THE REALNESS OF DREAMS

by P. Erik Craig

Some time ago I awoke from a dream in which I was talking with a friend, who had passed away a few months previously. In the dream, *I was standing with him at the very spot where we had first met and musing about what it would be like to return to that moment. My friend, Paul, simply asked, "Would you like that?" I continued to muse: "Well I've often wondered if all the planets and stars in the universe returned to the exact same place in space, if time would then also return." Again, Paul asked quietly, "Would you like that, Erik?"* At the time I was not aware of the significance of this: that if time could be repeated so could my relationship with him. After all, *in that moment my friend was very much alive and engaged with me. As we spoke we had been walking to Paul's new home, but when we arrived on his doorstep he was apparently reluctant to invite me in and, instead, walked me back to the original spot of my dreaming and of our relating. With a silent kind gesture, Paul left me standing there alone.*

When I awoke from this dream the significance of my friend's departure struck me immediately and I was overcome by an intensity of emotion which I had not experienced for weeks. I realized how fortunate I was for having had such a genuine meeting with Paul after the long months of his absence. While I was dreaming, my friend appeared to me as the kind and gentle man I had always known him to be, a man who never tried to impress others with his wisdom but simply acted on it without announcement or fanfare. In the dream, he silently affirmed that I would not join him in his new home. At the same time, he responded to my interest in returning to the beginnings of our relationship and to the reality that I would have to be with the meaningfulness of that time and place alone. This encounter with my friend was a real balm for the grief and emptiness which had followed his sudden disappearance from my life.

Unfortunately, I do not always feel so enriched for having lived my dreaming. Quite frequently, even now, I will allow my dreams to slip into the past as unreal, as "only dreams" simply because the possibilities with which they present me seem so foreign, so incomprehensible. But does this really make sense? Since when are foreignness and incomprehensibility valid criteria for what is true, for what is real and what is not?

The Scientific Betrayal of the Realness of Dreams

For many centuries popular dream interpreters saw dreams as symbolic messages from alien sources, as a domain where the forces of good and evil presented their fancies to sleeping mortals. When Freud (1900, 1901) first developed his scientific approach to understanding dreams, he wanted to demonstrate that dreams were indeed the product of an alien mind but that the forces to which they give voice are not foreign intruders but rather the silenced citizens of our own psyche. Freud's investigative passion, his attention to detail, and his literary style left a formidable legacy and most dream interpreters today also see dreams as expressions of an alien or alienated consciousness within the dreamer. Therefore, in spite of their effort to introduce scientific credibility to dream interpretation, most twentieth century dream theorists share three basic assumptions with their unscientific predecessors.

The first assumption is that dreams originate in an estranged unconscious mind. Whereas prescientific dream interpreters believed this mind was external to the dreamer, most modern dream scientists assume, with Freud, that it exists "within" us as a covert personality with a willing and perceiving of its own, as an internal maker of meanings whose immediate activities are beyond our ken. In other words, this hidden mind is like the Wizard of an internal Oz for we may become aware of the work but never the worker. Such an assumption imposes a fundamental duality on our understanding of human consciousness and dreams and our language reflects this inferred duplicity with Janus-like fissions such as conscious vs. unconscious, surface vs. depth, manifest vs. latent. These dualisms tear our reality in two and imperil our hope for a singular, unified human existence. With such a view we can never know, for certain, the original meanings of our dreams for they do not originate with us as conscious selves but rather with this intimate, invisible stranger.

The second assumption is that dreams have a purpose, that is, to express the perceptions, desires, or goals of this hidden mind, our so-called psyche. Whether the dream's purpose is construed as concealing reality, as Freud suggested, or as revealing it, as Jung believed, the assump-

tion of purposefulness itself is nearly ubiquitous among modern dream interpreters. In other words, the dream becomes our unconscious Wizard's screenplay, shrewdly crafted for its intended audience of one. Our task then is to determine the Wizard's intent and so we ask such questions as, "What is the dream *trying* to say?" or "What is it *trying* to tell us?"

The third assumption which modern scientific dream interpreters share with their unscientific predecessors is that our dreaming itself, the manifest dream exactly as we remember it on waking, is a symbolic or metaphorical facade behind which lies its true meaning. In other words, a dream *represents* reality, it is not reality per se. The meanings discovered in analyzing the dream are real; the dream itself is not. With such an assumption, the challenge for a dream analyst is to decipher the symbolic language of the dream and to infer its original meaning and purpose. Again, with such a view, it is impossible to *observe* what is real and true for us while dreaming; we can only *infer* this truth and reality.

These assumptions about dreams as purposeful, symbolic expressions of the unconscious lead many modern dream scientists to view our manifest experience while dreaming as relatively unimportant beyond the clues it provides for what lies behind it. Indeed Freud (1933) himself wrote that once "the patient has told us a dream . . . we decide to concern ourselves as little as possible with what we have heard, with the *manifest* dream." Armed with such assumptions and attitudes, many dream interpreters diminish the experiential significance of the dream and charge through it as though through the wall of a fortress in order to capture the life within. In clinical literature we read of practices like "vigorously stalking the dream" (Yalom, 1970) or relating to the dream "like an invading army to the hostile territory to be conquered" (Grotjahn, 1980).

What if, however, we consider the dream to be no fortress or battleground at all but rather, like consciousness itself, a delicate fabric, a tapestry behind which there is nothing? What if this tapestry itself is the lesson? If, in this way, we heed Goethe's aphorism, "Do not look for anything *behind* phenomena; they themselves are the lesson!"* we soon recognize that the above assumptions about the nature of dreams are plainly discourteous toward the reality of the dream-world precisely as it is given in our experience. Furthermore, with this phenomenological perspective we see that in making such assumptions we may not only neglect the meaning which appears with the dream itself, but we may also squander the dream's intrinsic value as human experience. Whatever

*As quoted by Boss (1977, p. 3).

becomes, when chasing off in pursuit of hidden meanings, of *the raw fact and feeling of our having actually lived our dream*, of the fact and feeling of having, for example, encountered a goddess beside a beautiful mediterranean sea or of having been tortured and shot by miscreants? Even our commonplace dreams such as of doing laundry, losing a passport, having dinner with friends, walking through one's home town or getting a ticket for speeding all have a manifestly absorbing quality which may be forfeited or frittered away in the shadows of the analytic ambition to pursue the meanings behind these sensually lived episodes of being itself.

The Personal Betrayal of the Realness of Dreams

Most of our waking life fits what we think of as "ordinary, everyday experience." It is experience which we easily recognize as "our own" and which we see as outwardly quite intelligible and perfectly sensible. At least we seem to prefer that this be the case. Once asleep, however, we frequently appear to lose our so-called "grip on reality" as our world suddenly becomes unpredictable. While dreaming we find ourselves in the most remarkable situations responding with courage or cowardice, anxiety or aplomb. Consider these possibilities: On one night we may dream that we have flown through an antediluvian forest; on another, had a conversation with a turtle; and, on a third, discovered a golden medallion containing the most precious secrets of human existence. And then there is this dream which was reported just last week: *the dreamer was in a large victorian hall when suddenly, out of nowhere, a brilliantly colored twenty-foot parrot appeared climbing through an open window and intent on carrying the dreamer away in its enormous yellow bill.*

While the vast majority of our dreams probably do not have such surrealistic proportions, some inexplicable detail or curious sequence usually catches our attention. These curious improbabilities often surprise or delight us but they are also the very things that evoke our skepticism about the reality and significance of our manifest dreams. It is this apparent incongruity of our dreaming with our supposedly predictable reality of waking that tempts us to conclude that our dreams are not real.

Thus if we were to awake from a dream such as the one of the twenty-foot parrot I mentioned above, we would be tempted to declare, in keeping with so-called "common sense," that this dream was unreal because it was *"weird," "bizarre,"* or *unlike anything in our ordinary waking reality.* We might say, for example, that it was incompatible with our own personal experience and with the lawfulness of nature for we have never seen nor has nature ever produced such a bird. We also might say that

our dream was unreal because it was *fragmentary* or *discontinuous*, that the parrot appeared "out of nowhere," whereas in ordinary waking life, we would have seen or at least heard such a bird approaching. We might also argue our dream was unreal because it was entirely *private* or *subjective*, because no one else in our waking life could observe and verify the appearance of this parrot. And, finally, we might reason that this dream was unreal because this parrot's existence was entirely *contingent* upon our dreaming and completely collapsed as soon as we woke up. As a result, we could not now have the bird captured or exterminated as we might a bird which so threatened us while we were awake.

You will notice that every one of these criteria uses the standards of our ordinary waking life to determine what is real and unreal in our dreaming. And it is with these supposedly superior criteria of our waking life that we then dismiss the reality of our dreaming. At the most, we might grant, along with "dream scientists," that the dream is psychologically or meaningfully real while still denying its lived, experiential or intrinsic reality. But do we have any right or logical basis for judging the realness of our dreaming according to the standards and structures of our waking? How is it that we so arbitrarily assume our world of waking to be genuine and our world of dreaming artificial, whisking away our dreams as "unreal," as "only a dream?"

Returning to the Dream Itself

What if we consulted only our experience while dreaming as such. Taking such an approach, we find that what encounters us while dreaming appears to us as tangibly, palpably present in a way that it may be perceived and engaged in a variety of concrete relations. We notice too that, while dreaming, we actually feel throughout our bodies and beings the ecstasy, terror, passion, rage or humor which overtakes us in response to that which appears. Sometimes, in fact, we actually wake up drenched in sweat, with tears on our cheeks, or with our hearts racing wildly. So, contrary to the attitude of so-called "common sense," when we carefully consider the evidence of our own experience and do not hold our dreaming accountable to the criteria of "ordinary waking reality" we are hard pressed to find a reliable basis for saying that dreaming experience is any less real for us while dreaming than our waking experience while awake.

It is also worth remembering that our handy, standard distinctions between "reality" and "unreality" are not as discriminating as we prefer to think they are, even in waking. For we often find that waking experience, too, may be bizarre and unordinary; fragmentary and discontinuous; private and subjective; contingent and impermanent. For instance, well known events like the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger, the taking of hostages in the Middle East and the eruption of Columbia's Nevado del Ruiz were all described as "dreamlike" and "unreal" by many of those who lived them. The unexpected death of a loved one almost always evokes this sense of unreality and persons who awake from their sleep at such times often feel their waking existence is more "dreamlike" and "unreal" than their dreaming. Likewise, those persons who find unexpected personal fortune or fall precipitously in love also frequently describe their waking life as "like a dream." Although a thorough analysis and clarification of the question of reality lies well beyond the reach of this paper, it is at least possible to suggest that the felt sense of realness or unrealness is hardly an exclusive property of either waking or dreaming.

How would it be, then, if we took our dreaming experience for real, if we accorded it the same respect and recognition we grant our experience while awake? Existential dream investigators (Boss, 1958, 1977; Craig, 1985; Stern, 1972) do precisely this. Approaching dreams phenomenologically, these existential thinkers take issue with the common theoretical assumptions that dreams are unconsciously construed, purposive, and symbolic. In addition they question the corresponding popular attitude that dreams are not real. They suggest that such attitudes and beliefs betray unjustified, unscientific presuppositions which fail to discern the value of our dreaming itself, for our consciousness while dreaming continually shows us that the life-worlds of our dreams appear to us as utterly real and believable and not as figments of our imagination. If there is a single feature that distinguishes this existential approach to dreams from others it is this very notion that *the dream is real*, so real in fact, that it might well be considered a bona fide autobiographic episode, a legitimate manifestation of possibility and truth in the life of the individual.

This new attitude toward dreaming has been most explicitly developed by Medard Boss, a Swiss psychiatrist who began his psychoanalytic training with an analysis by Freud but who later turned to the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, a seminal existential thinker, for a critical reconsideration of the nature of human existence in general and of the nature of human consciousness and dreaming in particular. It is upon the foundation of Boss's phenomenological understanding of dreams that my own approach is built. To summarize briefly, in taking up this attitude we are guided by a reverence for the experience of dreaming as such and encouraged, in seeking to understand a dream, to remain with the dream itself, dwelling openly and receptively with its unfolding as the unique, concrete moment of human existence it is.

This phenomenological attitude requires a radical commitment to conscious experience and therefore to the consciously remembered manifest dream. We begin such inquiry, therefore, simply by describing the dream precisely as it is remembered so that all the details of fact and feeling in the dream life itself become plainly evident once more. We never look, then, for meanings behind such carefully explicated dreams, for the meaning is already there, in front of our eyes, simply waiting to be perceived. If we dream of a parrot or a forest grove, for example, it is the meaningful nature of *this* dreamt parrot itself, of *this* dreamt forest grove per se, which must be seen and understood if we are to have any hope of grasping the special and specific significance of our particular life while dreaming.*

Taking up this basic attitude of respect for the manifest dream, what might we now learn about the realness of dreaming per se and about its significance as such for our lives as a whole? In keeping with the phenomenological appeal "to return to the dream itself," we shall explore this question first through the actual dream experiences of individuals in psychotherapy and then through the detailed description of a dream from the writings of Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Dreaming as Appreciation

One striking characteristic of dreaming is the extraordinary opportunity it provides for human experience as such. If we consider nothing but the event of our dreaming itself, upon waking from a dream, we are often fascinated or amazed by the simple *fact* that we can and actually just have experienced what we have. Dreaming provides us with an existential time and space in which we may encounter and live out *as real* an enormous range of possibilities for being in the world. For example, a thirtyish lawyer, whom I shall call Stanley, reported the following dreams, among others, within a six month period of his therapy. One night he *dreamt of gently cradling a radiant, Christ-like infant in his arms*, on another night *of leading a squadron of fighter planes against an invading army*, on a third *of watching a beautiful deer walking through the forest*, on a fourth *of speaking out publicly against mediocrity in education*, and on a fifth *of wrestling with an alligator and then finally taming it by softly rubbing its forehead.* Simply the memory of each of these particular dreams left Stanley with a distinct feeling of satisfaction and enjoyment upon waking. And why not? Had these events all occurred in his waking life we would readily agree that Stanley led an exceptionally rich existence. And yet should we consider him any less rich simply because these events occurred while he was asleep and dreaming? Had he not cared for an unusual human infant, courageously defended and protected his homeland, partaken in a scene of rare natural beauty, made a public stand on behalf of sound education and tamed an alligator all within a six month period of his life? The potential for simply enjoying and appreciating our dreams which Stanley discovered is one of dreaming's most obvious values and yet it is this very value which is so commonly compromised through the analysis and subsequent reduction of dreams to something other than what they are in themselves.

As we saw with Stanley's dreams, the very range of possibilities which may appear to us while dreaming is one of dreaming's unique characteristics as a mode of human existence. This range of possibility is generally attributed to the exceptionally private and sequestered nature of sleeping existence. While dreaming we are not only liberated from the gaze of others but we are also largely freed from the requirements and impositions of our day to day existence and from our ordinary moorings in time and space. In addition we are also protected from the threat of any permanent consequences to ourselves, to others or to the world we cohabit with them, for our sleeping bodies are immobilized and we always wake up. Dreaming, then, is a domain of exceptional freedom and safety. This harbor of human consciousness, what David Foulkes calls a "culturally sanctioned luxury" (1985, p. 45), provides us with a time and space in which we may experience as real that which would be impossible to experience in this same way while awake. Dreaming goes well beyond our waking imagination in this regard because while dreaming we are generally aware only of the reality of our dreaming, we are not comparing it with anything else. While dreaming we do not, for the most part, imagine or reflect on our existence but, rather, we live it and *we live it as real.*

Certainly dreams of flying present us with one of the most striking "impossibilities" which becomes a real possibility for us while dreaming. For example, a thirty year old graduate student in psychology, whom I shall call Lyle, described a vivid dream of flying which he recalled from when he was eight or nine years old. In the dream *Lyle was being*

*Readers interested in a philosophically grounded approach to dreams and dreaming would benefit from a careful reading of Boss' two works, *The Analysis of Dreams* (1958) and *I dreamt last night . . .* (1977). Furthermore, a poetic and philosophically informed article following these same lines may be found in Paul J. Stern's (1972) lovely, lucid chapter entitled "Dreams: the Radiant Children of the Night." Finally, though not philosophically oriented, Gayle Delaney's *Living Your Dreams* (1979) has my heartiest recommendation as a quintessentially practical book for descriptive work with dreams which is grounded in a firm respect for dreaming experience as such.

chased by a witch when his movement became suddenly ponderous as if he were running in waist-deep water. As the hag closed in on him, Lyle realized that his only escape would be to leap straight up into the sky. While dreaming, he remembered that whenever he had done this in other similar circumstances, he would continue a rocket-like trajectory until he "willed" himself to stop, at which point he would float straight back to earth, as if with a parachute. For some reason, on this occasion Lyle realized that such a "flight plan" would bring him right back into the ogre's clutches. Suddenly, he thought, however, that if he did not will himself to stop he could just keep sailing into space until the rotation of the earth beneath him took the witch away. Then he could return safely to earth since his adversary would be thousands of miles off to the west. While dreaming these thoughts had occurred to Lyle almost instantaneously and he immediately tried his idea. He was delighted—and not a little surprised—that it worked perfectly. Even more memorable than his escape, however, was his dream flight into space. Once he had left the earth's atmosphere, he was completely entranced as he silently glided farther into space surrounded by what he described as "beacons of pure, warm light" emanating to him from planets and stars. Although in the years following this dream Lyle became acquainted with all kinds of dreamt aerobatics, he still felt that none of these later flights held quite the wonder and fascination of this, his first adventure in space. Nietzche (1966), who described the "conscious power and art of flight" in dreams as an "enviable happiness" which brings the "feeling of a certain divine frivolity," articulated Lyle's sentiments precisely when he wrote, "How could a human being who had had such experiences and dream habits fail to find that the word 'happiness' had a different color and definition in his waking life, too? How could he fail to—desire happiness differently?"

Another "impossibility" which the dreaming mode of existence makes possible is an encounter with loved-ones who have passed away. Such dreams of the "living dead" may inspire an appreciation of one's dreaming in and for itself. My dream of my friend Paul is one example. Here is another.

Karl, a thirty-four year old minister, dreamt one night that *he was in a workshed which his grandfather had built before his death twenty years previously. In the dream Karl was removing a hammer from the wall, when he realized how often he had been in similar worksheds and had a strong sense of his grandfather's presence. It did not even occur to Karl, while dreaming, that his grandfather was no longer available, so he called out to him. When his grandfather walked into the room, Karl slowly rehung the hammer and said, "Look Grandpa, everytime I do this, no matter where I am, I think of you." His grandfather smiled and looked on silently. Karl removed the hammer and repeated his gesture. "And," he said, with tears in his eyes,*

"every time I do this for the rest of my life, I will always think of you." Smiling, he added, "So, I guess that's eternal life!" His grandfather replied warmly, "Yes, I guess so." Karl woke up weeping and appreciative of this dreamt opportunity to meet with his grandfather in such a tangible way.

Such dreams of important persons who have passed away are fairly common. What is also common, unfortunately, is that dreamers either dismiss these dreams as unnatural and unreal or they worry that the dreams or the dead persons themselves are actually trying to tell them something. But, again, why not let such dreams stand on their own? In Karl's dream, nothing had struck him as weird or unordinary. Indeed, his experience had been just the opposite: the entire experience seemed utterly natural and real. Likewise, there was no evidence that the dream or anyone in it had been trying to tell him anything. In fact, it was Karl himself who had elected to tell his grandfather about the indelibility of his presence in his life. Fortunately Karl's response on awakening was not to dismiss his dream as an absurd impossibility; neither was it to worry about some unconscious or paranormal possibility. Rather, he felt directly the richness and realness of this gentle meeting with his grandfather whom he loved and had lost so long ago. And why not?

Had not this dreamt experience embodied the fullness and reality of his relationship with his grandfather in a way that waking experience, now, never could? Was not his grandfather's lived presence in his life as real and in some ways more real than the finality of his physical death some twenty years earlier? Is it any wonder, then, that Karl was so grateful for this encounter, for only in dreaming could he now palpably realize the fullness, depth and durability of that which still existed between himself and his grandfather.

Dreaming as Acceptance

In addition to simply enjoying and appreciating the rich reality of dreaming, we may also learn from our exceptional capacity to accept, while dreaming, existential realities and predicaments which we find ourselves somehow unable to tolerate while fully awake. For example, a competent and successful professional woman, whom I shall call Shawna, recently told her therapist that she had dreamt that *a child, whom a friend had been watching, had wandered too far out into the lake next to which they had been having a picnic. In the dream, Shawna raced out into the water, dove under and found the small boy floating down over the edge of an underwater cliff. Time after time Shawna tried to bring the boy to the surface, but she simply did not have the strength to bring both*

the child and herself all the way to safety. Finally, after exerting every ounce of remaining strength, Shawna let the child go and returned to shore, alone and despairing. As Shawna opened her eyes in the privacy of her bed a sense of helplessness and loss followed her into waking.

When Shawna mentioned this dream to her therapist she had already begun to feel a gnawing sense of guilt, believing that her dream portrayed a basic sense of selfishness in her character. Exploring her dream exactly as it was given, however, Shawna soon recognized that in the straightforward reality of her dreaming she had done everything possible, including risking her very own existence, to preserve the life of this innocent child. Shawna saw, furthermore, that, while dreaming, she had finally accepted the fact that she was not omnipotent and she had been courageous enough to acknowledge that she was on the very brink of extermination, that she herself would not survive if she continued to try to save this little boy. Only having accepted these "givens" of her existence while dreaming did she then choose to let go of the child and authentically mourn this loss of innocent and youthful being. There was simply no basis, in her dream as such, for feeling guilt on top of her already pronounced sense of grief and sorrow.

Another example of our unusual "forgivingness" while dreaming was offered by an eight year old girl, whom I shall call Annie, who had entered play therapy in the wake of her father's sudden, tragic death in an automobile accident. In Annie's first session she mentioned that she had had a dream about her father. This is how she described it:

"*My father and I were walking in town. We went to an old part of town with strange buildings and met my grandparents. Then, after we left there, I was at my home and it was just like it was after my father's funeral: you know, when everybody comes back to the house. But my father wasn't there anymore. And then one of the funniest things happened*" (Annie's face lit up here and she became quite animated as she continued): "*My friend was there and she started singing a song to me. She was singing real loud so everyone could hear—you know that song, 'Girls just want to have fun.' And then everyone else started singing, too! It was so funny!*" (Now, Annie was smiling and laughing but she went on with barely a pause.) "*Then everyone was gone and I saw my father again. We were standing in the yard talking. My father told me he loved me and that he had to go away and could never come back. I told him I loved him and asked him not to go. He said he couldn't stay but that he loved me very much. I kept asking him not to leave but he started going away anyway and then I started crying.* When I woke up I got really scared."

Annie went on to say that, since she slept in the room her father

once used as an office, she was afraid he would come back to frighten her like a ghost. One of the therapist's immediate concerns was with protecting Annie's sleep so he responded promptly, "Yes, I understand how you might feel afraid. It's unfortunate, don't you think, that stories and movies make ghosts so scary and mean. I imagine if *your* father were a ghost he'd probably be a lot more like Casper. After all, wasn't your father a good person and didn't he love you when he was alive? And didn't he tell you in your dream that he still loved you very much?"

When Annie responded with surprised affirmation to these questions, the therapist added "You don't think he'd change his mind about you only because he died do you? Wasn't that quite a dream that even *after* your father died, you could still see him and hear him tell you that he loved you? And wasn't it something that you could tell him you loved him too?"

"Yes," Annie responded, then added, "but I just wish he could come back. I wish it so much."

"Yes, I understand that," the therapist replied.

While dreaming this dream, Annie was open to a range of emotional possibilities in connection with this terrible loss. In relating to her father directly, she accepted not only the reality of their love for one another, even as he was leaving, but also the reality of her pain and her basic unwillingness to let him go without protesting. In addition, while dreaming, Annie accepted the possibility that little girls like her still need to have fun, even in the midst of such a tragic event. One therapeutic task, then, was to offer the child a strong adult ally who could permit her to express her feelings of loneliness and loss while not endangering her equally real desires for joy and pleasure. It was Annie's revealing her acceptance of these realities of her existence while dreaming that helped the therapist to see what he needed to do to embolden her to accept these same realities while fully awake.

While each one of the dreams mentioned thus far proved to be significantly related to specific aspects of the dreamer's existence, you will notice that detailed waking connections were not necessary in order for the dreamers to grasp the richness of these dreamt events in and of themselves. Here we are not concerned with the dream's relation to waking but rather with our openness in waking to the already rich and meaningful reality of our dreaming. Indeed, it is a primary contention of this paper that leaping too quickly to the dream's specific relations to waking often leads us away from the intrinsic beauty and wisdom of the dream itself. Also, in keeping with this radical commitment to the reality of the dream itself, it is worth noting that we have not once

mentioned a single symbolic reference, hidden purpose or unconscious motivation. Throughout our inquiry we have let each of these dreams speak entirely for itself.

Dreaming as Anticipation

I would like now to consider ways in which the reality of dreaming per se may play an important role in human development. Recalling the dreams of Shawna and Annie we notice that both dreamers were open to accepting, while dreaming, certain aspects of their lives which they still had not completely accepted while fully awake. We notice also, however, that in respectfully reconsidering their dreams, they were able to accept, in waking, what they previously tolerated only in dreaming. One might say that, as dreamers, Shawna and Annie were "ahead of themselves" as awakened individuals. While dreaming they anticipated as yet unrealized possibilities of waking. To illustrate this idea more concretely, let us first briefly reconsider Shawna's and Annie's dreams and then explore an entirely different dream which illustrates this same characteristic.

Shawna's experience reveals one of the particular borderlines of possibility where dreaming frequently anticipates waking. While dreaming, Shawna extended herself to the very limits of her endurance in trying to rescue the drowning child and, only at the edge of debility, did she finally act on her acceptance of the real but unpleasant contingency that either she could continue to try to save the child, in which case they would both drown, or that she could let go of the child and return alone to the surface. In this dreamt situation her mood went from fear and determination to helplessness and despair. While dreaming, Shawna was finally unable to do more than she had and her dreamt grief and helplessness was a natural and spontaneous response to what she could not do, to what she could not be. On the other hand, upon waking, Shawna almost immediately thought that, though she could not save the child, she *should* have been able to. This judgmental attitude, which never appeared in her dreaming, emerged only upon waking and it wasn't long before the irascible demands of this "waking conscience" left her feeling flawed and guilty as a person. Recognizing the anticipatory quality of Shawna's dreaming, her therapist was able to invite her to accept, consciously and openly, those existential realities which she had already tacitly accepted while dreaming and to embolden her to outgrow her self-degrading, overly-punitive waking attitudes and expectations. Thus through a recognition of her dreaming reality per se Shawna was able to transcend the demeaning, "neurotic guilt" which came with her intolerance of human frailty and limitation in herself;

and to move toward a more "existential guilt," that is, a natural sense of indebtedness and remorse which comes with the recognition of one's fundamentally brittle and imperfect nature as a human being.

Annie's dream of her father who died also anticipates her waking for, in it, she was open to the possibility of her father's enduring love as well as to the possibility of "having fun" even in the midst of her loss. These dreamt realities contrasted with Annie's waking where she imagined her father's appearance as threatening and ominous and where she tended to be especially serious and adult-like even to the point of taking an overtly maternal role with her own mother. Again acknowledging the anticipatory quality of dreaming, Annie's therapist invited her to reconsider the reality of her manifest dream as a trustworthy and straightforward disclosure of her own possibilities for living. He did this tacitly and non-verbally by permitting Annie to *be* a child, to play freely with various games and creative activities and by deliberately not expecting her to talk about her father unless she either initiated the topic or hinted in that direction herself. He also made use of the anticipatory quality of Annie's dreaming by consistently expressing his appreciation for her openness to such a loving exchange between her father and herself and for her honesty and courage in telling her father that she didn't want him to go even when he said he must. Annie was an exceptionally resourceful young lady and she quickly responded to her therapist's underscoring of these dreamt anticipations. Nevertheless, her therapist was also pleased to hear from Annie's mother that one evening, a few weeks later, Annie had pointed to a brilliant evening star and said that she had decided that that was her father. When her mother asked why that particular star, Annie responded because it was "closer than any of the others" and her "Daddy would always want to be nearby." Happily, Annie had begun to find her own ways, in waking, to acknowledge her father's continuing positive presence in her life.

Here is a final example of the anticipatory quality of human dreaming. Sophie, as I shall call her, a woman in her mid-forties who was beginning a completely new career as a portfolio manager in a large financial corporation, had entered therapy two years previously suffering with mixed insomnia, anxiety and depression. One concern she frequently raised was her uncertainty about the significance of her professional ventures particularly with respect to confidently realizing a corporate demeanor of rationality, strength and assertiveness. Though, externally seen, she was an obviously intelligent, attractive, and successful individual, privately she believed this corporate demeanor exemplified "male characteristics" (her term) which she saw as relatively foreign to her way of being in the world. In her first two years in therapy, Sophie

made steady progress in her personal and professional life and even began to sleep soundly for the first time in years. Nevertheless, she was still concerned about realizing these so-called "masculine" possibilities when she reported a "bizarre" dream of *being a young male executive.*

When Sophie mentioned the dream to her therapist, he invited her to describe this executive as whom she appeared. She said that he had been "sharp," "successful," "launching a career," "confident" and "at ease"; "a promising young man" who was "looking ahead to his future" and who had clearly "earned the respect of others." Although there had been other people circulating in the dream-world, none of them appeared to her distinctly and, as this man, she was herself the vital center, the single clear presence in her dream.

Reflecting on Sophie's existence while dreaming, one is struck by the fact that Sophie did not dream about a male executive, either as a stranger or as a manager in her own corporation. She did not even dream of being in the same world with this executive, observing him in this promising moment of his career. No, she dreamt *she was this male executive.* She actually experienced in her own being the confidence, the rationality, the assertiveness, the promise, vigor and respect from others she had, until then, perceived as only available to male colleagues.

Notice that there is no evidence here, in Sophie's dream itself, of any secret purpose or symbolic content. Why not let her experience while dreaming speak for itself? Why not let it be the living reality it was? For it was while dreaming, on that particular night, that Sophie opened herself to the possibility of her own appearance in the world as an individual who had realized those specific human qualities which had always seemed somehow foreign and out of reach. It was Sophie's actual existence while dreaming which made these previously alien possibilities for being in the world so immediately real, lifting them out of the realm of anxious, intellectual abstraction and embodying them in concrete, lived experience. In tangibly realizing her own professional significance while dreaming, Sophie had anticipated her *real*ization of these very possibilities in waking for, throughout the following year, she described numerous experiences at corporate headquarters with almost precisely the same language she had described this dreamt experience of being a male executive.

Dreaming as Actualization

In these last three dreams, those of Shawna, Annie and Sophie, we have seen how our dreaming may anticipate our waking, how our way of being-in-the-world-while-dreaming is, in some ways, "ahead" of our way of being-in-the-world-while-awake. Sophie's experience, in

particular, shows how important gains in one's own development as a person are often made for the first time while dreaming. This leads us to consider a fourth quality of our manifest worlds of dreaming: dreaming as actualization.

Masud Khan (1974), a British psychoanalyst, has described the therapeutic function of dreaming as an actualizing space, a private realm of being where individuals may safely experience possibilities of their own which their waking existence may not as yet securely contain. The individual's awareness of such dreamt achievements may therefore be of invaluable assistance in the therapeutic situation, the preeminent task of which is the self-*real*ization of the patient. I will report only one somewhat extended clinical vignette here to illustrate this actualizing characteristic of dreaming.

Bob, as I shall call him, was a thirtyish business school graduate student whose initial phase of therapy had focused primarily on his sense of powerlessness, entrapment and shame in his emotionally enmeshed Italian family of origin. For as long as he could remember he had been ambivalently scorned as both the "golden boy" and "the black sheep" of the family and he felt hopelessly entwined in this double bind, always in danger of falling from grace to ignominy. One day, in his sixth month of therapy, Bob recalled that the previous night he had dreamt of *being at a family gathering where he was being alternately ignored and harassed by siblings and relatives. Throughout his dream, he felt diminished, hurt, helpless, and ashamed.* As he finished telling this dream, which was the first one he had disclosed in therapy, he was reminded of another dream, a recurring nightmare which he had had for many years. His entire recall of this recurrent nightmare consisted of the memory of *falling out of a castle tower.* As soon as Bob mentioned this second dream, his therapist invited him to describe a typical instance of the nightmare.

As this anxiety-provoking dream unfolded anew, Bob realized that it typically opened with his observing a castle from some nearby woods. He usually saw a figure, whom he knew to be himself, standing in the window of a turret. Typically, he then found himself tumbling out of the window and plunging toward a moat below. At this point, however, Bob was never a distant observer, but suddenly "in" his own body as he plummeted, terrified, toward the water's surface. He always woke up before landing in the moat, feeling anxious and then relieved.

When Bob's therapist asked him to describe the castle, Bob said it was a great stone structure with high, thick walls around it. Bob was puzzled, however, that, as he described this particular dreamt wall and tower, he kept "wanting to say it [was] like a prison or a dungeon." He said he was sure it was a castle, and found it odd that he seemed

bent on comparing it to a prison. Regardless, he imagined it to be a "self-sufficient world" with "lots of feasts and celebrations" and that the family that lived there must have been "powerful," aristocratic, and "aloof," "isolated from the people who lived around them." Bob added that he had no idea how he had ended up in the tower since he was "just there" from the very beginning of his dream. He imagined that he might have been "trying to get away" from the others or that he had been "sent there as a punishment" for something. Bob assumed that, prior to his fall, he had been leaning out the window, perhaps "to see the countryside or the moat down below," when he had "leaned too far" and "lost his balance." As Bob continued to describe the life-world of his dream he became increasingly animated and articulate. Aspects of his dreaming which had lain unacknowledged in the horizons of this recurrent experience became increasingly visible.

At the end of the session, Bob's therapist expressed his appreciation for the richness of this dream and Bob's reliving of it. The therapist offered no symbolic interpretations but simply underscored a few of the details of Bob's recall of his dream as such. He noted with interest, for example, that in reliving his dream Bob had been surprised that his castle was so much like a prison and that, while dreaming, he had always taken this ambiguity for granted. His therapist then added that he thought it especially interesting that Bob had consistently experienced himself *as himself* only after he had left the confines of this situation, that is, fallen out of his tower. Finally he said he was impressed by Bob's courage, over the years, in being repeatedly open to getting out of these castle-prison walls in spite of the fact that this could only appear as a frightening, catastrophic event. He then paused and inquired, incidentally, if it had ever occurred to Bob that he might actually enjoy his splash in the moat and that he might go for a swim or for a walk in the nearby fields and woods? Although Bob was initially astonished with this last question, as he left the session he was sporting a subtle, slightly mischieveous grin.

It is important to notice that neither Bob nor his therapist discussed any of the details of his original "shameful dream" about being alternately ignored and harassed by his family of origin. However, in his next session the following week, Bob reported another dream, this one involving one of his sisters who had been prominent in that previous undiscussed dream. In this new dream, which he had recalled on the morning following the above session, *his sister was crudely speaking about his wife. When his sister continued, Bob suddenly (and uncharacteristically) interrupted her and told her that if that was the way she was going to talk about his wife, she would have to leave his home. He then showed her out*

immediately! Bob said he was surprised, when he woke up and remembered his dream, that he had had such a distinct sense of pleasure and relief. He was amazed that he hadn't felt the "least regret!" Bob then added that he believed that the process of reliving his recurrent nightmare the previous day had somehow enabled this new dream. His words were almost exactly as follows; "Somehow just looking at that dream, looking all around at the moat and the fields and the castle, just really looking at all this opened something up in me. It's strange, I felt something actually loosening up right here inside me." Throughout these comments Bob kept tapping his chest as if to say that this freedom appeared concretely in that specific bodily domain of heart and lungs.

In reflecting on this modest vignette, we see that Bob had come to therapy with one of his central concerns being his lack of confidence, freedom and autonomy in his relations with his family of origin. Having discussed these difficulties in detail throughout the early months of his therapy, he went to sleep one night and, while dreaming, took up his concern with these very difficulties, reliving his familiar, familial conundrum of shame, powerlessness and dependency. Recalling this dream in therapy reminded him of a recurrent nightmare of falling out of a castle tower. This castle, it turned out, was more like a prison than Bob had ever realized and it was only upon leaving its confines that he actually experienced himself as himself. Thus, repeatedly, over the years, Bob had found the courage, while dreaming, to leave his ambiguous sequestered heights in that family domain. But the possibility of this event seemed so catastrophic that he could entertain the happening only as unintended and as something he must arrest by waking up before its final, fateful conclusion. So over and over, while dreaming throughout the years he had boldly relived the reality of his terror at becoming himself.

By reconsidering this recurrent nightmare, acknowledging the reality of the dream as such, Bob actually began to feel immediately, in his own viscera, a concrete sense of liberation. This was then followed by the imminent actualization of new possibilities for being-in-the-world. Specifically, in dreaming that very night, Bob achieved what he had never achieved, asleep or awake; for in telling his sister to leave his home, he initiated his own possibilities for autonomous, adult intention, thought and action in relation to his family. He not only told his sister to leave but he actually showed her out of the house and then dared to wake up feeling pleasure and relief! In that moment of dreaming Bob actualized specific aspects of his own identity without feeling afraid or guilty. The significance of these gains for Bob was corroborated by the fact that in the next four months of therapy he scarcely men-

tioned a single member of his family; in other words, he had shown them out of this private waking domain of therapy as well and concentrated instead on matters critical to his own immediate development as a person. Though the months ahead held recurrences of Bob's difficulties in relation to his family, the palpable reality of this latest dream offered him, at last, *a concrete experience of autonomy* with which to compare his all too familiar experiences of flustered confusion. It is important to remember that Bob's experience was no mere symbolic achievement, but rather a tangible actualization while dreaming of hitherto disenfranchised human possibilities.

Here we see how in dreaming we may be open to possibilities which we still dare not acknowledge while fully awake. In other words, while dreaming, we may confidently carry out perceptions, attitudes and behaviors which in waking leave us still anxious, awkward or uncertain. We might say that dreaming provides us with a sanctuary in which we may take up our own future, entertaining as real and immediate that which is imminent in our development as individuals. This view of dreaming as actualization suggests that, in certain respects, our dreams may be our own future development made real and present.

Dreaming as Aspiration

This view of the palpable realness of dreaming experience and its potential to reveal and liberate new possibilities for waking existence is lyrically expressed in Dostoevsky's short story, "The Dream of a Queer Fellow." In this little gem of a tale, a typically quirky and querulous Dostoevskian man had come to the intellectual conviction that life was meaningless, that "nothing mattered, it was all the same." One night, after being ridiculed by acquaintances in a bar, he went out into the damp, cold streets resolved to return to his room and commit suicide. On the way home, however, a terrified little girl, shivering with panic and cold, ran up to him and, tugging at his arm, cried out for his assistance. Her mother was near death and she begged for the man's help but he continued resolutely toward his home. Though she pursued him and desperately pleaded for his assistance, he finally cruelly rebuked her and went to his room determined to take his life. However, as he sat at his table with a candle and a pistol before him, he began to think about the meaning of his response to the little girl and then fell asleep before he was able to pull the trigger.

While asleep, this disconsolate man dreamt that *he actually picked up his pistol and pointed it "straight at [his] heart" not, as he had planned in waking, "at his head."* Already here we see that, while dreaming, Dostoevsky's queer fellow was open to the possibility that it was his

heart that needed to be addressed and not his head. The fact that nothing mattered to him was not, as he thought, fundamentally a concern of the intellect but rather a matter of blood and passion.

In the dream, *Dostoevsky's odd fellow then actually pulled the trigger and "everything suddenly extinguished." In the terrible blackness which followed he overheard his entire funeral and burial but expected nothing and remained silent. After having been buried for some time a "deep indignation kindled in [his] heart" and soon after, his grave was miraculously opened and he was taken to another Earth, "beautiful as Paradise" and shining forth in its entirety with "manifest, visible, almost conscious love." The people of that "happy planet" were "radiant," joyous and loving and "their faces gleamed with wisdom and with a certain consciousness, consummated in tranquility." At one point he exclaimed of them, "Children of the sun, children of the sun—oh, how beautiful they were! Never on earth have I seen such beauty in man."*

Dostoevsky describes in great detail his hero's experience in this dreamt cosmos of love *where there was no quarrelling, no jealousy; where there were no temples, but where there was "a real, living and continual communion with the universe." Nevertheless, though at first he relished and revered this world of perfect love and understanding, eventually he himself introduced the possibility of abstraction and duplicity which was followed by the first acts of selfishness and cruelty. The strange fellow then became a shocked witness, in his dream, to the gradual deterioration of this utopia into a world of suffering and sorrow much like the Earth he had left behind.*

At the peak of his disenchantment, just as "[his] heart shrank and [he] felt [he] would die," he awoke again in his easy-chair, his loaded revolver before him, his candle burned out. It was morning and then, fully awake, he felt his dream to be so tangibly real, he put his pistol away and vowed to seek out the little girl whom he had so cruelly rebuked the night before. The palpable reality of the dream itself convinced him that he had been wrong: that things did matter after all; that there was meaning and value in his life and in the lives of his fellow human beings. Inspired by the memory of this tangible actualization of a different existence which *was* his dream, Dostoevsky's queer fellow dedicated himself to a life of preaching on behalf of love as a supreme human good and against abstraction as the supreme evil.

He said of his dream, "Now they tease me because it was only a dream. But is it not the same whether it was a dream or not, if that dream revealed the Truth to me? Surely if you once knew the Truth and saw her then you would know that she is the Truth . . . whether in sleep or wakefulness." "The sensation of the love of those beautiful and innocent people has remained with me forever, and even now I

feel that their love breathes upon me from yonder. I saw them with my own eyes." "I was overcome by the sensation of that dream alone, and that alone remained whole in my bleeding heart . . . the real images and forms of my dream which I indeed saw at the very moment of my dream were perfected to such a harmony, were so enchanting and beautiful, and so true . . . how could I not believe that all these things had really been?" "I saw the truth, I did not invent it with my mind. I saw, saw and her living image filled my soul for ever." "But the mockers do not understand: 'He saw a dream, a delirious vision, a hallucination.' Ah, but is this really wise? A dream? What is a dream? Is not our life a dream?" Clearly Dostoevsky's unlikely hero did not fall into the trap of dismissing his dream as unreal, as "*only* a dream." To the contrary, he saw that this instance of dreaming was in many ways more real, more truthful, than what he had been living in waking and he chose to honor its principle and possibility as his new motive for living.

That dreams may, in and of themselves, inspire profound transformations in individuals is well documented in historical and religious literatures. Although such radical renewals may be rare and perhaps, at the most, once-in-a-lifetime experiences, still as this dream changed the life of Dostoevsky's "ridiculous man," dreams may regularly enable us to see the truth and possibility of our existence with "undreamt of" clarity. Having been "awakened" to this wider reality of dreaming, we may then be inspired and emboldened to assume responsibility for a fuller human existence while awake, to embrace possibilities which we have ignored or denied or failed to see at all. Therefore, it is through the realness of dreaming per se that we may aspire to a life which lies beyond our present imagination. As Dostoevsky's transformed eccentric put it, "Well let it be a dream; nevertheless, my dream, my dream—it announced to me a new life, great, renewed and strong!"

The Significance of the Realness of Dreams

Our lives as dreamers do not deserve the all too common fate of being dismissed as "unreal," as "*only* dreams." In the above examples we have consistently observed that our manifest experience while dreaming is not only real and full of meaning in itself, but also a potentially important aspect of our existence as a whole. Simply honoring the appearance of our dreams as the precise realities which they are may play an important part in our development as persons.

The realness of dreaming is worthy of our appreciation simply as the vital human experience it is, opening our lives, as it does, to an extraordinary range of human possibilities, many of which would be

impossible to realize palpably outside of this unique manner of existing. Dreaming infuses our lives with a plentitude we could not otherwise experience: our existence is more bountiful for having lived our dreams. Nietzsche (1966) wrote that "what we experience in dreams—assuming that we experience it often—belongs in the end as much to the overall economy of our soul as anything experienced 'actually': we are richer or poorer on account of it, have one need more or less." Grounded in an appreciation for this cornucopia of dreaming we saw that the tangible reality of dreams may play an important role in human development.

First of all, our tolerance and forgivingness while dreaming may enable us to recognize and accept realities in our lives which in waking we are still too anxious or unkind, too insecure or demanding, to acknowledge and admit graciously. Dreaming is an exceptionally permissive mode of being and, as a result, while dreaming we offer a margin of clemency to possibilities in our lives which, at other times, we consider reprehensible and horrifying. Therefore, recognizing our own mercy and grace while dreaming, we may soften the unforgiving boundaries which we wakefully erect between ourselves and our frail and frightening possibilities as human beings.

Next, the anticipatory quality of dreaming itself may enable us to recognize, for the first time, possibilities which we are not yet ready to acknowledge while fully awake. Thus, the immediate reality of dreaming is the future possibility of waking. As Nietzsche (1966) put it we "finally are led a little by the habits of our dreams even in broad daylight." Carl Jung (1960) referred to this aspect of dreaming as its "prospective function" which he likened to "a preliminary exercise or sketch," "a medical diagnosis or weather forecast" which anticipates future prospects and possibilities. Our capacity, while dreaming, to precede ourselves as awakened individuals may give us our first fresh and immediate glimpse of our own future and our awakened awareness of this precurrent reality, this "preexistence," may serve as an invitation to us to be more conscious and courageous about these as yet unclaimed possibilities in our waking lives.

Dreaming itself, as an actualizing mode of human existence, may offer *an opportunity to live out as real* certain possibilities which we still dare not attempt in waking. In this sense, dreaming provides *a time and a space for personally carrying out our own future development as awakened individuals.* Many dreamers like Sophie and Bob have their first significant, concrete experience with actualizing an important new attitude or behavior while dreaming. This is not only an encouraging occasion for those who wake up to remember such dreams but also it provides a crucial *foundation in experience* for possibilities which have previously

existed only in the abstract modes of reasoning or imagination.

Finally, dreaming itself may be an unparalleled domain of human aspiration, transforming the very parameters and definitions according to which we have become accustomed to living our lives. While dreaming, we may rise above even our wildest imaginings and not merely witness but actually live out moments of utter perfectibility. *While such dreams may not be "realistic" they are nevertheless still real* and therefore enable us to see and feel the promise of human existence immediately and for ourselves. Such palpable dreamt testimony is not only beautiful and wondrous to behold while dreaming, but the remembrance of such dreams may inspire us, while awake, to transcend the ordinary in everyday life, to reach beyond what is to what might still be. What we realize while dreaming we may certainly aspire to while fully awake. Regardless of whether what we achieve while dreaming is ever achieved in waking, it is aspiring itself which lifts us above ourselves with a vision of possible worlds breathing new meaning and hope into our lives.

Shepherding the Dream

It is very tempting in the study of human dreaming to be guided by the question, "What is in it for me?" This fundamentally utilitarian attitude, as tantalizing, worthy and helpful as it may be, ultimately diminishes the significance of dreaming itself and makes the dreaming mode of human existence subservient to waking. The perspective on dreaming presented here suggests that, in addition to discovering what we might "take from" our dreams, we also explore what we might "give to" them. Therefore, along with the question, "what's in it for me?" we might also ask, "What's *in me* for it?" In other words, how would it be if we asked "What is it in me, as an awakened individual, that needs to be brought out, to be courageously declared, to be tangibly realized so that the possibilities which lie alone and isolated in dreaming may be carried out into the light of day?" In this way, not only might our dreaming serve to shepherd our own possibilities for a fuller, more authentically human existence; but also, in waking, we might shepherd those particular human possibilities which lie still "tethered" to dreaming, unable to find their way into the course of human history simply because of our own fear, our own blurred and blinded vision of Truth, of what it means to be ourselves, to be human.

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Dreams Are Wiser Than Men

EDITED BY

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1987

NORTH ATLANTIC BOOKS
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA