

Mirror and Oneiric Mirages: Plato, Precursor of Freud

By Sarah Kofman

Freud and Plato

IN *THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS*, FREUD CITES PLATO ON two occasions. In the chapter "The Moral Sense in Dreams," reviewing the various authors who have expressed opinions on the subject, he writes, "Plato... thought that the best men are those who only *dream* what others *do* in their waking life" (Strachey 99). On the last page of the book, Freud returns to the philosopher to ratify him, and to cite him as evidence for the distinction between latent meaning and manifest meaning, thereby invalidating all judgment which one might bring to bear on dreams:

I think... that the Roman emperor was in the wrong when he had one of his subjects executed because he had dreamt of murdering the emperor. He should have begun by trying to find out what the dream meant; most probably its meaning was not what it appeared to be. And even if a dream with another content had had this act of *lèse majesté* as its meaning, would it not be right to bear in mind Plato's dictum that the virtuous man is content to *dream* what a wicked man really *does*? I think it is best, therefore, to acquit dreams. (Strachey 658)

This repeated allusion to, and nearly in the same words as, the famous passage from Book IX of *The Republic* (571a) is surprising, to say the least. If Plato, too, really believes that the dream is a sovereign route to knowledge of the unconscious — the desires "innate in each one of us, but repressed (κολλυζόμενα) by laws and better desires... which reveal themselves during sleep" — he nonetheless does not distinguish between manifest meaning and latent meaning, but maintains that our dreams betray our desires, and thus permit our judgment. The good man does not fulfill these desires, even in his dreams, and there lies his superiority, for only the wicked man acts awake as asleep. If all men, even those who appear quite normal, possess

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“a species of terrible, wild, lawless desire... evidenced by their dreams,” then some of them, sound of mind and body, experience the least possible disturbing visions during sleep, and there come in closer contact than ever with truth. The dreams of the wicked are the source of our knowledge about desires which are so well-repressed by reason in better people that they leave them in peace even during sleep; in any case, Plato says, they torment them less (ἥκιστα), since these disturbing (παράνομοι) desires are entirely innate.

Freud thus seems to have read Plato in a rather rapid manner — a rapidity which would also explain why he neglects to cite him elsewhere when he discovers that the dream is the realization of incestuous and parricidal desires. Indeed, Plato writes: “You know that in this state (the state of sleep), the soul dares all, as if it were detached and disencumbered from all shame and reason (αἰσχύνηζ καὶ φρονήσερζ); it does not hesitate to attempt in thought to rape its mother, or any other, whether it be man, god, animal; there is neither a murder it shies away from, nor a food it abstains from; in short, it does not restrain itself from any madness or immodesty” (571d). It is an even more surprising silence concerning Plato that Freud, who corroborates his discovery only with Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, complains in a note added later of the indignant outrage which his interpretation — and the unsupportable and dreadful revelation of incestuous and parricidal desires — provoked. And in the text itself he writes: “Like Oedipus, we live unconscious of desires which damage our morality, and from which nature constrains us. When we reveal these desires, we would rather avert our eyes from the scenes of our childhood” (229).

Could the effect of *Oedipus Rex* on Freud have been so powerful as to make him forget the text of *The Republic*, or did Freud turn his eyes away from Plato to Sophocles because the former anticipated too clearly Freud’s own discoveries, depriving him of his priority, of which he was so jealous?

In any case, Freud’s repeated “error” in reading, his silences, and the return on the last page of Plato’s name seem to me sufficiently significant incitement to regard the text more closely.

The Primal Scene of the Dream

It is upon examining the transition from the democratic regime to the tyrannical regime, or rather from democratic man to tyrannical man,¹ that Plato is led to appeal to dreams, in order to expose in them the sort of desires which dominate and characterize the tyrannical soul. Having analyzed the aristocratic regime and the corresponding type of soul, in which the intellect (the *noûs*) governs; the timocratic regime and timocratic man, in whom the *thumos* has the upper hand and ambition

reigns; the oligarchic regime and oligarchic man, marked by the supremacy of desires (the *épathumia*) — among others, the desire for money; and the democratic regime and the democratic type of soul, in which the desire for liberty triumphs, Plato finally arrives at the last possible type of regime and man²: the tyrannical, the result of an excessive desire for freedom, which necessarily leads to servitude (the general law of regime-change³ being a disturbance of the principle of motives grown excessive, each type of regime, governed by the desire for the good which is proper to it, being in general indifference to all the rest). Plato does not undertake his examination of different types of regimes and souls with a theoretical or descriptive objective, but rather a normative one. His (idealist) question is to discern which regime and type of soul is best able to procure for man the happiest life.⁴ With this aim, his final examination of the extreme low turns out to be most important, for only a comparison of the two extremes — the most unjust man, the tyrant, and the most just man, the philosopher — will allow the choice of life and regime to be decided. What is really at stake is to refute the thesis of Thrasymachus, expounded in Book I, who decided in favor of the most unjust life — that of tyrannical man — which according to him is the happiest:

When we have identified that which is most unjust, we will place it beside the most just, and thus we will be able to render an exact account of the effects of pure justice and pure injustice on the happiness or unhappiness of the individual and, consequently, we will either go along with the opinion of Thrasymachus and follow the route to injustice, or yield to the evidence which presses upon us and practice justice. (545a)

It would not have taken anything less than the ten books of *The Republic* to counterbalance this thesis, and the final myth of Er [Hera?] to respond to that of the ring of Gyges — this is the importance of the debate.

The analysis of tyrannical man demands consideration of a sort of desire, neglected until then, which had escaped the dichotomous division of desires conducted from 554a to 558d. This division was necessary in order to describe oligarchic man and democratic man; the first, after all, is led by necessary desires and pleasures, the second by superfluous desires and pleasures. Treating all these desires equally, tyrannical man permits complete anarchy and freedom to reign in his soul, and thus variegation, disorder, and injustice.⁵ The sort of desires characteristic of the tyrannical soul had persisted unnoticed until then because the comprehension of other “psychic” and “political” structures did not require their display, and, moreover, because these were more difficult than others to discover; in fact, they were “repressed by laws and better desires” among most men. Indeed, this is what distinguishes them from the desires proper to democratic man, which, however superfluous, nonetheless are prohibited by neither social laws nor the laws of reason — they belong, one might say, to a superfluous “good....”

“Tyrannical” desires, superfluous *and* evil, are no less so for being natural, probably innate in everyone (*κινδυνεύοθαι ἐγγίγνεσθαι παντί*) and, because they are dangerous to the very existence of the society over which they loom, prohibited either by law and reason (in the case of the aristocratic or timocratic soul) or by bet-

ter desires (in the case of the oligarchic or democratic soul). Their repression with the aid of reason can lead to their total extirpation in a small number of people, or their reduction in others — or, if reason does not interfere, their repression may fail in part, leaving them to subsist in number and in force.

Because tyrannical desires are thus more or less “inhibited,” their existence is evinced above all in dreams, the “sovereign route” to knowing what law, reason or better desires censor in the waking state — during sleep, to degrees proportionate to the strength or weakness of each person’s repression, forbidden desires awaken as reason falls asleep. The mechanism described by Plato by which the inhibited returns anticipates Freudian description and metapsychology at every point. It is because, during sleep, the authority of supervision (Freud calls it the conscious mind or the superego; Plato, the careful, reasoning part of the soul, ready at the command: the intellect) — these sentinels and guardians of reason, known as good principles (cf. 560a and 591a) — slacken and rest; repressed desires are given free rein to satisfy their appetites; “the sleep of reason gives birth to monsters....”

It is possible to overturn the hierarchy and mastery in favor of the wild and bestial part of the soul (the unconscious), which is more or less already stuffed, not with nectar and ambrosia⁶ but with earthly — too earthly — food and drink.⁷ The comparison, which has become classic, of superfluous and forbidden desires to the wild beast does not, however, escape Plato’s notice. Indeed, earlier, at 563a, he shows that even animal savagery bursts out only when animals “imitate” man in their disorder, for instance in the democratic regime: “The same animals who are at the disposal of men are much more free here than elsewhere — to such an extent that one would have to see it to believe it. It really is true that dogs, as the proverb says, resemble their mistresses; that’s why one sees horses and donkeys, accustomed to free and proud speed, strike down in the streets all the pedestrians who do not yield to their passage; and everywhere is the same excess of freedom.” Dogs, donkeys, and horses are all animals domesticated by the reason of man, which, when it finds itself subordinated to its desires, cannot help but lapse into a wilder state. In the city, man alone is responsible for the disorder of the “beast” in himself and outside himself. Only the wild beast, whose freedom is not yet domesticated, serves as a metaphor for the savagery of tyrannical desires when these are no longer mastered — bound by laws, reason, or better desires. In fact they burst forth, no longer restrained by shame or modesty — the foundational virtues of social life, if one believes the *Protagoras*. In the scene of dreams — more of a simulacrum than the theater, where the laughter and tears of the best audience testify to their abdication of reason and their abandonment of all shame⁸ — like the tyrant who ridicules all written and unwritten laws (cf. 563a), desires, delirious with freedom, dare all. *All*, Plato, awake and modest, says in the text, before clarifying — this time without mincing words, and right off the bat — incest with the mother (Μητρίτε γὰρ ἐπιψείρεν μέγροθσαι), not without retreating immediately, obsessively, before its own audacity and oedipal horror,⁹ to generalize the rape to “any other, whether it be man, god, animal,” as if it does not allude to parricide and cannibal-

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ism, which are encompassed in a more general criminality, immodesty, madness, the result of a dispossession and generalized injustice.

Thus, dreams do not respect any of the three major forbidden components of humanity: no more than the tyrant (precisely whose desires dreams reveal) who, even awake, does not hesitate to eat his own children, kill his father or elder brother, or beat his father and mother to force them to serve his own wants and who, incurably mad, will suffer for his ignoble misdeeds an eternal punishment in Tartarus without the possibility of reincarnation (cf. the myth of [Hera]), if it's not being metamorphosed into a wolf or some other ferocious beast¹⁰: he will have transgressed all the laws of humanity; he himself will be always already transformed into a savage.¹¹

However, the madness of dreams, unlike that of the tyrant, is only imaginary. The satisfaction of superfluous and forbidden desires in them, Freud would say, is hallucinatory. On this point, one should refer to the *Timaieus* (10c and sq.), which explains the possibility of such hallucinatory satisfaction by way of a peculiar device. According to Plato, the gods constructed for the nourishment of the body a sort of trough, between the diaphragm and the edge of the navel, and there they attached the appetitive soul, like a wild beast which must be fed if the human species is to survive. The gods lodged it there, as far as possible from the part which deliberates, in order not to disturb its deliberations on the common interests of everyone.¹² The appetitive part cannot hear reason; it simply lets itself be fascinated, *night and day*, by images and phantoms, simulacra, simple reflections of this mirror, the display of the liver, this other obscure cave, which reflects in the form of images the thoughts arriving from the intellect:

To make use of this illusion, a god has erected before the intellect the display of the liver; he has placed it in its habitation and contrived it so that it is dense, sleek and bright, sweet and bitter; that way, the thoughts coming from the intellect are reflected in it as in a mirror which receives rays of light and offers images to view.

Dreams are one of these simulacra, one of these shadows which the appetitive, deluded soul mistakes for reality. However — and on this point Freud has not understood Plato — it is possible to control oneiric delirium, to escape the illusion and the brutish visions, so long as one knows how to master his desires during waking life. This requires, first of all, having a healthy body, and above all, a liver in good shape; for nothing is voluntarily wicked, but rather, “it is due to some vice of bodily constitution, or from the clumsiness of those who raised one, that the wicked man becomes wicked” (*Timaieus*, 87d). Thus the immoderate person is not blame-worthy,

for the disorder of lust derives, for the most part, from properties of a substance which the porousness of bones allows to stream through the body and inundate it, to the point of introducing a malady of the soul. And likewise nearly all the defects which one calls intemperance with respect to pleasures. (ibid)

The second condition of mastering one's dreams, which thus depends so closely on the first, is temperance. The third is a sort of ritual of exorcism, which it is fitting to perform before being immersed in sleep; one endeavors to hold onto his waking soul, to nourish it with good thoughts and speculations, to turn it toward the best part of itself — towards the top rather than towards the base — so that even asleep, far from forgetting itself, the best principle continues to dominate the scene alone, all desires sleeping. The slumber of desires will leave the noble part of the soul in peace only if they have been calmed in accordance with a just measure of temperance, which demands neither fasting nor abundance¹³: in their excesses of dissatisfaction or satisfaction they could, in fact, trouble the soul, marry it to the body and to its sadnesses or joys, and prevent it from accomplishing its task. If the best part of the soul, before falling asleep, knew by the same token how to quash all anger, to appease the *thumos* — the heart, the intermediary part destined to assist it in containing the appetites¹⁴ — then, paradoxically, it could accomplish its task of knowing even better than it could in the waking state: the state of sleep, one might say, prefigures the state of death, that ultimate state in which the exhausted soul, returned to its first divinity, freed from the body and the troubles it engenders, will finally be able to know the truth.

During sleep, in effect, the soul which has gone to sleep in perfect mastery of itself, in a just hierarchy of its parts, not only won't imagine any vision contrary to laws, but will be gifted with divination¹⁵ of the past, the present, and the future — “will come in closer contact than ever with truth”; this is the only manner in which human infirmity can touch something true, the knowledge of which is reserved for the deity. In other words, dreams in themselves are not false illusions: the simulacrum, if it is “fabricated” by a well-trained soul, can be the bearer of truth. There are good and bad dreams, and the philosopher is a doctor who, capable of converting falsehood into a good dream, permits you to sleep in peace. The good man thus does not do, even in dream, that which the wicked do in reality. The dream scene, like the theater scene (Plato differs on this point from Aristotle, and from Freud, who relies on him), produces no cathartic effect. If one worries so much about sleeping and dreaming well, it is out of fear that he who is accustomed to killing his father or sleeping with his mother in his dreams, far from discharging these desires via hallucination, does eventually, by force of habit, really commit them — precisely like one who, believing himself to identify without risk with a mournful or laughable hero on the pretext that it is not he himself at stake, wails or cries without restraint at the theater and ends up behaving in daily life like a coward or a buffoon:

Few people, I think, realize that the sentiments of others enter our hearts; for, having nourished and fortified our sensitivity to the pains of others, it is not easy to master our sensitivity to our own pains... Is it not so with the ridiculous? When you attend a theatrical representation... the desire to make others laugh which you had repressed, by reason, out of fear of looking like a buffoon, you now give free reign, and, having fortified it thus, you often let yourself get carried away, without thinking that you have become the joker. (*Republic*, Book Ten, 606b-c)

If the well-regulated soul can and should, asleep, bring forth good simulacra which alone are capable of divination and truth — supplements with which the deity in its generosity has favored human infirmity — it is nonetheless only wakeful reason which is capable of interpreting dreams: Plato does not grant the simulacrum, whatever good it does, the last word on the noble part of the soul. By itself, the good simulacrum does not know how to speak the truth; it can only captivate the hungry part of the soul and thus permit it to sleep in peace. Upon waking, reason regains all its rights and mastery:

Thoughts coming from the intellect are reflected in the liver, like a mirror which absorbs rays of light and presents images to the soul. Sometimes, the intellect terrifies the soul: using the bitterness which is in the nature of the liver, it adopts threatening and severe ways... Sometimes, on the other hand, completely opposite mirages appear on the liver by a peaceful inspiration issuing from the intellect; deigning neither to agitate nor to make contact with that which is of an opposite nature, it puts bitterness to rest; in order to have an effect on the organ, the soul uses its natural gentleness, and restores all of its parts to their proper positions, revives their sheen and their freedom; thus, it renders docile and tame the part of the soul rooted by the liver, which then enjoys well-regulated nights and takes pleasure in the sleep of divination. And this because the human species was made as perfectly as possible. Wanting to redress our weakness, and in order to touch, somewhere, upon the truth, our makers installed the organ of divination in it. A sufficient proof that the deities have placed their gift of divination in the infirmity of human reason: no man with good sense achieves an inspired and veridical divination but that the activity of his judgment be fettered by sleep or by sickness or put off course by some kind of enthusiasm. On the contrary, it falls to man, in full reason, to assemble in his mind remembered words pronounced in dream or in the waking state by a divinatory power, to apply reason to his visions in order to extract what they might mean for the future, past or present, bad or good. As for those in a state of trance, it is not their role to judge that which appeared to or was proffered by them. (*Timaecus*, 71b and sq.)

If no man can escape dreams, the sign of his infirmity and its eventual remedy, still all dreams are not alike: Plato, in contrast to Freud, would have approved the Roman emperor who had one of his subjects executed because the emperor dreamed the man had assassinated him, for our dreams judge us, judge the violence of our superfluous and forbidden desires, our capacity or not to master them; and, far from purging us of these desires, dreams work to fortify them.

The peculiarity of the tyrannical soul is its incapacity to convert bad dreams into good dreams. The tyrant never sleeps in peace — and his waking life is itself a nightmare, since, without fearing punishment, he can satisfy without restraint the

wildest desires which dreams allowed him to reveal.

The Tyrant

How is such a man, at the very limits of humanity, possible? Plato locates the genesis of the tyrannical sort of soul at the "decay" of the democratic soul: as always, it is born of a division between desires, of a conflict between father and son. Democratic man had been born at the moment of conflict between necessary, useful desires — those honored by the father (of an oligarchic soul), the educator who inculcates in his son the principles appropriate to his parsimony, the sentinels and guardians of the law of the father in the soul of the son (his "superego") — conflict between these desires and the superfluous desires linked to luxury and to *mimesis*, to rivalry without law or measure, frustrated by the father and awakened in the soul of the son by the bad company

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of men for whom life is not regulated by need but by luxurious supplementarity (cf. 561a-c). Seductive principles capture him and frustrate the paternal principles, one model and *mimesis* replacing the other, the authority of the "second" father replacing that of the "first," not without imbuing in the son a certain guilt which keeps him in conflict: whence his adoption of principles midway between the two others, neither totally uncontrolled nor parsimonious; it is this middling, ultimate compromise which characterizes the democratic soul.

One turns from a democrat into a tyrant by the repetition of an analogous scene of seduction: the democratic father inculcates his mitigated principles in his son, who is drawn away from them by a model of life proposing, as its only principles, desires forbidden by law. These can seduce only — for no one is voluntarily wicked — by a magical operation of false exchange, of the falsification of names: this proposed deregulation, unchecked, is called *freedom*, a beautiful title which ratifies the anarchic equality of all desires, the absence of order and restraint in conduct (cf. 564d and sq.).

If the young man, however, resists the seduction of "freedom," an infallible plot to transform him into a tyrant — consisting of inciting his heart to love, the most tyrannical of desires, their boss and master (cf. 574c and sq.) — will drive him from extreme freedom to the deepest servitude. Though boss, love will not offer the soul a principle of hierarchical arrangement but will introduce, on the contrary, the same disorder as bile or pituitary in the body (546b), for it is the boss only of superfluous anarchic desires. Plato compares these desires, which do not need to work or expend much, to bees of various types. Thus at 552c, he writes: "A bee in a cell is the disease of the hive," and he distinguishes the winged bees without stingers, without sting, who end up beggars, and the two-footed bees, who have stingers and constitute the class of criminals. At 554c, he declares that "those with desires natur-

al to bees restrain them with great effort." At 556a, the usurers are described as walking bees who injure with their stingers and increase their capital by a hundred-fold; at 559d, "man delivered to his pleasures and desires is governed by superfluous desires," democratic man, is compared to a bee as against oligarchic and domesticated man, who is governed by necessary desires:

When a young man raised as we have said, in ignorance and parsimony, has tasted the honey of bees, and he has frequented ardent and pernicious insects, able to indulge in various pleasures of all species and qualities, it is then, you can believe it, that his interior regime begins to pass from oligarchy to democracy. (559d)

Love has all the characteristics of a winged bee. It is the disease of the beehive, of which one is only the apparent master, for he will end in begging, in living at the expense of other superfluous desires which he subordinates and puts at his service but which, like the flatterers of the tyrant, end up in power. While Eros of the *Banquet* has, in order to leave the apories, more than one poros in its arc, tyrannical love has for its only poros a profusion of incense, perfumes, wreaths and wine: neither stinger nor sting. These are the flatterers who distend the stinger of unsatisfied desire. Such is, in effect, their strategy for conquest: rendering the other, the boss, literally mad with desire by expurgating in him all that could make him listen to reason (reason, but also the wiser, oligarchic and parsimonious desires, which, governed by the principle of reality, demand, by avarice, prudence in the seeking of pleasure). Just as the tyrant in the city exiles or exterminates all who try to return him to reason, and does not hesitate to kill father and mother (cf. 560 to 567c), tyrannical love, this "bad love" — which operates at the inverse of the philosophical catharsis of the true Eros — pulls all paternal principles up from the roots: one is not seduced this time by a principle contrary to that which up to now had guided him, by a false good which he would wrongfully have taken for the Good; he no longer even recognizes the value of the Good. This is the complete perversion of the tyrant, his dementia, his "becoming primal." Love, in its intoxication, thus leads to tyranny. And the tyrant, in his dementia and the absence of self-mastery, no longer recognizing human or divine law, undertakes to impose his law upon everyone.

To the question posed initially — does the tyrannical life offer happiness or unhappiness? Is Thrasymachus right or not? — it is now easy to respond: tyrannical man can only be unhappy, and desperately so, since he is totally dispossessed of himself and of his own parents; he is captured by an incurable and limitless madness; no paternal guilt principle can check or put an end to his megalomania; awake or asleep, he behaves in the most savage and brutish manner, in the grip of the most terrible desires:

Previously, these ideas were only given free reign in dreams, during sleep, until the time when he again submitted to laws, to his father, and democracy reigned again in his soul; but once tyrannized by love, he will be constantly in a waking state what he was sometimes in dreams, and he will retreat before the horror of no

murder, no food, no infamy. (574e)

Plato does not clarify whether the perfect tyrant continues to have bad dreams (could he, in his dementia, still distinguish dreams from waking life?). In any case, dreams produced during his democratic past will not be able to serve as catharsis; he will have probably even fortified them by nourishing his cannibalistic, parricidal, and incestuous desires.

If you want to sleep and live in peace, it is thus far better, instead of — like this incense of which the myth of [Hera] speaks — rushing toward the tyrannical life, to choose a philosophical and regulated life. For if these terrible desires exist in you, as they do in us all, it will be better to psychoanalyse them in order to recognize them. Waiting, Plato stands guard; sleep tight, and sweet dreams. ☐

Endnotes

¹ Conforming to the general plan of Book Eight, Plato begins by examining the transformation of political regimes before he examines sorts of men, for if it is true that the sort of regime depends on the hierarchy of parts of the soul, then the sort of regime is a paradigm for the corresponding sort of soul, because it permits us to read in capital letters that which, in the soul, is written only in lower-case (cf. Book One).

² The deduction of different sorts of regimes and souls can be done, in fact, a priori, since it is a function of the different manners in which the soul orders its parts.

³ As for the original change, occurring in the ideal regime where harmony anticipates neither alteration nor decay, Plato explains this by the general law of corruption of all that is born (cf. 546a), the real and occasional principle of decay being a principle of division within the party which governs. As in the *Iliad*, discord is the origin of evil, and discord itself is caused by the ignorance of guardians who do not always reproduce in the right geometric number or at the right generational moment, promoting good mating. These poor unions are responsible for the mixing of "races" and for a division in the guardian class, between the old members, of pure race, and the new ones, more mixed: "This mixing will result in a defect of inequality, of justness and harmony such that, everywhere that the two races meet, there will be war and hatred" (547a). Consequent to this division, the two races of iron and bronze turn to profit, while the other two (those of gold and silver) consider the only riches to be those of the soul — of virtue. The appeal to myth of these four races justifies in nature the differences in the structure of souls and their destiny.

⁴ Cf. the beginning of Book Eight, 545a.

⁵ Note the resemblance between the democratic man and the mimic who appears in the city when luxury and superfluity reign, and the soul is guided by no "proper" principle.

⁶ Cf. also the *Phaedra* 580e and the *Republic* 580c, 588d, 589b.

⁷ The satisfaction of nutritional needs serves as a metaphor for the satisfaction of desires in general. As in dreams, according to Freud (cf. the dream called "The Three Fates"), sexual desire appears in the form of hunger for food.

⁸ Cf. the *Republic* Book Ten, 606c and sq. "If you consider that the part of the soul which, moments ago, we endeavored to contain... is precisely that which the poet satisfies and celebrates in his representations; and that the part of us which is naturally the best, not being sufficiently fortified by reason and habit, relaxes its supervision on this mournful part, under the pretext that these are the unhappinesses of others that it stages; and that it is not shameful, when another who calls himself a good man pours out his tears at the wrong time, for us to applaud and sympathize — from which expression, on the contrary, we take pleasure, and wouldn't want to deprive ourselves of it by rejecting all poetry... are we not likewise ridiculous? And when you listen in a theatrical presenta-

tion, or in a private conversation, to a farce that you would be ashamed to put on yourself, and from which you take a vivid pleasure instead of reproving its perversity, do you not achieve the same thing as in poignant emotions? The desire to bring laughter, which you repress by reason, out of fear of looking like a buffoon — you give it free reign in its turn.”

⁹ Plato and his Greek contemporaries could not, before Freud, help but think here (roughly 981-982) of *Oedipus Rex*: “Numerous are the mortals who dream of sleeping with their mother.”

¹⁰ Cf. the *Republic*, 565e, 574a, 615b.

¹¹ Plato does not like madmen. In the *Republic*, in Book Three, it is forbidden to guardians of the city to imitate them (no more so for anyone than for women), and the *Laws* oblige them to be confined (cf. Book Eleven 934d and sq.): “Madmen should not appear in town; rather, each one will be guarded, in his house by his relatives... otherwise these relatives will have to pay a fine... But there are quite a lot of ways to be mad, and one might say really quite a lot among the Greeks! Among those of whom we are speaking, it is the effect of a sickness... there are other individuals for whom it is the simultaneous effect of the perversion of the natural and that of education: men in whom the slightest irritant provoke to shouting and flinging rudely at one another injurious words... in feeding his anger with poisonous fuel, in rendering wild again all that his soul had, long ago, tamed by education, this man lapses into a beast from living in irritation.”

¹² Cf. also *Phaedra*.

¹³ Plato, here again before Freud, well knew that a total sublimation of desires is impossible, that the base part of the soul, like Schilda's horse — of whom Freud speaks in the fifth of *Five Lessons in Psychoanalysis* (Payot, 65) — needs to be the slightest bit full, if only so as to leave the nobler part in peace.

¹⁴ “This part of the soul has a touch of courage and anger, and is hungry to dominate. It has been placed closer to the head, between the diaphragm and the neck such that, amenable to reason, it can, in concert with reason, contain a species of appetite by force, when, from the top of the Acropolis, the commands of reason no longer have the means to obtain obedience by willing agreement.” (*Timaeus*, 70a)

¹⁵ In the *Phaedra*, divinatory delirium is one of the good forms of delirium.