography. It was only belatedly that Freud came to this recognition, noting in the foreword to the second German edition that: “this book has a further subjective significance for me personally – a significance which I only grasped after I had completed it. It was, I found, a portion of my own self-analysis, my reaction to my father’s death – that is to say, to the most important event, the most poignant loss, of a man’s life” (Freud 1953, *SE*, 4, xxvi; Freud 2024, *RSE*, 4, xxx).

The present paper draws on unpublished archival material in the Library of Congress (LoC), the University of Reading Special Collections (UoR), and the Archives of the British Psychoanalytical Society. It reveals the hitherto untold story of the first authorised translations of *Die Traumdeutung* into English, initially navigating concerns about obscenity and censorship in Britain and latterly a secret usurpation of the translator’s prerogative to his text to align it with emergent orthodoxies in British psychoanalytic politics. In between these poles, the first in 1913 and the second 20 years later in 1933, the production and sale of the intervening editions and impressions are noted. Some of the logistics of the 1913 restricted sale process are documented. In the course of such considerations, much new light is thrown on the English language history of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the publishing challenges that confronted (and can still confront) dissonant material, and early psychoanalytic politics particularly with respect to control of its canonical texts.

Converting *Die Traumdeutung* into *The Interpretation of Dreams*

From 1908, Freud’s ideas began to attract increasing attention both in Vienna and around the world and – although German was the *lingua franca* of much scientific discourse

before the Great War – there was increasing demand for translations of his works. Wanting to disseminate his findings, Freud willingly entertained offers from a range of often competing associates who were keen to translate his work. The New York-based Austro-Hungarian Jewish émigré Abraham Arden Brill (1874–1948) became key to the early English language translations. Born in Kańczuga, in Galicia, into a working-class Jewish family, Brill had emigrated alone to New York in 1889, where he worked multiple jobs to support himself through school and university, finally graduating with an MD degree in 1904. He would become the leading proponent of psychoanalysis in the United States for much of the next 40 years (de Mijolla 2005, 1, 227). Brill originally met Freud in 1907 and the two men became close friends, Freud with extraordinary rapidity entrusting him with an exclusive contract to translate his books into English. Part of the foundations of this bond rested on their common Jewish identity: “from our first acquaintance”, Freud would later write, “I put a complete confidence in you, not shaken to this day, such as a Jew can only put in another Jew” (Freud–Brill, 19 January 1920, LoC). Another bond, though one less articulated by either man or subsequent commentators, was their shared economically impoverished working-class early lives (Willoughby 2024b).

Brill’s contribution to the psychoanalytic literature was prodigious. Having already translated Jung’s (1909) *The Psychology of Dementia Praecox* into English (jointly with Frederick Peterson), by July 1908 his focus was firmly on Freud’s works (Brill–Freud, 18 July 1908, LoC). Over the ensuing six years Brill successively translated Freud’s *Selected Papers on Hysteria and Other Psychoneuroses* between 1908 and 1909 (and a second enlarged edition in 1912), *Three Contributions to Sexual Theory* between 1909 and 1910, *The Interpretation of Dreams* between 1911 and 1913, *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* between 1912 and early 1914, the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* also in 1913–1914, and *Totem and Taboo* in 1914. Brill took enormous trouble over these translations, seeking where possible to use the demotic in a similar way to Freud and eschewing technical jargon (though he would use “ego”) and neologisms where possible. In brief illustration, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* Brill thus translated Freud’s *Besetzung* mostly as “charge” or sometimes as “energy” or “revival”, which Jones (1924) and later Strachey would translate as “cathexis”. *Nachträglichkeit* was rendered as “subsequence” or “subsequently”, which Strachey would translate as “deferred action”. *Phantasie* was generally rendered as “phantasy” but sometimes more colloquially as “fancy” or “fancying”, Strachey using “phantasy” in his translation. *Trieb* usually became “impulse” or sometimes “motive”, “motive force” or “motive power”, which more often became “instinct” in Jones (1924) and in Strachey’s translation; notably, in the *RSE*, Solms (2024) uses “drive”. *Lust* and *Unlust* Brill generally translated as “pleasure” and “pain”, Strachey rendering the latter as “unpleasure” in his later translation, a construction Jones had interestingly condemned as “hardly acceptable linguistically” (1924, 10). Such use of the everyday was not a practice that would endear Brill to his more establishment rivals, nor was his substitution of some English language jokes and slips into his translations of *Wit* and the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, where the original material proved very difficult to transliterate, though he did so with Freud’s explicit agreement (Brill–Freud, undated but c. March 1914, LoC). He would continue this practice in a very limited way in his 1933 translation of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Marinelli and Mayer 2003). Brill’s language choices, however, very probably contributed to making Freud’s ideas accessible to a wider demographic, especially in the United States, where his translations remain in print.

The translation of *Die Traumdeutung* was by far the most important and challenging work to be undertaken. Freud doubted its translation would be even possible and confided to Jung in February 1908 that it would effectively mean rewriting *Die Traumdeutung*, which “would be a deserving task for an *Englishman*” (McGuire 1974, 120 [italics in original]; Freud–Brill, 2 June 1913, LoC). While Brill had agreed to make the translation and had in fact made considerable progress on it by July of 1911 (Jones–Brill, 20 July 1911, LoC), Freud was approached by two of his other followers, Lieutenant-Colonel William Dunbar Sutherland (1866–1920) and Montague David Eder (1865–1936), who were also eager to attempt the task (Freud–Brill, 26 February 1911 and 26 July 1911, LoC). A third approach came from the British publisher Swan Sonnenschein, in association with Macmillan in New York, who began negotiating for the English language rights with Deuticke. Well known for their publication of radical literature by figures such as George Bernard Shaw, Edward Carpenter, and Karl Marx, Swan Sonnenschein instructed the still more radical Eden Paul (1865–1944), a member of the Independent Labour Party and a communist, to make the translation. Learning of the proposal, Freud vetoed the deal, pointing out to Swan Sonnenschein that Brill had exclusive rights to conduct his English language translations (Freud–Brill, 11 June 1911, LoC).

At the same time, knowing Brill was looking for a satisfactory publisher, Freud sought to effect an introduction between Brill and Swan Sonnenschein, with an additional eye on Macmillan as an American distributor. For the next nine months, however, Brill seems to have persevered in vain with negotiations with other London publishers (Freud–Brill, 14 December 1911, LoC). This is evident in surviving correspondence from both Freud and Ernest Jones, the latter writing to Brill as late as March 1912 that: “It is really too absurd that this masterpiece cannot find a publisher” (Jones–Brill, 4 March 1912, LoC). Ultimately, however, Brill did take up Freud’s suggestion, but his letter to Swan Sonnenschein of 2 April 1912 brought a response back from Cecil Reynolds, a director of George Allen & Co., informing him that Swan Sonnenschein had been recently amalgamated into that company (Reynolds–Brill, 17 April 1912; Mumby and Stallybrass 1955). After brief negotiations, the two parties agreed a publishing contract on the half-profit system, which was signed off on 29 May 1912 (Reynolds–Brill, 29 May 1912, LoC; Unwin–Brill, 4 June 1930, UoR). It would be to Brill, as the translator, rather than to Freud, as the author, that such profits would go.

Familiar with the first and second German editions of *Die Traumdeutung*, Brill used the latest third German edition, released at the end of June 1911, as the basis for his new translation. Whether he delivered the bulk of the translation at once is unclear, but from mid-June through to December 1912 he was receiving, correcting and returning galleys piecemeal to George Allen. This had its inevitable shortcomings as a process and the publisher failed to incorporate all of Brill’s corrections in the final printed text (Brill–Allen, 2 November 1912, UoR). By October that year, with an eye on potential customers, George Allen invited Brill to write an advertising flyer for the book, which he did a little reluctantly, pitching the work to a wide audience (Reynolds–Brill, 9 October 1912, LoC; Brill–Allen, 28 October 1912, UoR).

Working around censorship

For George Allen & Co., publishing Freud’s work in English was a “courageous” undertaking, as the company’s later owner Stanley Unwin (1884–1968) would declare, typifying

their ambition to publish cutting-edge literature (Unwin 1960, 169). That said, in early January 1913 the publisher – perhaps having sought a legal opinion – seemed to be getting cold feet over references in the book to sex and sexuality, which might give rise to charges under the British Obscene Publications Act 1857. They had already faced this prospect in May 1912 when they published Albert Moll's *The Sexual Life of the Child*, only averting legal action by restricting the sale of that volume to members of the medical, legal, and scholastic professions, people whose minds would not be corrupted by such supposedly toxic material, and setting the retail price at 15 shillings (the equivalent of £95 in 2024), placing it beyond the reach of much of the population. To face similar strictures on the sale of *The Interpretation of Dreams* might begin to tarnish the company's reputation and would certainly impact on the book's profitability.

The Managing Director, William Allen (1859–1939), wrote to Brill on 9 January 1913, suggesting to him that elements of what was chapter five, “The material and sources of dreams”, particularly pages 245–259 (Freud 1913; this material was later moved by Freud to chapter six; see Freud 1953, *SE*, 5, 351–372 and 382–384; Freud 2024, *RSE*, 5, 314–332 and 341–343, excluding new material interspersed into the text after the third 1911 German edition), were unsuitable for general publication as was originally intended and could they be either modified or omitted. Even if that portion of the text were to be expurgated, Allen had clearly come to believe that publishing *The Interpretation of Dreams* could land him in court on an obscenity charge. Seeking to head this off, he opined that he “should probably have to limit the sale of the book to members of the Medical and Legal professions” (Allen–Brill, 9 January 1913, LoC).

The supposedly problematic text began with a discussion of unconscious symbolism in dreams, popular culture, myths, legends, and everyday speech acts. Freud here emphasised the predominantly sexual interpretation of these symbols (underscored in the 1911 German edition by the header “*Sexuelle Symbolik im Traum*”). The text then went on to discuss a series of six dreams, to illustrate the centrality of an understanding of such symbolism for effective dream interpretation. In five of these dreams the manifest dream contents were superficially innocuous and it was only through an interpretation of dream symbols that latent sexual meaning emerged.

The other dream (number five in the series of six), which may have been the core source of Allen's disquiet, exhibited – by contrast – manifest sexual content, specifically paedophilic frotteurism, in which a man chased a little girl with the overt intention of punishing her for some misdemeanour. Catching the child, he sexually assaulted her on a stairway, rubbing his penis against her genitalia. After some further superficially disjointed material, the dream ended in orgasm. The example, referred to as “A stairway dream”, had been reported and interpreted by Otto Rank (1884–1939), who noted the dreamer had as a child played roughly with children in his neighbourhood and had sexually assaulted several of them in similar fashion (Freud 1911, 217–219; Freud 1913, 254–257; Freud 1953, *SE*, 5, 369–371; Freud 2024, *RSE*, 5, 330–332). Interpretation of the dream drew on the staircase as a symbol for copulation, a woman who caught the child for the dreamer, two landscapes the smaller of which had the dreamer's name on it, and a sign that “cheaper pictures could also be obtained”. Rank's interpretation pointed to the dream's motive being primarily libidinal, albeit with a degree of competition between larger and smaller landscapes, between adult women and small girls. The original material, less framed than it is here, might easily be read as articulating the dreamer's

preference for and sense of entitlement to the smaller landscape (the child), which had his name on it, which he thought of as his birthday present. It is, probably, the most unsettling material of this section of the book, particularly so with its lack of contextualisation and a meta-narrative. However, if this dream was the core of Allen's concern, without it and its immediate neighbours he still worried that the book might somehow give rise to public complaint and possible legal challenge.

Conflicted over the best way forward, Brill suggested Allen contact Freud about the proposed excisions, which he did towards the end of January (Brill–Allen, 20 January 1913, LoC). For Freud, facing disquiet about his theories, and of the place of sexuality in them in particular, was not new and was often interpreted by Freudians as a sign of resistance to psychoanalysis. And at this juncture in 1913, sexuality was a central issue in Freud's split with Jung. However, given the importance of disseminating his work, maintaining good relations with publishers was vital, particularly so in this case as the book was well advanced in the production process. Writing to Brill on 31 January, Freud outlined his thinking and strategy, suggesting that while he would agree *in principle* to the excisions, he would leave final approval up to Brill (Freud–Brill, 31 January 1913, LoC). With Freud writing to Allen to that effect and at the same time subtly suggesting he was in thrall to subjective feelings of embarrassment (Freud–Allen, 1 February 1913, UoR; Ryder 2013), Allen hesitated until 25 February before contacting Brill for his final decision. Replying by letter (rather than by telegram as Allen had requested), Brill – having criticised Allen's dithering – gave his consent to minor cuts on pages 246 and 247, followed by the excision of most of pages 248 through to 257 (Freud 1953, SE, 5, 353–371; Freud 2024, RSE, 5, 316–332), if – as seems unlikely – they could do so “without disfiguring the book”. Failing that, Allen should publish the text as it stood (Brill–Allen, 6 March 1913, LoC and UoR).

While Freud and Brill were clearly at odds with Allen's opinion about the potential negative consequences of publication (and as author and translator they faced significantly less legal risk than the publisher), their combined strategic response allowed each to take up divergent negotiating positions (see also Brabant, Falzeder, and Giampiere-Deutsch 1992, 464), helped further by their differing yet overlapping roles as author and translator, respectively. This manoeuvrability and the thinking space the slow pace of communications further opened up seems to have had a reassuring effect on Allen. Leaving the text itself intact without the originally sought expurgations, Allen published the book in Britain at the beginning of April 1913,¹ with the proviso that its sale would be on a restricted basis in Britain and the Empire.

This restriction was given effect in four main ways. Firstly, it was printed on the books themselves, on both the dust jacket and a publisher's note, typically found attached to the left-hand margin of the front free end paper, which read: “The sale of this book is limited to members of the medical, scholastic, legal, and clerical professions”. These were supposedly the groups who might have a *bona fide* interest in the subject. Secondly, customers' credentials were sought, their names collected and registered, with the corresponding copy they received of *The Interpretation of Dreams* being clearly identifiable by a

¹The copyright copy deposited with the British Library carries their ‘4 April 1913’ date stamp. Freud received his own copy of the book from George Allen on 12 May 1913: see Freud to S. Ferenczi, 13 May 1913; in Brabant, Falzeder, and Giampiere-Deutsch (1992, 485).

number individually pencilled on the bottom of page 510, the last page of the index. While undertaking the present research, 32 copies of the three George Allen & Co impressions of the first edition were examined, bearing the following numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 23, 34, 37, 53, 56, 69, 74, 115, 129, 154, 159, 195, and 217 (being first impressions), 265, 266, 294, 302, 306, 327, 328, and 340 (being second impressions), and 354, 407, 448, and two unnumbered volumes (being third impressions). Numbers one to six were UK copyright deposit copies, number 159 was Freud's copy (received on 12 May 1913), and number 195 was purchased by Brill on 7 June 1913 for Ernest Jones (Allen–Brill, 7 June 1913, LoC). The numerical sequence does not totally follow the sales chronology (contrast, for example, numbers 53 and 74, which were accessioned by the London Library on 8 May and 17 December 1913, respectively, with Freud's and Jones's copies). It is unclear whether all the numbers were utilised, exactly how high the numbering sequence went, or precisely when it was abandoned. Sightings of further numbered volumes should, however, help to elucidate these questions. Thirdly, circulation was restricted by the volume's high British retail price, which was set at 15 shillings (current 2024 value £96), effectively limiting its purchase to elite groups. And, fourthly, limited direct advertising was undertaken of the first edition, again restricting potential demand.

At the end of February, Macmillan had wanted their copies of the text held back for a fortnight (Allen–Brill, 25 February 1913, LoC), though in the denouement of this publishing saga whether the US release of the book was synchronous with or followed shortly after the British publication is unclear. George Allen produced the Macmillan copies for US sale, printed as were theirs by Ballantyne Hanson & Co., in Edinburgh, with the Macmillan details on the title page and spine. At least some of the initial copies distributed in the USA also carried a publisher's notice on the dust jacket proclaiming it was principally addressed to doctors, teachers, lawyers, and clergymen (*Evening Sun*, Baltimore, 10 May 1913, 4). Whether this was an artefact of Allen's stance in London or Macmillan's decision based on US conditions is unknown.

Reviews and initial sales

Despite the restricted terms of sale George Allen imposed on the British release of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, it soon attracted notice in various professional and scientific journals, including *The Lancet*, the *British Medical Journal*, the *Medical Times*, the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, the *Glasgow Medical Journal*, *St Bartholomew's Hospital Journal*, and the *Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal*,² as well as a handful of mentions and short reviews in the national and regional press.³ The volume was met with silence at the time in the leading British neurology journal, *Brain*, and the *Journal of Mental Science*, the periodical of what is now the Royal College of Psychiatrists. In the USA, reviews and mentions were somewhat more extensive, particularly in the popular press, helped no doubt by the

²See the *Medical Times*, 28 June 1913, 493–494; *British Medical Journal*, 5 July 1913, 23–24; *St Bartholomew's Hospital Journal*, August 1913, 183; *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, October 1913, 11, 371–374; *Glasgow Medical Journal*, February 1914, 81, 147–148; *The Lancet*, 7 March 1914, 689; and the *Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal*, March 1914, 32, 72.

³Popular press notices and reviews of the publication in 1913 were included in, among other places, *The Athenaeum*, 19 April 1913, 424; *Daily Citizen* (Manchester), 18 April 1913, 7; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 May 1913, 7; *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 27 May 1913, 4; *Evening Despatch*, 27 May 1913, 5; *Daily Graphic*, 27 May 1913; *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 28 May 1913, 6; *Daily News* (London), 9 August 1913, 7; *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 12 August 1913, 6; and the *Haslingden Gazette*, 1 November 1913, 8.

book's freer circulation. Both British and US notices generally exhibited some curiosity about what was widely seen as a novel book (or "epoch-making" as *The Medical Times* declared), though many reviewers suggested its references to sexuality were excessive.

Despite such notices, sales in Britain and the USA differed radically, confounding at least the publishers' expectations. The initial print run was probably no more than 1250 copies (the publisher's accounts merely noting the cumulative total for the first and second impressions combined as 1763 copies). Two weeks after publication, William Allen noted the first impression was "almost exhausted" due to the large number taken by Macmillan for the US market and a month later thought "a new edition may be called for at any moment" due to American demand (Allen–Brill, 17 April 1913 and 21 May 1913, LoC). Firm figures for 1913, however, have proved slippery to grasp. Up to 31 October 1913 sales on the domestic UK market, Cecil Reynolds would claim, totalled 189 copies, in contrast to 1447 sold in the USA (Reynolds–Brill, 3 November 1913, LoC). In passing on these figures to Freud, Brill under-reported the US sales as totalling 1000 copies (Brill–Freud, 13 December 1913, LoC). The end-of-year accounts revealed a rather different picture, with reported regular British sales amounting to just 112 copies, with a further nine books sold as so-called thirteenth copies, a marketing incentive wherein booksellers' sales receipts on such copies were exempt from royalty payments, thus fractionally increasing their profits (Stanyon, 2017–18–18, 27–28), and 60 books being distributed gratis (these presumably including Brill's copies, six copyright deposit copies, and others to potential reviewers and other stakeholders), thus totalling 181 copies. The US market by this stage had taken a healthy 1457 copies (Author's Accounts, UoR ref: AU A/133). The variation between the reported sales figures is curious, and elsewhere at least (for example, in the case of the New York pirate publisher James McCann in 1922), Freud would take a rather sceptical view of publishers' reports of the true numbers of copies sold (Paskauskas 1993, 458).

The combined 1913 sales yielded £35 out of the profits for Brill, though it was a sum he would never collect as George Allen & Co went into receivership on 1 January 1914 and no assets were available to pay Brill or other creditors (CG Morgan–Brill, 7 August 1913, LoC; Allen & Unwin–Brill, 22 October 1914, LoC). Stanley Unwin, who eventually purchased the company on 7 August 1914 as the Great War broke out, expressed his "very great sympathy" to Brill over this loss, while holding firm to the line that the new company, "George Allen & Unwin Ltd", was not responsible "for the sins of our predecessors" (Unwin–Brill, 22 October 1914, LoC). With others, including Edward Carpenter, Unwin took a more generous line, paying 50% of lost royalties (Unwin–Carpenter, Memorandum of Agreement, 1913, UoR ref: AU FSC 6/35/2). Subsequent royalties, from 1914 through to 1933, totalled £1162, the equivalent of at least £60,068 in 2024 (using the Consumer Price Index measure in the Bank of England inflation calculator).

The politics of translation

Most early reviewers were complimentary about Brill's translation of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, some particularly so. *The Medical Times*, for example, dwelt at some length on the question and opined that "Dr Brill deserves very great credit for his painstaking and accurate translation of what must be regarded as one of the most difficult German scientific works in existence" (Anon. 1913a, 493), while *The Lancet* declared "we have every

reason to compliment Dr Brill on his satisfactory ... [translation, which] reads very smoothly, and at the same time it is conspicuously faithful to the original" (Anon. 1914, 689), and the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* waxed lyrical that "One cannot but feel grateful that Freud has found such an admirable translator as Dr Brill", before going on to say that Brill "rendered ... [the difficult German] into English which is as lucid as the obscurity of the matter allows. In less competent hands an English translation might easily have been almost incomprehensible" (Anon. 1913b, 373).

Behind the scenes, however, other Freudians – most of whom were ambitious to have a hand in translating Freud's works themselves – were less generous about Brill's efforts and indeed had been for some years. In the USA for instance, Brill's psychoanalytic colleague and a would-be Freud translator James Jackson Putnam (1846–1918) trenchantly criticised his literary style in private on various occasions, writing for example to Ernest Jones in September 1910 that Brill "writes atrocious 'English' (if one must call it such)" (Hale 1971, 229; see also 295). Of course, in writing thus to Jones Putnam knew he had a receptive audience. Jones had been jealous of Brill since at least 1909, something Freud had taken him to task over (Paskauskas 1993, 32), and which Jones in turn acknowledged. Confessing his own "absurd jealous egotism" and his jealousy of Brill's relationship with Freud, Jones nevertheless reasserted that he was "not blind to certain defects [in Brill] that particularly strike an Englishman" (Paskauskas 1993, 34–35). What Jones, who was originally Welsh, meant by this he did not state, though some critique emerged publicly in his contemporaneous review of Brill's translation of *Selected Papers on Hysteria and Other Psychoneuroses*, wherein he wrote that "In many other respects the translation is less felicitous, and, indeed, sometimes makes the meaning obscure" (Jones 1910, 130). Jones's jealousy-fuelled criticism of Brill and his translations was oft repeated and became cemented as an orthodoxy in the psychoanalytic family saga through his biography of Freud and his own autobiography (Jones 1955, 50–51, 1959, 230–231).

For Freud, disseminating his ideas – and thus translation of his works – was particularly important, and during the early years of the psychoanalytic movement meaning would trump style for him. He was grateful to Brill for his work and careful to protect him from unnecessary criticism from whatever quarter. In this respect, Brill was not immune from self-criticism and was alert to it from others also. In April 1913, as *The Interpretation of Dreams* was being published, Freud reassured Brill that he wanted him as his primary English translator (Freud–Brill, 9 April 1913, LoC). When Freud received a copy of the book from George Allen & Co on 12 May 1913, he was delighted and thanked Brill for his effort and courage in making the translation (Freud–Brill, 2 June 1913, LoC). Going over the text page by page over the next couple of months, Freud marked up the first one hundred plus pages of his copy in pencil with numerous small corrections, hoping he would be able to discuss them with Brill if he came to Europe that summer for the psychoanalytic congress in Munich (Freud–Brill, 9 July 1913, LoC). Brill, however, was unable to make the journey and apparently never got to see Freud's actual comments, despite asking to see them again in January 1914 as a precursor to a possible revised edition (Brill–Freud, 11 January 1914, LoC). For his part, Freud was taken up with other matters and never appears to have resumed his editorial annotation of his copy. It remains as it was left in Freud's library, now housed in the Freud Museum, in London.

Given the small issues Freud identified in *The Interpretation of Dreams* as well as hearing criticism from colleagues, he asked to see draft translations of other works Brill

was working on in 1914 (Freud–Brill, 22 January 1914, LoC). Freud would later acknowledge to Brill that an unidentified “Englishman” (possibly Jones) told him that Brill’s “style was not genuine English” (Freud–Brill, 16 November 1914, LoC). Taking up what he discerned as Freud’s unhappiness with his work directly in June and later October 1914, Brill latterly offered to step down as his translator, adding that he was “convinced that Jones has been trying in all sorts of ways to bring this about and has not been honest with me about it” (Brill–Freud, 27 October 1914, LoC). While this would prove an astute observation (though Brill’s critics were more widespread than Jones), Freud was still quick to reassure his friend and translator of his gratitude and position (Freud–Brill, 16 November 1914, LoC).

The First World War would sweep these understandings aside, firstly with the disruption of communications it produced during its course, and then with the profound shift in power wrought by its outcome. England, and Ernest Jones in particular, became key post-war conduits for English-speaking patients and trainees who began to again seek analysis with Freud and his colleagues in Vienna and Berlin, their ability to settle their fees in hard currencies saving Freud from financial ruin. And English assumed increasing importance as a language for scientific and intellectual exchange, in contrast to German and the languages of the defeated Central Powers. It was at this point that Jones secured the establishment of an English language journal, the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, and a related book series, the *International Psycho-Analytical Library*, which consolidated his (and British) power and control within psychoanalysis. Part of the manifest rationale for these initiatives was to make available in standardised English key works previously published in German and other European languages (Willoughby 2022, 361–368).

Brill’s exclusive contract as Freud’s authorised English language translator became one of the first casualties of this new order. Freud broke the news to him by letter on 5 October 1919 that all future translations would be done in Britain. Thanking him for his past work, Freud blithely added that he realised Brill’s time was now too valuable for such work (Freud–Brill, 5 October 1919, LoC). It must have been a hammer blow for Brill. For a time, he withdrew somewhat from Freud, their correspondence becoming sparse, though by January 1920 he began transmitting his own royalties from the translations to Freud, ostensibly to support him financially amidst the post-war economic crash.⁴ A second and more far-reaching casualty of this centralised publishing plan was the demotic in psychoanalytic print. In contrast to Brill’s translations, which like Freud’s German had employed a rich everyday vernacular where possible, the new British texts and translations increasingly adopted a flatter standardised and professionalised terminology, employing various neologisms coined from Greek and Latin roots (Bettelheim 1985; Solms 2024), reflecting the elite social aspirations of Jones and the social roots of his subordinate band of translators who were then *in statu nascendi*. Psychoanalysis

⁴In 1922 Brill embedded this practice, instructing Stanley Unwin to send his royalties direct to Freud (A.A. Brill to Stanley Unwin, 7 December 1922, UoR ref: AUC 1/13). It was an arrangement that Freud had reservations about, as he told Brill for example in 1930: ‘I suspect it is wrong of me to accept the royalties for *Traumdeutung*. I believe they belong to you, and it is a present to me you have them send. But I sense your sensitivity and propose we share them’ (Freud to Brill, 16 July 1930, LoC ref: MSS 51748, box 20 folder 12). Brill, however, stuck to his position, reminding Freud that: ‘As to your right to the royalties, we discussed this many years ago and I repeat what I told you then: that whereas I have a legal right to them, I believe that under the circumstances you should receive them’ (Brill to Freud, 15 December [1938], LoC ref: MSS 39990, box 19).

and its discourses would become more specialised, elitist, and obscure to many who were not insiders.

Publishing history and overall sales

The standard view of the publishing history of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, as represented by James Strachey (1953) and reiterated by Alexander Grinstein (1977) and the *RSE*, claims that during its first two decades there were three editions of the English translation, in 1913, 1915 and 1932. This broadly accords with the publication details printed in the books themselves, which additionally – and with some inconsistency – assert there were three impressions of the first edition and eight of the second. The first edition impressions supposedly appeared in April, May, and November 1913. The May 1913 impression was not marked as such on the title verso, leading to it being commonly misidentified by both dealers and collectors as the more sought-after true first edition. The final impression of the first edition, that of November 1913, was embargoed by the printers when George Allen went into receivership and these 750 copies would only emerge in 1914, trickling out in three batches across the year. Given these difficulties and the severe impact of the outbreak of the First World War on the book trade, it was not until the end of 1915 that the three impressions of the first edition – 2513 copies in total – sold out.

The second edition impressions were reportedly released in December 1915, December 1916, May 1919, January 1920, January 1921, April 1922, February 1923, and February 1927. From the April 1922 impression onwards, the stated release date of the very first impression was inexplicably and erroneously changed on the books themselves from April to February 1913. Later that year, in November 1922, Allen & Unwin's lucrative contract to supply Macmillan with books for the US market was renegotiated: henceforward Macmillan would purchase folded sheets at a reduced price, rather than bound copies, the export of which also attracted less duty (Unwin–Brill, 14 November 1922, LoC). Macmillan volumes from this point onward were bound in the US in brown cloth, with gilt titling on the spine. Macmillan were thus able to lower the book's US cover price and boost their domestic sales the following year. Aside from the probable economic benefits for Macmillan, this arguably represented a rather more liberal attitude towards the dissemination of psychoanalytic knowledge in the United States, bringing Freud's text within easier reach of the general public. In Britain by contrast, with its entrenched class structures, lowering the price does not appear to have been considered at this time.

The third edition, though initially dated 1932, was in fact released on 7 February 1933. These 12 print runs between 1913 and 1933, which ranged from 750 volumes to a high of 2500 copies (in 1933), cumulatively produced 16,363 books. While the bibliographic details of these various impressions and their distinguishing features are discussed elsewhere (Willoughby 2024a), it is worth briefly noting here the limited and fluctuating pattern of sales across the period under review (see Figure 1). Sales in Britain and its Empire were particularly modest, albeit with a spike in the period immediately after the First World War, suggesting that the cultural penetration of psychoanalysis there was relatively shallow and restricted (at least insofar as may be judged from the sale of such expensive books). Sales in the USA, by contrast, continued to significantly outpace

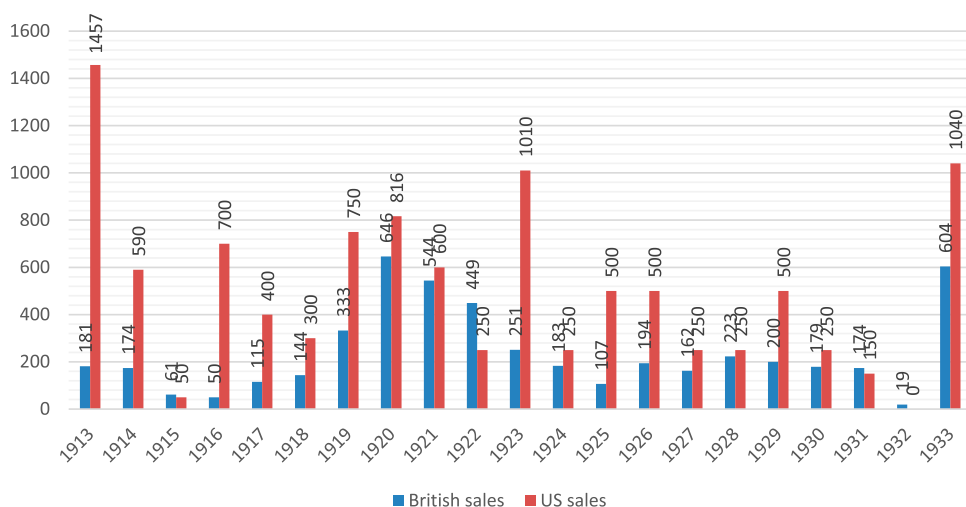


Figure 1. British and US sales of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1913–1933.

those within the domestic market in Britain and its Empire as they had across virtually the whole period under review, and as they no doubt continue today. Such a result speaks to many factors, not least of which will be the demographics of the US market and the price point Macmillan were able to set there, as well as the rise of the USA vis-à-vis Britain on the international psychoanalytic stage.

The third edition and a palace coup

In the summer of 1929 Brill and Stanley Unwin agreed that a new translation was needed of the forthcoming eighth German edition of *Die Traumdeutung*, which Freud was then proofreading, and Unwin emphasised the desirability of improving (or “polishing up” as he termed it) the literary quality of the translation (Unwin–Brill, 1 August 1929, LoC). Though he did not as yet have the finalised German text, by the end of September Brill had begun preparations for the new translation, working on the seventh German edition pending receipt of the new edition.

As this work proceeded, Stanley Unwin became embroiled in a dispute in 1929 with the book’s German publisher, Deuticke, who was now demanding back payment of fees for translation rights from Allen & Unwin, claiming they were owed 500 Marks for each impression of 1500 copies printed from the second impression onwards. As George Allen had gone into receivership and the Trading with the Enemy Act 1914 prevented any payments being made to Deuticke during the period of the Great War, the claim was not quite straightforward. Unwin mooted the possibility of having to reclaim some of the royalties previously paid to Brill, and later Freud, and attempted to tighten up the original contract with Brill by formally incorporating his renunciation of royalties in favour of Freud into it. Unsurprisingly, Brill declined the proposal to permanently sign away his rights and, with Freud apprised of the situation, Deuticke and Stanley Unwin reached an agreement by 1 May 1930 to settle the outstanding debts for a one-off payment of £50 (Unwin–Brill, 1 May 1930, LoC). It would take until the end of the year

to conclude negotiations about future impressions, each of which would henceforth incur this same fee (see also UoR refs: AUC 23/3 and 24/3).

On 6 August 1930, Brill announced that he had received the new German edition of *Die Traumdeutung* “a few weeks ago and am almost finished with the translation” (Brill–Unwin, 6 August 1930, UoR). This proved a little overly optimistic, and it would take Brill a further three and a half months to complete the translation of the main text body. Sending this to Unwin on 19 November 1930, the prelims and end matter would follow piecemeal into the spring of 1931 (Brill–Unwin, 19 November 1930, 31 January 1931, and 2 April 1931, UoR).

Unwin’s readers, Eden and Cedar Paul, thought the new translation was distinctly better than that of the 1913 edition, though they suggested that – as this was likely to become the definitive edition – it would really benefit from a “man of letters” giving the text a more literary gloss, reducing Americanisms and improving its general fluency (E. and C. Paul, 7 December 1930, UoR). Eden Paul had, of course, been Swan Sonnenschein’s proposed translator for the book back in 1911. Now, in line with his advice and with Brill’s consent, Unwin commissioned Bernard Miall (1876–1953), an experienced translator, to “polish up” the text, addressing any grammatical shortcomings in particular. Having worked through the first 120 pages, Miall’s update to Stanley Unwin on 15 April 1931 prompted him to seek a second opinion from Ernest Jones, who was now President of the British Psycho-Analytical Society (Unwin–Jones, 22 April 1931, UoR).

Jones, who had been open to – if not actively sponsoring – criticism of Brill’s work, was quick to support Unwin’s doubts about the translation. Having met with Joan Riviere (1883–1962) and James Strachey (1887–1967), he initially proposed that Unwin and Arthur Tansley (1871–1955) seek Freud’s agreement to more extensive and very time-consuming editing and rewriting of Brill’s translation, while he remained like an *éminence grise* in the background. He would arrange to fund Miall’s revisions through the Institute of Psycho-Analysis. Brill, meanwhile, had informed Unwin that if the editing was “solely of a stylistic character”, then he was content for the revised manuscript to be typeset without his having further sight of it (Brill–Unwin, 22 April 1931, UoR). This was good news for Unwin on a number of fronts. He might dispense with the uncertainty entailed in an approach to Freud on the matter, time would be saved, and perhaps most importantly the radical covert reworking of the translation might be obscured from Brill through furnishing him merely with printer’s proofs rather than an extensively marked-up manuscript. By the end of May 1931 this strategy had been agreed and Miall was instructed to continue with the work post haste, using Joan Riviere’s Freud translations as a model, aided by Jones’s *Glossary for the Use of Translators of Psycho-Analytical Works*, a 16-page supplement to the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, first issued in October 1924 (Jones–Unwin, 4 June 1931, UoR). Brill had in fact contributed to the *Glossary* project himself and had queried its adoption of neologisms and shift from everyday language as unhelpful (Brill–Jones, 28 March 1922, LoC).

By 13 July 1931, Bernard Miall had returned the first third of the reworked manuscript, which was divvied up between Jones, Riviere, and Strachey for checking and any further revisions they deemed appropriate. The second and third instalments followed on 5 and 29 October, respectively, with the prelims, bibliography and index being delivered on 2 November. Jones was now scathing of Miall’s work, suggesting to Unwin that his punctuation was poor, there were “serious mistakes as regards the German”, and some sentences

were totally omitted (Jones–Unwin, 21 September 1931, UoR). Pressed by Unwin to give examples of these mistakes, Jones repeatedly declined to do so.

Jones, Riviere, and Strachey's work on the text took some time, in part due to Riviere's ill health, other work demands on Strachey and the illness and demise of his brother, Lytton Strachey, who died on 21 January 1932. With these delays, Jones reputedly took on an added share of the revisions himself and when Strachey contracted influenza in March 1932 he claimed he was bringing in another (unidentified) colleague to further assist (Jones–Unwin, 5 March 1932, UoR). Finally, on 8 March 1932, Jones returned the reworked typescript to Unwin and it was immediately sent for typesetting.

During this protracted process, Brill's requests for updates were parried by Unwin with spurious claims that his translator "has only just got down to it" and they had considerable unsold stock of the existing edition in hand (Unwin–Brill, 24 September 1931 and 11 April 1932, UoR). In fact, while Unwin managed to supply customers in 1931 by scraping together a motley collection of previous impressions discovered in their warehouse, being only able to supply 19 copies to the British market in 1932 and none to the US, the book was actually out of print that year. Sending Brill the page proofs on 2 May 1932, Unwin suggested that as they now needed stock they would have the proofs carefully checked in London and proceed with printing unless Brill advised them to the contrary. Fortunately, Brill was not to be so easily hurried and over the ensuing six months would send Unwin numerous corrections to the text and index, beginning with the curious omission of the new foreword Freud had specially penned for this edition (see Freud 1953, *SE*, 4, xxxii and Freud 2024, *RSE*, 4, xxxvii). In this short but important positioning text, Freud had among other things explicitly acknowledged Brill's crucial pioneering role both as his English language translator and in promoting psychoanalysis in the United States. Both statements may have ruffled Jones's jealous feathers, dislocating him emotionally and politically from his wished-for status as both Freud's loved disciple and the leading pioneer of psychoanalysis in the English-speaking world.

Evidently some of these corrections were necessitated by surreptitious changes to Brill's original translation by Miall, Jones, Riviere, and Strachey. Of the 106 specific corrections Brill now requested across several letters in May and June 1932, and further corrections noted in the page proofs returned on 17 June 1932, all bar one were rectified in the text. That exception related to a paragraph on examination dreams which Brill had omitted for some reason from his original translation and had been inserted by one of the polishers on the wrong page (Freud, 1932, 290–291 rather than 267).⁵ Brill wanted the text in question moved to what should have been its correct position (Brill–Unwin, 6 June and 14 July 1932, UoR), a disruptive and expensive change which Unwin resisted, claiming it would impact on 202 pages of type (Unwin–Brill, 1 July 1932, UoR). With this (as with other corrections Brill submitted) and with Brill still pressing his case, Unwin deferentially sought Jones's verdict. Without apparent consideration of Freud's original text, Jones proposed the paragraph should *not* be moved as it "would be unintelligible at an earlier place" (Jones–Unwin, 30 July 1932, UoR). Bolstered by Jones's arrogance, Unwin reiterated that the typesetting was too far advanced to make this costly change, though they would include cross references in the text (Unwin–Brill, 1 July and 4

⁵Another paragraph, beginning 'Early this morning ...', was in fact missing at that point (Freud 1932, 290) and went unmentioned by everyone. Strachey would later correct the omission (Freud 1953, *SE*, 4, 302; Freud 2024 *RSE*, 4, 269).

August 1932, UoR). Surrendering the point, Brill was gracious in complimenting the anonymous editing Unwin had arranged, ceding that it was generally “an excellent job” (Unwin–Jones, 27 June 1932, UoR). It would be 20 years before this particular distortion of Freud’s text was corrected, somewhat ironically, in James Strachey’s *Standard Edition* translation (Freud 1953, SE, 4, 275–276; Freud 2024, RSE, 4, 244–245).

On 7 February 1933 the much delayed third English edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* was finally published by George Allen & Unwin, this time using Unwin Brothers Ltd, in Woking, as their printer. Ten days later, Freud received his personal copy and sent Brill a postcard declaring “To my great joy I just received the *Traumdeutung*. Sincere thanks” (Freud–Brill, 17 February 1933, LoC). In a laconic review in the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* (which was edited at the time by Jones), Sylvia Payne (1880–1976) focussed almost entirely on the translation, writing that:

The present edition is an entirely new translation of the eighth German edition. The nomenclature and form of Dr Brill’s original translation has been carefully studied and brought up to date with the most recent psycho-analytical terminology. In its present form this book should be in the possession of every psycho-analyst. (Payne 1933, 272)

If Payne’s text here very slightly equivocates over the translator, 20 years later – and five years after Brill’s death – James Strachey would tantalisingly reveal that the third English edition was: “Completely revised and largely rewritten by various unspecified hands” (Freud 1953, SE, 4, xi; Freud 2024, RSE, 4, xv). It was a remark (if not a confession) that readers largely turned a blind eye to.

Sales of the third edition began well, with 1040 quires being exported to Macmillan and 572 bound copies being sold in Britain and the colonies in 1933 out of the initial impression of 2500. However, Macmillan were clearly frustrated with both the long delay in producing the book and its incorrect dating on the title verso, issues which George Allen & Unwin then largely misattributed to Brill holding up the final production process (J.N. Myers–Unwin, 2 February 1933, UoR; Unwin–Myers, 13 February 1933, UoR). In the midst of the Great Depression, it would take the publishers a further four years to sell the remainder of this impression.

Afterword

Freud’s work, with *Die Traumdeutung* as a cornerstone, offered readers a semantics of desire (Ricoeur 1970, 6), which in that book moves between dream text and underlying realities, or between the manifest and latent content. In parallel with this, the hidden history of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in English translation reveals an emotional underworld riven with desire, anxiety, ambition, and intrigue.

As Freud’s *first authorised* English language translator (an often-forgotten fact amid the trumpeting of Strachey’s later authorised *Standard Edition*), Brill’s hard work and courage were qualities the professor would acknowledge. He would display both in undertaking the epistemic and literary challenge of translating and partly reworking Freud’s magnum opus, a task Freud thought for a time impossible. Brill’s courage, and that of George Allen & Co., were evident too in getting an unbawdlerised text to the public amidst the real risks of prosecution under Britain’s Obscene Publications Act 1857. Part of the price for this victory was the heavy restriction initially placed on the volume’s

sale in Britain, another mechanism of censorship, and one which in this case no doubt reinforced the prejudicial narrative of psychoanalysis being obsessed with sex. Still further supplies of courage were needed in facing the attacks that came from within the psychoanalytic movement itself. Biting and at times self-interested critiques of his literary style, which was by no means the best, were further infused with issues of class and cultural politics.

However, deeper matters were being contested, including the very ownership of psychoanalysis and whether it might retain something of the lyrical ambiguity and uncertainty of Freud's open text and demotic. While Brill to an extent managed to remain close to Freud's idiom with his 1913 translation, his loss of future English translation rights to Ernest Jones and his coterie of translators, particularly Joan Riviere and the Stracheys, from 1919 was a clear turning point towards the professionalisation of a *version* of psychoanalysis and a *standardisation* of its nomenclature. Their translations framed psychoanalysis within the language of a British intellectual elite, which with the Stracheys' later involvement drew on the hegemonic cachet of Bloomsbury. Psychoanalysis in this way was to an extent appropriated into a class politics that was alien to both its origins in Freud's biography and to its early radical aspirations.

Psychoanalysis in print would thus come to offer privileged access to some, while for others the increasingly rarified and professionalised texts were inevitably and deliberately exclusionary. Before and behind Strachey other hands were at work, notably Ernest Jones, who Riccardo Steiner rightly points to as having sought to orchestrate "a rather rigid codification, ... a sort of linguistic corset, or rigid linguistic scaffolding, and too often a partial, reductive, scientific interpretation of psychoanalysis" (2021, 95). It was a taming of psychoanalysis into an upper-middle-class intellectual mould. Amidst this, Brill's translation of *The Interpretation of Dreams* survived, offering a different nuance in psychoanalysis, up to the early 1930s and would have survived longer had it not been effectively ambushed and secretly rewritten, with the connivance of Stanley Unwin, aligning its terminology much more closely with that of the new British psychoanalytic hegemony. That said, Brill's translations continue to circulate, particularly in the USA, and continue to offer readers a certain counterpoint to the *Standard Edition* and indeed to the *Revised Standard Edition*, which despite its impressive and important interpretative apparatus, continues in a more nuanced way to perpetuate the Jones–Strachey cultural hegemony.

The English translation of *The Interpretation of Dreams* from its first edition in 1913 through to that of 1933 bears all the traces of this hidden history. From the restricted sale notices and secret numbering of the George Allen & Co impressions, and the cancel titles of some Macmillan volumes in 1913, the vicissitudes of desire are evident before one even ventures into the text body. The first edition, however, does not exhaust these signs, with others discernible in later impressions. Take the November 1913 impression for example, half of which did not arrive until after the outbreak of the Great War, bearing in some iterations the imprint of a publisher that did not exist at the time it was actually printed. During the two decades that are here under review, sales were substantially sustained by the United States until after the Great War, when British demand rose somewhat during a bubble of interest in psychoanalysis. It was then one of the ways, arguably, in which the book met with the zeitgeist as people attempted to understand the nightmares of the war. However, the general sales figures for this key text of twentieth-century intellectual history underscore why it is actually a

scarce book today in the antiquarian trade, especially the first British edition by George Allen & Co. These same figures also give pause to claims such as those by W.H. Auden about the penetration of psychoanalysis into the culture if represented by sales of this seminal book. Certainly in Britain, not many people actually owned the book.

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Potentially personally identifying information presented in this article that relates directly or indirectly to an individual, or individuals, has been changed to disguise and safeguard the confidentiality, privacy and data protection rights of those concerned, in accordance with the journal's anonymisation policy.

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