

1. Reading Yourself to Sleep: Dreams in/and/as Texts

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Reading yourself to sleep. The image is not one of anticipated reader response to this book. Rather it represents a set of relations unifying the fourteen individual contributions which comprise the book, a set of relations between wakefulness and sleep and the intermediate process of “rising” into the former and “falling” into the latter; between reality and dream and the intermediate stage of the imaginal we are accustomed to calling fiction; between the non-sense of “it was only a dream,” the beyond-sense vision of “I have a dream,” and the intermediate sense of “life is (just) a dream.”

The opening image may figure a process personally known to many readers of this book but it is also a process familiar to many dreamers in literary texts. Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina drowns over a novel, reading herself in and out of a reverie of liminal consciousness; Chaucer’s narrator in *The Book of the Duchess* nods off over a romance narrative containing a dream and in the process has himself yet another dream within a text; Bronte’s Lockwood, reading Catherine Earnshaw’s diaries and the titles on the bindings of sermon pamphlets, drifts off into not one but two powerful nightmares.

“Reading yourself to sleep” can also be read as a provisional statement of the nature and practice of oneirocriticism, which is the core process of this book. “Oneirocriticism” is not a postmodern neologism but an ancient term and a similarly ancient practice undergoing a consciousness (or unconsciousness) raising in this turn-of-the-century period. The Greek word *oneiros*, of the many Greek terms for dream the one referring specifically to message dreams from the gods, has become the generic term for dreams of any kind. “Oneirocriticism” as the activity engaged in here can be described this way. It involves the use of critical methods from various fields of study to explore dreams, the use of critical insights from dreams to explore var-

ious kinds of texts, and the development of a dialogue among these explorations. Dreaming is thus both a subject/object of inquiry itself and a process by which inquiry proceeds. Double focusing on dream texts and literary texts highlights their differences, as well as their similarities, by foregrounding their shared aesthetic components: image, language, and narrative.

While many societies of the world have a rich oneirocritical history, in recent centuries, in the West at least, this richness has been reduced to polarized perspectives constrained within disciplinary boundaries: religion *or* psychology *or* history *or* literary criticism. Take only one component of a complex system, the dream represented within a literary text. There are those who have treated such dreams as nothing more than simple, transparent structuring devices. Dreams are read as framing mechanisms by which the author chooses to convey something that would lose its desired effectiveness if directly stated, simply represented, or incorporated into the main narrative stream. Once that function is served, however, the dream is essentially discarded. Then there are those who have treated dreams in literary works as psychological proof-texts, confirming the validity of a particular psychological theory. Here, too, the dream itself is dismissed once it serves its use.

The legitimacy of and necessity for mutually informing and balanced interdisciplinary approaches to dreams-and-literature to counter existing inadequacies have been persuasively argued by individual voices from a variety of schools: Shoshana Feldman and Meredith Skura¹ for the psychoanalytic tradition, for example. But foregrounding the dream and its content rather than instrumentally using dreams for other ends has not come readily. The chapters in this collection, however, separately and in their intertextual exchange, constitute an entirely transforming oneirocritical landscape. Certain developments in this century have opened the way for a return of respect for the multifarious implications of dreams, both "real" and "literary," in and of themselves. The contributors to this volume have come of age in the midst of these developments and the chapters that follow this one in our volume demonstrate the many ways in which the interdisciplinary study of dreams-and-literature is devising new strategies of inquiry which reflect these other changes in society.

First, there has been an erosion of Freud's hegemony as the supreme authority on the meaning of dreams and a similar revaluation of Jung's stature as an oneirologist. Individuals and organizations now aim to wrest dreams from the hands of the "experts" and place them back in the hands of the dreamers themselves. Second, neurophysio-

logical studies of dream formation such as the “activation synthesis” hypothesis of Allan Hobson and Robert McCarley² have demonstrated the complex interplay between brain and mind in the creation of dreams. Such research has heuristic implications for an understanding of the way humans use images and narrative structures to render their experiences meaningful and coherent.

Third, virtually all fields in the human sciences have in recent decades undergone a philosophical transformation in the way they regard language, texts, meaning, and the process of interpretation. Language is no longer considered, even hypothetically, univocal and transparent; texts are seen as fluid, not fixed—as processes, not objects; meaning is not “there” in the text but depends on the particular questions that are asked of it; and “interpretation” involves an interaction between the world of the text and the world of the interpreter. In short, the natural scientific model has given way, or one may more accurately say returned, to a hermeneutic model. This shift has provoked new investigations in many fields: anthropology, theology, law, art, history, linguistics, psychology, and sociology.

Fourth, recent work by anthropologists such as Barbara Tedlock and Waud Kracke and sociologists such as Peter Berger has provided us with new understanding of the social construction of reality and the interdependent relationship between dreams and culture.³ Such studies show the great extent to which the assumptions of a given culture shape the way dreams are experienced, reported, interpreted, and brought into relation with waking life. Their findings require a reexamination of dream theories that have insisted on the universality of dreaming processes, on the timelessness and the cross-cultural continuities of dream meaning and dream content (whether “manifest” or “latent”). At the same time that this social science research testifies to the somewhat determining effect on dreaming of the psychological, social, epistemological, and religious assumptions of a culture, it reveals the force of the reverse process: dreams also shape cultures. By critiquing current social conditions, envisioning new possibilities, motivating individual and collective action, and in myriad other ways, dreams have an impact that often changes the cultural paradigm in which they occur, an impact often ignored or obscured in Western culture.

In addition, oneirocriticism becomes an oneirolinguistics also whether we consider dreams as intrapsychic communication, meta-communication, or not communication at all. In the first place, though many dream theorists insist on the priority of visual over verbal phenomena in dreams, the dreaming brain is a notorious punster.

Wordplay, and in fact image-play of an analogous kind, is one of its salient characteristics in virtually all languages and cultures. Secondly, discourse about dreaming is impossible to conduct without dissolution of all traditional linguistics boundaries. Indeed, the impulse toward categorization and taxonomy that rears up in the dream theory texts of almost any age in almost any culture has been identified as a defense against the bewildering indeterminacy of dreams and of discourse about them.⁴ Perhaps this indeterminacy explains why no volume like this has yet appeared in English and why until now no one has ventured to bring out a multidisciplinary array of writings on dreams.

We are transgressing linguistics boundaries as soon as we begin to talk about our own sleeping mentation as a "real" dream to distinguish it from a dream we call "fictitious" or "make-believe" because it is the sleeping mentation of an "unreal" person, that is, a person who is a character in a fictional narrative and who is, obviously and therefore, *not* like us who are, after all, *really* "real." That is, we live in "real" houses where we read (real? fictional?) books and we are not imaginary characters in the books we're reading. But we have already made a radical shift in perceptual labeling when we try to make such a distinction between dreams in life and dreams in literature because, prior to picking up the novel or poem or play, we had readily been using the unreality of sleep mentation (it was a dream and not real) to distinguish our dream people, events, and feelings from the "real" people. "real events," and "real feelings" of our waking life.

Reading yourself to sleep further suggests the transitionality of the waking/reading/sleeping/dreaming continuum and its intertextual bias. Is a character in a novel we read who later appears in our dream therefore a "fictitious" figure in a "real" dream who needs to be distinguished from those real people in our waking, non-reading life who also appear in our dreams? Is the Hamlet of my dreams more or less real than a consanguineous relative, say Aunt Betsey, who is having a conversation with Hamlet in my sleeping mentation? Don't we need levels of "day residue" to differentiate between dream content that clearly derives from novels or stage drama or film or painting or sculpture (or TV) from that content which derives from our families, our jobs, and other diurnal preoccupations that involve us on a cognitive level?⁵

The chapters which follow are grouped into four somewhat arbitrarily devised parts. Each of the parts is preceded by a brief statement of the section's focus. But we also offer in the next several pages some guidelines for the reader. First, these chapters are not simply about

dreams and literary texts and the relation between them; they make important contributions to our knowledge about dreams themselves—their nature, function, meaning, and potential. The chapters should thus be of interest to all those involved in dream study whether they work from the imaginal perspective or not. Second, there are an amazing number of intratextual dialogues going on among the chapters. In this way, the collection is (surprise!) like a dream itself and can be read/interpreted as such. To collaborate in this dream-reading exercise we provide the following observations of our own.

There are several keen, and often amusing, reflections on oneiric issues in this collection. One is a classic essay on reading as a transactive process by Norman N. Holland reprinted here from its initial appearance in 1977. Reading a dream within a literary text, such as Hermia's dream in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, complicates this process, especially when we take account, as Holland does, of our subjective responses; when we withdraw the projections we have made onto the text and analyze "them" along with "it." Reading yourself to sleep and then dreaming about your "real" life and about the fabricated, invented life in the literary text may be the ultimate transactive process.

Also, following on an irrepressibly playful impulse that seems to strike everyone who writes on dreams in/and/as texts, Bert O. States extends this multiplicity of inference and reference even further. He reports a dream he has fabricated in "a hypothetical work of fiction" he has created just for the occasion of his essay. Then he turns himself into a reader of this fiction to demonstrate the multiple simultaneous negotiations the brain undergoes as it "reads" a narrative, with or without a dream in it. Holland also toys with the issue by citing an anecdote about Henri Matisse. Holland reports Matisse's reply to the charge by a viewer of one of his paintings that an arm of the woman in it was too long: "Madame, you are mistaken. That is not a woman, that is a picture."

Laurence M. Porter tackles the multivalenced complexity hinted at above in a somewhat different way, as does Jane White-Lewis. They juxtapose "real" dreams by "real" people—in Porter's case himself, in White-Lewis's case her clients in therapy—to literary representations of dreams. Porter then looks at a "real" author, Nerval, who turned his own dreams into fiction in the form of the most famous novel of French Romanticism, *Aurélia*. Suzi Naiburg treats a similar process in Henry James's career where an actual nightmare recorded by James becomes transformed into literary material. Naiburg also

explores the further wrinkles of aesthetic complexity that arise because James's nightmare was stimulated by his boyhood experience among the paintings in the Louvre. Thus James is engaging in a dizzying intersemiotic translation.

As the collection unfolds, it begins to take on some of the qualities of the Chuang-Tse butterfly dream experience which various authors invoke. And States suggests an analogy between dream-and-text analysis and Douglas Hofstadter's "strange loop" or "tangled hierarchy." If reality proves to be a social construct and the self a narrative construct, as some contemporary theories of criticism want to argue, then what are dreams and texts made of and how can a simultaneous discourse on both proceed? Readers may want to take on a "willing suspension of disbelief" as they work their way through the volume.

Other contributors concern themselves with dreaming in earlier genres and cultural systems: ancient Babylonian epic and the Hebrew Bible (Kelly Bulkley); dream commentary from the Talmud and Midrash (Ken Frieden); historical and poetic documents from early pre-Han China (John Brennan); medieval Spanish dream poetry (Harriet Goldberg); theoretical dream texts of Renaissance Italy (Carol Schreier Rupprecht); dreams in the drama of Elizabethan England (Kay Stockholder, Joseph Westlund) and of the Spanish Golden Age (Frederick A. de Armas); prophetic dreams in nineteenth-century Russian poetry and prose fiction (C. Nicholas Lee).

De Armas uses oneirics to redeem a text that has been called the least successful play of a second- or third-rate playwright. He is able to show not only the aesthetic value but also the historical interest of this drama that may have been the first Golden Age play on the discovery of America. Westlund demonstrates the way use of psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut's self psychology in approaching a dramatic character who dreams focuses the reader on the character's psychologically healthy sector rather than on his psychopathology. Westlund's method produces a deepened reading of a late romance by Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, which complements the excellent Freudian analysis of the dream within the play by Meredith Skura.⁶ White-Lewis fills in a major gap in dream theory by showing the neglect of nightmares, and especially of their symbolic value and teleological potential, in the psychologies of Freud, Jung, and their descendants. She then explores clinical and literary cases illustrating the important functions nightmares perform in lives and in texts.

Examining dreams in Chinese sources from the earliest dynasties to the Han era, Brennan discovers a major change in dream content. He is led by his readings to wonder if history shows that dream

content, and by implication the patterns of the unconscious, changes even more radically than culture does, "beyond the predictable changes in material culture." Brennan reports that message dreams—communications from the gods—lose status and decrease in frequency of report in China from the Han period (206 BCE–220 CE) on. He notes that Dodds cites a similar shift in the oneiric tradition in Greek culture. These hypotheses parallel, though on a different cultural scene and different timetable, Rupprecht's view on the abandonment of beliefs in divinely originating prophetic dreams as a major marker of sixteenth-century Europe. These chapters also trace a relocation in the meanings and origins of dreams to within the mental state of the individual dreamer and away from dreaming as a process embedded in a "broader impersonal system of signification and causality" of which the dreamer is only an instrument.

Brennan also, like Bulkley and de Armas, addresses the role of dreams in political contexts, especially the effects of naively or deliberately misconstrued interpretations with serious political outcomes. All three writers mediate evidence from the texts of creative writers with evidence from actual governmental records.

Versions of the oneiric in realism and romanticism are treated by Lee and Porter, showing the contrast between the oneiric and the fantastic and the persistence in certain cultures of belief in prophetic dreams. Westlund treats the nexus of *psychological* realism and romance in late Shakespearean drama. And Goldberg shows how one poet in only four poems can create an oneiric range encompassing the aesthetic, the erotic, and the political. Read in the sequence offered, the chapters possess, like a series of dreams in one night, a deep-level lateral homology even though each one, except Holland's, was composed especially for *The Dream and the Text* with no knowledge about the other topics or contributors, and all the others, except Stockholder's, appear in print here for the first time.

In moving through this book, the reader will encounter an often-familiar populace but one that appears in many new guises. Freud, Jung, Tzvetan Todorov, Jacques Lacan, Heinz Kohut, Ernest Jones, Ernest Hartmann, David Foulkes and Medard Boss, J. Allan Hobson and Robert McCarley, Francis Crick and Graeme Mitchison. But such "authorities" on dreams are invoked only to be challenged, extended, modified, and re-visioned. The reader will find Shakespeare, Henry James, Emily Bronte, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Goethe, Poe, Nerval, and Calderon, but also Santillana, Claramonte, Tyutchev and Supervielle, but should refuse to take even this roll call at face value. There is no intention here to launch a new field of study, or to

reinstantiate an old one, depending on your historical perspective, by producing an instant canon of privileged texts and commentators. For example, Frieden challenges the Freudian orthodoxy from within by unveiling Freud's perhaps deliberate disguise of his debt to Jewish predecessors in dream commentary. Also Bulkley asserts that the multivalency of every dream and text demands commensurately multivalent, hence multidisciplinary, readings.

We started with what we have known to stimulate ventures into the unknown. There is an acknowledged bias toward premodern texts as a result of the editor's training and scholarly interests. And there are acknowledged omissions of many other kinds which we invite readers to hasten to fill. What about gender? Is there a "common language of women's dreams" as the editor proposed several years ago?⁷ Why does gender difference appear to be the one unvarying presupposition in dream theory across cultures and times as she observed in 1988?⁸ What does oneirocriticism tell us about sex and power, and economics? Kay Stockholder makes some suggestions about these issues in her provocative work on incest in *The Merchant of Venice*. What is the role of race in the matrices of dreams and texts? Dreaming is a universal human phenomenon. How universal is dream content and meaning and function?

Incubation was a practice in the ancient Near East designed to facilitate the occurrence of "big" dreams, but it seems to have been neither practiced nor encouraged in Biblical and ancient Chinese cultures. What is to be made of this difference and of other information emerging from multidisciplinary dream studies? For example, nightmares outnumber positive or affectively neutral dreams by at least ten to one in the texts cited in this volume, texts from a variety of genres, time periods, and cultures. Why has so little theoretical attention been devoted to nightmares?

Is there a core of truth to mythological representations of sleep, dreams, and death as members of the same family? Despite Freud, the erotic—naked or disguised—makes a surprisingly minimal number of appearances in the dreams from the texts studied here while death occupies a much more significant position. Are erotic dreams less frequent in literature than in life? Or are these two categories of dream—eroticism and death—really one?

Such questioning reminds us that dreams are inherently dialogical. They involve dialogues between consciousness and the unconscious; between individual and culture; between past, present, and future. And fittingly this jointly authored chapter and this multiply authored text are dialogues about those dialogues. While the tempta-

tion with any collection is to read only a few of its pieces—those contiguous to one's own immediate interests or discipline—readers thus tempted will miss the crucial interplay of multiple perspectives offered here. They will miss the opportunity to read themselves awake to the potential of oneirocritical inquiry, to seek out dreams that appear in/and/as texts and to begin to read, and to write, about them.

Notes

1. See among their many writings Shoshana Felman's "To Open the Question," in *Literature and Psychoanalysis—The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, a special issue of *Yale French Studies*, nos. 55/56 (1977): 8–9 and Meredith Skura's book, *The Literary Use of the Psychoanalytic Process* (Yale University Press, 1973), and her many excellent articles. See n. 6. [See also chapter 11 by Joseph Westlund.] Prof. Skura had graciously consented to the reprint of one classic article, "Revisions and Rereadings in Dreams and Allegories," in this volume; unfortunately, however, limits of length, financial constraints, and the priority of printing new essays made it impossible to include her material. Readers are urged to consult this author as a fine resource on dreams-and-literature. Also see Carol Schreier Rupprecht, "Enlightening Shadows: Between Feminism and Archetypalism, Literature and Analysis," *C. G. Jung and the Humanities: A Hermeneutics of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 279–93.

2. See J. Allan Hobson and Robert McCarley, "The Brain as a Dream State Generator: An Activation-Synthesis Hypothesis of the Dream Process," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 134. 12 (December 1977), 1335–48 as well as later articles by both and Hobson's recent *The Dreaming Brain*, (New York: Basic Books, 1988). See also Kelly Bulkley, "Interdisciplinary Dreaming: Hobson's Successes and Failures," *Dreaming*, I. 3 (1991) for critical assessment of his work.

3. See *Dreaming: Anthropological and Psychological Interpretations*, ed. Barbara Tedlock, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) for essays by Tedlock, Kracke, and others. Also, Peter Berger, principally *The Sacred Canopy* and with Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, New York: Doubleday, 1966).

4. An example would be David G. Hale's article on medieval poetry, "Dreams, Stress, and Interpretation in Chaucer and His Contemporaries," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 9 (1988) 47–61.

5. An Italian Renaissance dream text treated in chapter 6 of this volume indicates that this was a vexing issue in 1562. See Girolamo Cardano's

Somniorum Synesiorum, omnis generis insomniam explicantes, libri iiii (Basel: Henry Petrie, 1562).

6. See "Interpreting Posthumus' Dream from Above and Below: Families, Psychoanalysts, and Literary Critics," *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, eds. Murray M. Schwartz and Coppélia Kahn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 203–216.

7. Carol Schreier Rupprecht, "The Common Language of Women's Dreams: Colloquy of Mind and Body," *Feminist Archetypal Theory: Interdisciplinary Re-visions of Jungian Thought*, ed. Estella Lauter and Rupprecht (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 187–219.

8. Address at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville in the annual conference of the Association for the Study of Dreams, later revised and printed as an article, "Our Unacknowledged Ancestors: Dream Theorists of Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance," *The Psychiatric Journal of the University of Ottawa* 15.2 (1990), 117–122.