
CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOANALYSIS


Dream-Narrative and Dream-Continuity

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IT NEED NOT BE TAKEN AS CRITICAL when we say that Freud in the Traumdeutung was taking a particular interest in dreams as a source of information about unconscious mental processes and not in dream-life as an aspect of living. The dream, whose trivial function was to keep the sleeper asleep by gratifying unconscious wishes while cleverly evading the censorship of what two decades later would be called the Super-ego (with a capital S), does not preclude the dream as "a thought like any other thought." It was merely a particular vertex for viewing and exploiting a phenomenon. There is neither reason for saying that Freud's view is wrong, nor certainly that it is uninteresting, if we move on, as the analytical method has moved on, to take an interest in this phenomenon from another vertex and to put it to another use. I wish to do so, to take dream-life as my object of examination, for it is certainly, in my own method of work which has been so deeply influenced by the experiences of the playroom, the object of scrutiny par excellence for the elucidation of the transference. Not, I must emphasize, that the dream is the prime object of observation, for that exists palpably in the transactions of the transference—countertransference relationship in the consulting room; but the dream, I find, is my most convincing evidence for the elucidation of the meaning and structure of the transference.

With this preamble in mind, I would like to present a short dream sequence from a patient very new to the analysis, about whom I know very little as yet, so as to examine the particular question: What increment to our tools of comprehension is gained by viewing dreams as a narrative, whose continuity we are able to sample periodically, as a basis for constructing a hypothetical continuum? Now the patient is a man in his late thirties, a professional engineer living in a small town some two hours drive from Oxford.

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and only able to start his analysis twice a week pending a change in his life brought about by an estrangement from his wife and the commencement of a new relationship. The upheaval has unbalanced him in various subtle ways which made him quite willing to accept the advice of the clergyman who has been his father-surrogate since adolescence and who was eager to hold together a marriage both partners of which he held in affection, along with the children. The marriage had deteriorated slowly but relentlessly in the years following the birth of a daughter, the second child, and strongly suggested a link to a reputed change in himself as a child subsequent to his younger sister's birth. The material of the first month of the analysis had strongly suggested a link between his paramour and his sister, perhaps most amusingly in the item of his quite suddenly falling in love with this young woman, one of a group of mountaineers, while they were eating their lunch on a peak in Wales. He seems to have been a rather shy and indolent boy, more prone to play with his sister and her friends than to make friends of his own until a period in a new prep school at age ten which rather transformed him into a scholar and athlete of some considerable accomplishment. This became clear in the second month of the analysis through exploration of the dream sequence that follows.

In the second week after the Christmas break he brought the following:

He was squatting in a rockery with his back to a house overlooking the moors and some yards away six middle-aged women seemed to be looking at him with some disapproval while he absentmindedly fingered an Alpine flower, a stone-crop, thinking exultantly that he was now divorced, free, no longer a "one-woman guy."

Based largely on previous material, once his helpful but patronizing lecture on Alpine flowers had finished, I suggested that the Christmas holiday had liberated him from the analysis as a possessive and controlling mother (the disapproving women as a collection of part-objects) in favor of an intimate relation to his bottom and anus (the stone-crop) and feces (the rockery) as Beryl was felt to liberate him from his wife and his sister's birth from his mother in the past. He was a "two-woman guy" and could play them off against one another. A question about hemorrhoids brought confirmation.

To the following session he brought a dream preceded by the information that he had gone a far as to dig up a stone-crop from

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his garden and place it in a plastic bag to show the analyst before he realized that it was not appropriate to the method I had explained to him at the start of the analysis. He had a very complicated and peculiar dream. In it
it seemed that the church of the village he been born in had been removed stone by stone and erected elsewhere and he was attending Sunday service with Beryl. The minister came romping in dressed in white robes and hood with huge green cat's eyes painted on each side and arranged the congregation so that the men and women were separated. The patient felt outraged to be kept from Beryl and left, but to his surprise found himself in the corridor of his grammar school, and that he was wearing a constricting brown waistcoat that the minister had left for him.

The patient then told me at some length how the change in his life at age ten had been wrought by the headmaster of the new prep school, "Whacker" Hill by name, who put fear and admiration into him. A renewal of this experience in the transference seemed strongly suggested. Interpretation of the stone-crop dream seemed represented in the stone-by-stone transference of the church of his baptism, and also in the "whacking" for playing with his Beryl-sister-bottom which increased the split in his bisexuality (the boy’s grammar school and constricting waistcoat).

But far from being galvanized to work by "Whacker" Meltzer, he came to the next session in a rather desultory mood and listlessly reported that he'd dreamed of being on the slope below the crest of a Welsh mountain but the scree began to shift and he just let himself be swept over the precipice and was falling to his death unconcernedly.

To the suggestion that this was a representation of rebelling against the daddy's authority by falling-in-love with his bottom again, the patient responded with the information of his lunch on the peak and falling in love with Beryl, how different from his slow courtship of his wife. Again he had thought of bringing me a stone-crop but had decided not to.

To the Thursday session he brought a fascinating dream which opened up a new vista to exploration, namely the seduction of the daddy—analyst into idealization of his dream-feces. (Acting-in-the-countertransference may, after all, be the driving force behind most analytic writing.) In the dream he was once against on the slope below the crest of the mountain and again the scree began to slide. But this time he scrambled to a stone outcrop to save himself. When the slide was finished his friend Wilfred edged over and together they peered over the edge to see that the scree had fallen into a perfect geometric shape. The scene then

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changed and he was romping down the road with two of the secretaries from his office, petting and pummeling each other as one of them carried a plate of food for her old mother.
The patient awakened with an erection. The implication is that he is now a "four-woman guy," that he does not have to fall in love to justify his abandonment of the mother, but can hang onto the breasts. This allows him to be friendly with the daddy who admires his feces while still allowing him to romp in private with his nice round buttocks while the feces is being prepared to placate poor old analyst—mummy.

Now, of course, I do not wish to plead the "correctness" of these interpretations; they are only one particular way of viewing the material, bound to a particular framework of fantasy-about-fantasy and a particular poetry for its description. As I have said, I know so little about this man that I have no idea at all whether this way of seeing his mental life is going to induce or encourage a process that will benefit him in any way. I have selected the material because it seemed to give promise of fruitful exploration with regard to the idea of continuity in dream-life. So let us commence our exploration. For the sake of avoiding confusion, let us start by naming the "dreams" as follows: "stone-crop," "stone-by-stone," "stone scree," "stone outcrop."

I feel that the first move I wish to make is to investigate this shifting imagery of "stone":

a. There is a rockery in which he is squatting and fingerling a flower, stone-crop. The concept is split into two somewhat idealized portions, the inanimate but decorative rocks and the animate and tender flower.

b. The stone is again split but now geographically, having been idealized in one place, dismantled and reassembled in another place, thus moving time forward from his baptism to the present.

c. The stone is fragmented into scree and moves, taking him with it into another state of mind, falling, perhaps in love, perhaps in death; it is his state of mind that is also thus either fragmented or reintegrated.

d. The stone is again split into two forms, scree and outcrop, the one endangering, the other saving him; but the fragmented scree is reintegrated as an admired geometrical form.

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Now I feel in a position to investigate the link between the vicissitudes of "stone" and of his states of mind in the dream:

a. He is in a triumphant state in relation to the women who disapprove, divorced from his wife and them, as the moor is divorced from the rockery.

b. This triumph is undone by the hooded minister who introduces a new divorce, between himself and Beryl (whom we can link with the stone-crop flower), moving him back in time
from the present to his grammar school, midway, as it were, between the churches of his baptism and of the present; his mood is finally one of submission, as with "Whacker" Hill.

c. The mood of submission continues, but now it is submission to the movement in space of the fragmented stone, the scree; in abandoning himself to death he falls in love with life, as in the lunch-on-the-peak with Beryl.

d. But once again this idealization (by being divorced from life he finds a new life to fall in love with) is undone by splitting the stone, this time in its form, the scree and the outcrop; now a move toward a new idealization is set going with the help of friend Wilfred and this sweeps him back to the position in "stone-crop," amplified into promiscuity (one-woman, two-woman, and four-woman guy).

How far have we come now? We have raised the possibility that the moods of the dream have a strong correlation with the states of the "stone" but we are quite uncertain about the meaning and significance of the "stone." Let us see if we can sort them. My impulse is to link them as follows: stones (of the church)—stone outcrop as one series; rockery—stone-crop—scree—geometrical form as a second series. Series One may be said, from its reference to the church of his baptism, falling in love on the peak, and being saved by the outcrop to represent the concept of the mother's breast. Series Two, judging by the squatting and fingering, the fragmentation, the sliding of the scree and the looking down at the geometrical form, to represent his feces. To this series we can add the tactile qualities of stone-crop flower, Beryl and the two secretaries to suggest his own anus and buttocks as the narcissistic alternative to the mother's breast. Now this is a man who loves the mountains, a mountaineer to whom they are both beautiful and

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dangerous. He is also very proprietary about them and would really like to have been a forester rather than an engineer. The scree dream suggests that falling to his death and falling in love are perilously linked, while stonecrop and stone outcrop «dreams» suggest that being dropped from the breast to his death can be converted through a series of moves as follows: fall in love with the Beryl sister-at-the-breast, fall in love with your own sister—bottom while still clinging to the breast. But this narcissistic union with the Beryl—bottom while still clinging to the outcrop—breast or the new stone-by-stone church is opposed by the minister—daddy and the new "Whacker" Meltzer—daddy. Obviously the thing to do is to seduce the daddy into becoming the Wilfred-friend by showing the geometry of your dream-feces and the beauty of your stone-crop bottom. On the other hand his history suggests that he was an indolent and effeminate boy until he ran into "Whacker" Hill. The relation with Beryl would be threatened by contamination by this infantile configuration, liable to deteriorate into an impotent playing-with-sister's-friends (the secretaries).
So much then for this pastime of reading a dream sequence as a narrative. Does it really have any methodological and metapsychological significance or is it a bit of playing about with a rather fortuitous series of disparate events?

This question takes us deep into enemy territory, the realm of hated "theory," if you wish. But perhaps this anxiety can be diminished if we take a less portentous view and merely speak of seeking a suitable metaphor or model of the mind for use in the analytical consulting room. The model I wish to use is one that I consider "Kleinian" essentially for it is based on Melanie Klein's earliest discovery, that small children have an overwhelming interest in two internal spaces, in their mothers and in themselves, which they experience as holding objects that are in continual communication and commerce with congruent objects of that other space, the outside world. On the basis of this discovery, one open to anyone who will listen to small children with interest and respect, she came to envisage the unconscious in far more concrete terms than Freud could employ, as a place. And being a place inside the mind, its inhabitants were seen to have a continuity of existence which transcended the discontinuity of contact with the outside world wrought by the cycle of sleeping and waking. This then was

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the realm, in a concrete sense, of psychic reality which manifests itself as a continuous stream of unconscious fantasy. By this recognition, or invention, or discovery, depending on your point of view, Melanie Klein set going an irresistible sequence of moves which, contrary to her wishes, has set Kleinian analysis on a divergent road of development. Like the High and Low Roads to Scotland, they may meet again with the passage of time (and in fact give every promise of doing so quite soon). The essential factors in this divergence are easy to state. They are as follows:

a. Taking psychic reality in this concrete sense as a place in the mind inhabited by objects and parts of the self, one thereby creates a stage upon which a drama may unfold. This drama may be viewed as the theater of the creation of meaning with which the forms of the outside world are then infused. This implies the primacy of psychic reality for meaningful life-of-the-mind and is an essentially Platonic view.

b. Given such a locus and a continuous play of unconscious fantasy manifest in various ways, the psychoanalytical category of "mechanism of defense" loses its mechanistic and quasineurophysiological implication. The unconscious fantasy is the defense.

c. In consequence, psychoanalytical interpretations become merely descriptions and cease to be explanations, for the mode of thought borrowed from the physical sciences, namely causality, can find no field of operation in this activity. Decision and judgment operate in every detail, responsibility is absolutely personal.
This then is the conceptual background for considering the phenomenology of the consulting room to have the status of a discontinuous sampling of a continuous process, focused to a recognizable concentration by the phenomenon of the transference. If this transference-forming tendency can find a setting in which to manifest itself as an externalization of unconscious fantasy, and, as well, some help in preventing the crescendos of mental pain from disrupting its flow and continuity, a describable process results which, strangely enough, seems to have therapeutic value. As scientists we are thus relieved of the guilt of vivisection; as therapists we are buoyed up by the endless adventure of discovery of new phenomena of the transference—countertransference.

These phenomena through which unconscious fantasy, operating

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as transference, manifests itself are available to us either through the senses, through communication, or through somewhat more mysterious means as identification and countertransference. One of these, communication, and perhaps the third, identification, enables the patient to evoke in the analyst a vision-based fantasy which is hopefully somewhat congruent with a dream the patient observed in his sleep and, partially, remembered in his session. Transmission of this experience to the analyst is however complicated by various aspects of the transference, manifest as action, which tend to treat the dream as a "thing" to which uses, qualities, and values might be reasonably attached. The analyst must discern and investigate these actions so as to protect his own "dream" of the patient's dream from being distorted. But the understanding of these actions can also be taken as correlative to the dream, in the sense of associations which can enrich the comprehension of the dream as a sample of the continuous stream of the patient's unconscious fantasy-life.

You can readily see that, with this model of the mind in view, our approach to the analysis of "dreams" is bound to be very different from Freud's "jig-saw puzzle" or "translation from Latin to German" method. He was approaching the dream as a piece of mystification that needed decoding, a trivial efflorescence of a mind longing to remain asleep in the face of the stirrings of desire and pain. We are approaching the dream as a sample of a continuous process that is the very heart of the matter of the patient's mental life; a glimpse par excellence into the theater where meaning is being constantly generated. Where Freud could look for help in associations, day residues, and symbolism, we are more royally equipped. We can place the dream in a rich context of the entire knowledge we possess thus far in the analysis, of the patient's so-called history and the history of the transferential process. Where Freud had to work intellectually, augmented by inspiration, we can work intuitively, augmented by intellect. We need not "translate" the dream; we can, with experience, learn to read and speak the individual patient's dream-language—imperfectly of course. But this imperfection does not negate the essential nature of the method. Its other advantage may be that the patient learns to modify his dream-language to accommodate our limited comprehension, as one may talk pidgin English to a
foreigner for his greater understanding. This can easily be confused with the "compliance" and "following on" which Freud described as a source of concern about the authenticity of

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the patient's dream, or the imputation that "suggestion" operates and invalidates the whole process.

However, this distinction of method from Freud's does not yield us any advantage over him in another respect. Just as he had a twofold task, to discern first the dream's meaning and then its significance, our method for reading the meaning does not relieve us of the heavy task of discerning the significance. But we are pursuing a different quarry than Freud. He was seeking to use the dream-thought to lend new significance to the reconstruction of the infantile neurosis as a past configuration. We are only using the dream-meaning as a sample for monitoring the significance of the evolution of the transference as an immediate configuration in the patient's infantile life. While he had to do the therapeutic work, we only have to assist the therapeutic process in the patient. Of course his achievement was the greater, but his failures the more crushing.

It now remains to us to turn back to our clinical material to see if this methodological formula has any reality in practice. We have taken advantage of a certain representational perseveration on the theme of "stone" in our mountaineer's <<dreams>> to follow his dream language. By tracing these vicissitudes we seemed to discover an interesting interplay between representations of self and object. The stones of the church and outcrop as object of his nurture and salvation seemed easily to metamorphose into the stones of the rockery and scree as his feces, presided over by his idealized anus (stone-crop) and buttocks (Beryl, the two secretaries). This shift from object dependence to self-idealizing narcissism could be interfered with, however, by the minister—daddy (and "Whacker" Meltzer in the transference). But if his feces could be idealized in geometric form (<<dreams>>) to make an admiring Wilfred-friend of the analyst—daddy, then dependence on the breast and attendant sexual frustration (a one-woman guy) could be obviated in favor of romping promiscuity. In following this process of shifting back and forth between object-relations and narcissism we were able to catch a glimpse of other interesting aspects of the patient's relation to time (the new and old churches), and space (up and down, in and out, near and far) as dimensions for the representation by unconscious fantasy of the various levels of development (adult—schoolboy—baby), and corresponding perceptions of his objects and their states of mind and body (the romping minister, the disapproving middle-aged women). The material in toto seems to

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center on the question, who is to do the romping at holiday time, the baby—patient or the analyst—parents? Only in his associations about the beneficial effect upon his development of the friendly but firm discipline of "Whacker" Hill-Meltzer do we find evidence of the patient's wish for the analytic experience to continue. We also saw the interesting tendency to put the dream into action in bringing the stone-crop specimen to the session, and its actual subtle acting-in-the-transference by bringing such a crop of interesting "dreams" that the analyst and his colleagues would be rapt in admiration (I trust).

So in closing we must examine the question, what is it that we are admiring? It cannot help to evade the problem by saying that we are admiring psychoanalysis, or the patient's intelligence or the analyst's insight or the beauty of the method. We must stick to the point: Are we admiring the "dreams" themselves? Are they products of the mind that can reasonably evoke our admiration? I think not. I think the patient's "geometric form" representation is correct. "Dreams are the feces of the mind and we are prone in our infantile way to idealize them and in the countertransference to join in the idealization.

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