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A COGNITIVE THEORY OF DREAM SYMBOLS*

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It is not my intention in this article to discuss theories of symbolism in general, nor even to review the history of thought regarding symbols in dreams. Rather I have set for myself the more modest task of proposing an alternative theory for one which now occupies the center of the stage whenever dreams are mentioned. I refer, of course, to Freud's theory of dream symbolism.

In order to gain some perspective on the psychoanalytic theory of dream symbols, let us consider briefly the origin and history of dream books, a task that H. B. Weiss has made lighter by his interesting and informative article on them (12). We learn from this article that the first dream book was written by an Italian physician, Artemidorus, who lived in the second century A.D. Artemidorus collected reports of dreams in his travels, through correspondence, and by the purchase of manuscripts. From these sources, he compiled a work of five volumes under the title *Oneirocritics*, a word which means the art of interpreting dreams. Following the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, Artemidorus's work was widely published, going through numerous editions in various languages. *Oneirocritics* is the Adam of all dream books, past and present. The first American dream book, *The Book of Knowledge*, was published in Boston in 1767. It was followed by a spate of others so that today there is a wide selection available to those who seek help in interpreting their dreams.

A dream book is actually a special type of dictionary, in which the entries are words or phrases descriptive of dream items followed by their meanings; that is, symbols and referents. In a typical dream book, the referent is usually either "good fortune" or "bad fortune," since the dream book exploits the notion that dreams are prophetic and that what most people want to know is what the future holds for them. Dream books also rest on the assumptions that dreams are symbolic and that the symbols of dreams have universal significance. For example, we read in Artemidorus that to dream of *eating cheese* signifies profit and gain to the dreamer. It is not

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stated that sometimes this is its meaning, or that it depends upon the state of the dreamer, or upon the context in which this activity appears. The meaning of eating cheese in dreams is *univocal*, *universal*, and *timeless*. It is this feature of universal symbol-referent connections that accounts for the popularity of dream books. Since they do not make qualifications and exceptions which would require the use of judgment and discrimination, anyone can decode dreams and foretell the future if he has a dream book handy.

Freud borrowed two of the dream books assumptions, dream symbols and the universality of *some* dream symbols, and rejected the third, the prophetic character of dreams. Why are there symbols in dreams? Freud answered that symbols appear in dreams because the referents for which the symbols are surrogates are distasteful to the censor. The dream-work can smuggle reprehensible things into a dream by transforming them into innocuous symbols. One dreams of climbing a tree instead of masturbating because climbing trees (the symbol) is condoned and masturbating (the referent) is condemned. In short, symbols are disguises for referents.¹

In order to determine what referents are commonly symbolized, a search of the psychoanalytic literature was made by the writer and his students. Although not exhaustive, our search turned up 709 symbols. The two most popular referents are *penis* for which there are 102 symbols, and *vagina* for which there are 95 symbols. Other referents that have a large number of symbols are *death* (62 symbols), *coitus* (55 symbols), *masturbation* (25 symbols), *mother* (15 symbols), *father* (14 symbols), *breasts* (13 symbols), and *castration* (12 symbols). Be it noted, with the possible exception of

¹This, of course, is not all that Freud had to say about symbolism. He felt that the subject went beyond dreams. Symbolism is an archaic form of expression, a primordial language which is found in myths and fairy tales, in popular sayings and songs, in colloquialisms and in poetry. Even if there were no censorship in dreams, dreams would be rendered incomprehensible by the use of symbols. The fact remains, however, that Freud believed that symbolism served the purpose of disguise. He writes: "Symbolism, then, is a second and independent factor in dream distortion existing side by side with the censorship. But the conclusion is obvious that it suits the censorship to make use of symbolism, in that both serve the same purpose: that of making the dream strange and incomprehensible" (2, p. 150). "Everything points to the same conclusion, namely, that we need not assume that any special symbolizing activity of the psyche is operative in dream-formation; that on the contrary, the dream makes use of such symbolizations as are to be found ready-made in unconscious thinking, since these, by reason of their ease of representation, and for the most part by reason of their being exempt from the censorship, satisfy more effectively the requirements of dream-formation" (1, p. 368). "Dreams employ this symbolism to give a disguised representation to their latent thoughts" (1, p. 370). Quotations from Freud could be multiplied to show that for him the most important function of symbols in dreams is that of disguise.

death, all of the referents are concrete things, people, or activities, and similarly all of the symbols, as *gun* for *penis*, *bag* for *vagina*, *ploughing* for *coitus*, *playing the piano* for *masturbating*, *queen* for *mother*, *king* for *father*, *apple* for *breast*, etc., are concrete things, people, or activities. In short, something concrete, the symbol, is substituted for something else concrete, the referent.

If one adopts Freud's theory of symbolism, an essential feature of dream interpretation consists of finding a referent for each symbol. Since the meaning of numerous symbols has been set forth by psychoanalysts it is fairly simple for anyone to decode his dreams by using a modern psychoanalytic dream book, for instance, Gutheil's *Language of the Dream* (3). The following dream reported by a young woman can be readily deciphered.

I was in a big room talking to one of my friends. She said she was going riding and I decided to join her. I waited for her to come back for me; when she did return, she said she had already ploughed the field and that the horse was upstairs. I said that I'd probably have trouble getting it down the stairs, and she told me one of the men had helped her down. However, I decided against riding.

Later we were all sitting around in the room and I looked up and saw a friend of mine who was in New Orleans. He came over and we were talking until everyone was handed an enormous gun and we all started shooting out of the windows. I recall loading and re-loading the gun.

In psychoanalytic dream language this dream is a versatile portrayal of sexuality. *Riding*, *ploughing a field*, *climbing stairs*, and *shooting* symbolize masturbation or coitus. *Gun*, *horse*, and *plough* are phallic symbols, room and windows are vaginal symbols. *Being handed an enormous gun* = being given a penis. Apparently the dreamer's wish is to be a man.

According to Freud, how does a symbol become a symbol? How does it happen that one object or activity becomes a stand-in for another object or activity. Freud draws upon the laws of association, particularly the law of resemblance, to explain the formation of symbol-referent connections. Some of the ways in which association by resemblance operates are as follows:

(1). Association by resemblance in ~~shape~~ *shape*. All circular objects and containers = vagina, and all oblong objects = penis.

(2). Association by resemblance in function. All objects that are capable of extruding something, e.g., gun, fountain pen, bottle = penis.

(3). Association by resemblance in action. Any act that separates a part from a whole, e.g., beheading, loosing a tooth, an arm or a leg, having a wheel come off an automobile = castration. By the same token,

dancing, climbing stairs, riding horseback, going up and down in an elevator = coitus.

(4). Association by resemblance in color. Chocolate = feces, yellow = urine, milky substance = semen.

(5). Association by resemblance in value. Gold = feces, jewelry = female genitals.

(6). Association by resemblance in number. Three = penis and testicles.

(7). Association by resemblance in sound. The blaring of a trumpet or bugle or the sound of a wind instrument = flatulence.

(8). Association by resemblance in quality. Wild animal = sexual passion, horse = virility.

(9). Association by resemblance in personal quality. Policeman, army officer, teacher = father, nurse = mother.

(10). Association by resemblance in physical position. Basement = the unconscious mind.

(11). Association by resemblance in status. King = father, queen = mother.

In addition to association by resemblance, there are several other ways in which two items may become paired as symbol and referent.

(12). Association by contiguity. Church = virtue, night club = sensuality, bathtub = cleanliness.

(13). Association of part with whole. A specific accident = difficulties of life, a school test = a test of fitness for life.

(14). Association by contrast. Crowd = being alone, clothed = naked, to die = to live. Freud wrote that "inversion or transformation into the opposite is one of the most favored and most versatile methods of representation which the dream-work has at its disposal" (1, p. 352), thereby acknowledging one of the oldest maxims of dream lore "that dreams go by contraries."

My skepticism regarding Freud's theory of symbols-as-disguises began with a simple question for which I could find no satisfactory answer within the framework of Freud's theory. Having read hundreds of dream series in the past few years, I noticed that within the same series outspoken dreams occurred along with "symbolized" dreams. It is fairly common for one to dream of sexual activities in the frankest terms one night and in disguised terms the next night. Open incest dreams alternate with camouflaged incest dreams. Parricide and fratricide are sometimes overt, sometimes concealed. I wondered what was the sense of preparing an elaborate decep-

tion in one dream when it was discarded in a subsequent dream. To this question I could not find a convincing answer.

Another flaw in the Freudian theory appeared. In collecting dreams, I often ask a person to give his interpretation of the reported dream. I found that many people have real talent for dream interpretation although some of these have little or no information about Freudian symbolism. Why should one bother to deceive oneself by dreaming in symbols when they can be translated so readily by the dreamer himself? Again I could not find a plausible answer within the context of the Freudian formulation.

While thinking about the lay person's ability to translate his dreams, it occurred to me that people have been using a consciously contrived form of symbolism in their daily speech for centuries. It is called slang. Although there are slang expressions for many things, much of it is sexual in character. In order to get evidence concerning the relation of slang to dream symbols, I went through Partridge's *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (8) noting every slang expression for penis, vagina, and coitus. There were 200 expressions for penis, 330 for vagina and 212 for coitus. The results of this study will be published elsewhere; suffice it to say here that many of the dream symbols for the sex organs and for sexual intercourse are identical with those found in Partridge. Many of these slang words have been in the English language for centuries.

If slang and dream symbols coincide as closely as they do and if the referents of slang are as well known as they are, how can these same expressions (or visualizations of them) function effectively as disguises in dreams? It would be absurd for a dreamer to deceive himself with symbols during sleep when these same symbols are used so self-consciously during waking life. This is not the place to discuss the motives for the development of slang; at another time we intend to show that the same principles govern slang formation as govern dream symbol formation. Both spring from man's disposition to express his ideas in concrete form; slang uses figures of speech and dreams use images.

These explorations in the world of slang led me to consider the psychological significance of figures of speech or *tropes*, of which four principal varieties have been delineated: (a) *synecdoche*, (b) *metonymy*, (c) *metaphor*, and (d) *irony*. Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part is used for a whole, a whole for a part, the cause for the effect, the effect for the cause, the name of the material for the thing made, the species for the genus and so on. Metonymy is a figure in which the name of one thing is changed for that of another to which it is related by association and close relation-

ship. A metaphor is a figure which consists in the transference to one object of an attribute or name which strictly and literally is not applicable to it, but only figuratively and by analogy. Irony is a figure whose intended implication is just the opposite of that which is stated. One associates figures of speech with poetry, although they are used more or less widely in all forms of writing and speaking. Modern literary criticism and research have become aware of the importance of trope analysis in shedding light upon the intrinsic meaning of a literary creation *and* upon the personality dynamics of the creator. Noteworthy among those who have analyzed writings and writers by paying attention to figures of speech is Caroline Spurgeon, whose exegesis of Shakespeare is a remarkable *tour de force* (11) although wanting in the insights that dynamic psychology might have provided. Another example of this approach is found in Mark Schorer's *Fiction and the "Matrix of Analogy"* (10) in which he scrutinizes Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, and George Eliot through their metaphors.

The relation of tropes to slang and of both to dream symbols is one of psychological identity. Slang expressions are figures of speech; they are an idiom by which the person tries to communicate his conceptions. It is the thesis of this paper that dream symbols belong to the same idiom; a dream symbol or any symbol, for that matter, reveals thought rather than conceals it.

Before developing this thesis, two other flaws in Freud's theory of dream symbols will be mentioned. We have seen that a multitude of symbols can stand for the same referent. Why is it necessary to have so many disguises for the genitals, for sexual intercourse, and for masturbation? Psychoanalysis has not given this question proper attention.² If one hypothesizes that dream symbols are the embodiments of conceptions, then the reason for the multiplicity of symbols for a single referent becomes clear. People have many different conceptions of the same object; thus they need a versatile idiom for conveying the precise shade of meaning for each idea.

Finally, a critique of Freud's position regarding dream symbols should take note of an assumption that is implicit in his theory, namely, that the mind works in a very complex manner during sleep. To assert that part of the work done by the mind in forming a dream consists of transforming

²Freud did suggest an answer in the following passage. "Wherever he has the choice of several symbols for the representation of a dream-content, he will decide in favor of that symbol which is in addition objectively related to his other thought-material; that is to say, he will employ an individual motivation besides the typically valid one" (1, p. 370). Had Freud developed the thought of this passage, he might have come to the conclusion that we have reached, namely, that a particular symbol is chosen because it expresses better than any other symbol would the precise conception in the mind of the person.

referents into symbols for the purpose of veiling the referents is to ascribe to the sleeping mind a heavier responsibility than seems warranted. Since we usually think of sleep as a period of reduced mental activity, would it not be better to formulate a theory of dream symbolism that makes symbolizing dependent upon simpler processes?

These questions prompted me to reexamine the whole structure of Freud's theory of dreams. Upon undertaking this task I discovered that Freud had proposed two reasons why symbols appear in dreams, one is the necessity to smuggle contraband psychic material past the border separating the unconscious from the conscious and the other is what Freud called *regard for representability*. The latter formulation states that in order for such abstract and impalpable mental contents as thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and impulses to appear in dreams, they must be converted into sensible, palpable forms. These forms are usually pictorial in character, so that it may be said that the pictures of a dream are symbols of mental states. For example, conscience may be symbolized by a church, chastity by a lily, the sex impulse by fire, feelings of inferiority by nudity, and remembering the past by walking through a series of rooms.³

When one compares Freud's two hypotheses regarding the function of dream symbols, it is evident that they are diametrically opposed to one another. In one, a symbol conceals the referent, in the other, a symbol reveals the referent. Preferring the simplicity of a single hypothesis to the complexity of two separate and incompatible hypotheses, I decided to explore the possibility of abandoning the disguise theory and let *regard for representability* carry the whole burden of explaining dream symbols.

This enterprise led to the formulation of a cognitive theory of dreams which is presented in another paper (5). In that paper, I set forth the view that a dream is a perceptible embodiment of a dreamer's conceptions (ideas). Dreaming is pictorialized thinking; the conceptual is made perceptual. I now intend to show how this view leads directly to the formulation of a theory of dream symbols. Both theories represent extensions of Freud's concept of *regard for representability*.

A dream symbol is an image, usually a visual image, of an object, activity, or scene; the referent for the symbol is a conception. The function of the symbol is to express as clearly as possible the particular conception that the

³Had Freud himself not commented upon regard for representability we might still have deduced it from our collection of symbol-referent pairs. It is obvious that some of the referents are objects which might be represented directly were it not for censorship while others are mental states, which require pictorialization if they are to appear as dream images.

dreamer has in mind. For example, a dreamer who conceives of his mother as a nurturant person may represent her in a dream as a cow. Or a young woman who conceives of sexuality as a powerful, alien, and criminal force which she is unable to control might have the following dream, as one of our subjects did.

I was the warden at a very inefficient prison for criminals. All at once the gates to the prison opened and all of the criminals tried to escape. They tried to beat me up and trample on me and I was left standing there completely helpless.

A young man conceiving of his phallus as a dangerous weapon might picture it as a gun or sword in his dreams. A woman who thought that her marriage was going on the rocks dreamed that she was looking for her wedding dress and when she found it, it was dirty and torn. In these examples, the visualization is an expression of, not a disguise for, an idea.

An object, activity, or scene is selected to serve as a symbol because the dreamer's conception of the object, activity, or scene is congruent with his conception of the *referent object*.⁴ A nurturant mother appears as a cow because the dreamer conceives of cows as nurturant animals. If the dreamer thought cows were dangerous, a cow could not serve as a mother-symbol unless at the same time he conceived of his mother as dangerous. Occasionally, a change of conceptions can be detected as in the following dream.

I dreamed that an old man was coming towards me with a gun. I become frightened and put my glasses on to see him better. Then I noticed that he was not holding a gun but a bottle of whisky.

The young woman's first conception of the man is that he is dangerous, but this idea gives way to the contradictory one that he is harmless. The change in conceptions is symbolized by the act of putting on her glasses; the better view follows this act.

In some cases, a symbol may represent several ideas concurrently. In psychoanalytic writings, such a symbol is said to be *over-determined*. This term is not a happy choice since no phenomenon is ever *over-determined*; it is always *just* determined, never too little or too much. I prefer to call such symbols *condensed*. The moon, for example, may be thought of as a condensed symbol for woman. The monthly phases of the moon resemble the menstrual cycle, a resemblance that has support from etymology since

⁴The term *referent* will be used to denote the dreamer's conception and the term *referent object* will be used to denote the object, person, or activity about which the dreamer has a conception. Thus, the referent object of cow is mother, and the referent is the conception of the mother as a nurturant person.

the words *moon* and *menses* are derived from the same Latin word. The filling out of the moon from new to full stimulates the rounding out of the woman during pregnancy. The moon is inferior to the sun, a male symbol. The moon is changeable like a fickle woman while the sun is constant. The moon sheds a weak light, which embodies the idea of female frailty. The moon controls the ebb and flow of the tide, which is another likeness to the female rhythm. Rhythm, change, fruitfulness, weakness, and submissiveness, all of which are conventional conceptions of the female are compressed into a single visible object. As Susanne Langer observes, the choice of moon as a symbol of woman is determined by the many ways in which lunar characteristics are congruent with popular conceptions of the female. Langer reminds us that the conceptions develop first, followed by the selection of a symbol which will best represent all of the conceptions.⁵

When one analyzes a series of dreams from a person, various symbols for the same referent object may be found. As we have seen, the male member may be symbolized in no less than 102 different ways. According to our theory of dream symbols, since the referent is not an object, person, or activity but a conception, the 102 different phallic symbols represent 102 different ways of conceiving of the male genitals.⁶ Thus in a dream series, one may find multiple conceptions of the same phenomenon because the dreamer conceives of it in diverse ways at different times. A father may be represented as a teacher, a policeman, a king, and an army officer in order to depict the multiple conceptions of a wise, guiding father, a punitive father, an exalted, remote father and a disciplining father.

To recapitulate, regard for representability explains why symbols are found in dreams. Dream symbols are visible representations of conceptions. In order for an object, activity, or scene to serve as a symbol, it is necessary that the dreamer's conception of that object, activity, or scene be identical with his conception of the referent object.

It is now time to say how we would limit the use of the term, *dream symbol*. Since dream images *are* images and not perceptions of reality, it could be argued that all images are symbols. One might even go further and assert

⁵My great intellectual debt to Mrs. Langer will be apparent to those who have read her book, *Philosophy in a New Key* (7).

⁶Although no two symbols probably express exactly the same idea, subtle nuances may be ignored for the sake of reducing the many particulars to a relatively few general classes. For example, we found that a large number of the 200 slang expressions for penis could be categorized under the following headings: (1) projecting or protruding objects, (2) insertive objects, (3) extruding objects, (4) suspended objects, (5) burrowing objects or animals, (6) oblong objects, (7) tools, (8) weapons, and (9) body extremities.

that everything mental, whether perceptions, memories, or images, is really symbolic since the mental is not the real world but only a representation of the real world. We prefer, however, to restrict the definition of a dream symbol to an image that does not embody the referent object directly. If one dreams of his mother, the image of the mother in the dream does not qualify as a dream symbol. If one dreams of a cow and the image of the cow stands for the mother, then the cow is said to be a dream symbol. According to this view, symbolizing in dreams consists of transforming one object (the referent object) into another object (the symbol), and this transformation is made in order to convey the dreamer's conception of the referent object. *Cow* is substituted for *mother* because the dreamer's conception of his mother is that of a cow-like person, i.e., one who is nurturant. Similarly *gun* symbolizes the dreamer's conception of the phallus as a dangerous, powerful weapon. Slang and metaphor may be explained in like manner; they are used to convey one's conceptions of referent objects. If one speaks of sexual intercourse as *grinding one's tool*, it is clear that the speaker conceives of coitus as a mechanical operation performed by a mechanical tool, the penis. Quite different but no less revealing conceptions of intercourse are conveyed by the slang expressions *stab in the thigh*, *playing at horses and mares*, and *doing the naughty*.

Symbols raise hob with dream interpretation since one must not only translate symbols into referent objects, e.g., *cow* into *mother*, *gun* into *penis*, *playing the piano* into *masturbating*, but one must also discover the dreamer's conception of the symbol. If one dreamed only of referent objects it would be relatively simple to discover the dreamer's conceptions of these objects by observing the context in which they appear. That is, if one dreamed of his mother performing nurturant acts it would be apparent that he conceived of his mother as a nurturant person. If she appears as a cow it is necessary to decipher cow into mother and then decide upon the dreamer's conception of cows in order to determine his conception of mother.

There are several lines of evidence that tell us when it is necessary to decipher a dream and how the deciphering should proceed. This evidence is of two kinds, internal and external. Internal evidence is that which is found in the dream itself or which is furnished by other dreams of the same dreamer. External evidence is secured from information external to the dream.

The following dream reported by a young woman illustrates the way in which a symbol is detected from internal evidence.

I was riding a horse with a saddle and everything was fine. All of a sudden the saddle and reins fell off except for one rein. The horse was a large, powerful horse. The horse told me that he was going to try and throw me off. I told him that I would stay on no matter what happened. He kicked and ran between trees as fast as he could. I stayed on him and then woke up.

The presence of a symbol is suggested by the "talking horse." One may converse with a horse, but save in fairy tales horses do not talk back; only other humans do that. Accordingly, we feel that it is justified to translate *horse* into *human*. Since the horse is referred to by the masculine pronoun, it is assumed to be a male. The description of the horse as large and powerful suggests that the male is an adult. The identity of the man, whether father, brother, boy friend, or someone else cannot be determined from the dream. It is possible however to interpret the dream as one that reveals the girl's conception of her relationship with an adult male.

A second kind of internal evidence is that which is obtained from other dreams of a series. For example, if other dreams of the girl who had the "talking horse" dream disclosed that she was having a conflict over her relationship with her father, that she felt he was trying to get rid of her, this knowledge would support the equation, horse = father. Then the looks and actions of the horse would divulge the dreamer's conception of her father.

This second line of internal evidence may be illustrated by the dream of a young married woman. She dreamed that it was her first wedding anniversary and that they had planned to reenact the ceremony. She could not find her wedding gown and searched for it frantically.

Finally when I found the gown it was dirty and torn. With tears of disappointment in my eyes I snatched up the gown and hurried to the church. Upon my arrival my husband inquired why I had brought the gown with me. I was confused and bewildered and felt strange and alone.

A literal interpretation of this dream might be that the dreamer is unhappy because her dress is dirty and torn and because her husband asks her why she has brought it to the church. Suppose we assume, however, that the state of the wedding dress symbolizes the dreamer's conception of her marriage, and muster what evidence we can to support this assumption. It might be argued that her emotional reactions are out of proportion to the stimuli of a dirty wedding dress and a husband's question, that the intense feelings which these conditions produce are appropriate to something more vital, such as an

unhappy marriage. If the reader remains unconvinced by the evidence from a single dream, other dreams of this young woman can be summoned to give their testimony. Here are the themes of some of them.

- (1). She dreams about a recently married girl who is getting a divorce.
- (2). She dreams that she is riding on a streetcar with her husband through a poor section of the city.
- (3). She dreams that she is waiting for her husband but he does not appear. She learns that he has tuberculosis.
- (4). She dreams that the diamond in her engagement ring is missing.
- (5). She dreams that her girl friend who is getting married receives a lot of useless bric-a-brac for wedding presents.
- (6). She dreams that she is shopping and has to wait a long time to be served. She worries about getting home to her husband on time. She loses her way, falls on the sidewalk, and is delayed by a train.

These dreams indicate that the dreamer conceives of her marriage as an unhappy one and corroborate the hypothesis that the torn and dirty wedding dress is a concrete embodiment of this idea.

The analysis of a dream series provides, in our opinion, the best evidence for the validity of symbol translation. Since many dream series contain unsymbolized versions of the dreamer's conceptions, one may use these bare-face dreams as a check on one's interpretation of dreams freighted with symbolism.⁷

External evidence as to the meaning of symbols may be secured from several sources. The traditional method is to ask a person to "free associate" to the various dream items. The free association method of deciphering dream symbols is a valuable one, but as Walter Reis has shown (9) the dream series method yields almost as clear and as complete a picture of the dreamer's personality as do dreams plus free associations. A practical drawback to free association is that it is time consuming. Although this may not be a limitation when dreams are being interpreted during therapy, it is when one is doing research on dreams. For the latter purpose, the dream series method is more feasible.

The identification and meaning of dream symbols may be determined by the "acting out" that occurs during nocturnal emission dreams. The writer has collected a number of such dreams and the outcome of an emission often proves unequivocally the meaning of the symbols occurring in the

⁷For a discussion of the dream series method see the writer's paper *Diagnosing Personality by the Analysis of Dreams* (4).

dream. The following dream reported by a young man demonstrates the equivalence of "opening a door" with "sexual intercourse."

My sister's girl friend came in the front door and smiled at me. She continued on through the living room and I arose from my chair and followed her. She walked through a hallway and into the bathroom of our home and closed the door. As I opened the door I had an emission.

Another nocturnal emission dream in the writers' collection validates the sexual significance of a number of dream symbols.

I and four or five companions of the same age got out of our car at some place that was like Mentor Park. It was winter and the place was abandoned. Ice was all over the ground. We walked across an open area and as we passed through some passageways we found ourselves threading our way down a sunny mountain trail looking for gold. We noticed small animals resembling pigs running around. As we got into the jungle proper which was very light and sunny we saw all sorts of wild life, lions, giraffes, pythons standing out in my mind. For safety we decided to climb trees. I first climbed a small tree but found it was not safe enough so I came down and began to climb a larger tent pole which I had not noticed before. As I did so, I had a nocturnal emission.

The outcome of a sexual ejaculation suggests that the climatic change from cold to warm, the change in setting from an icy, abandoned park to a light, sunny jungle, the searching for gold, the passageways, the entrance into the jungle, the animals, and the trees and tent pole are objective representations of the dreamer's conception of sexuality. Lacking the outcome of an emission, one might have inferred that this dream is replete with sexual symbols; with the outcome the meaning of the symbols is more firmly established.

Finally, external evidence for the meaning of dream symbols is found in such diverse material as slang, figures of speech, myths, fairy tales, the visual arts, and word origins. Since these sources have been exploited fully by psychoanalytic investigators, they will not be discussed in this paper. The writer has found them, particularly slang and etymology, a great help in recognizing and deciphering dream symbols. Although evidence secured from such sources is suggestive rather than definitive, a suggestion often puts one on the track of an inference that can be verified by other evidence.

Now let us see how the dream symbol theory as it has been formulated on the basis of *regard for representability* meets the criticisms that we made of Freud's symbol-as-disguise theory. In the first place, we criticised the

latter theory because it does not account for unsymbolized dreams appearing in the midst of symbolized ones. Our theory states that symbols do not serve as masks; consequently, the presence of symbols and referent objects in the same dream series is not paradoxical. In fact, it is to be expected if one holds a cognitive theory of dreams. Since dreams are representations of conceptions, a dreamer may convey his ideas either by having a referent object behave in a certain manner or by symbolizing the referent object, in which case the symbol chosen conveys the dreamer's conception. In either case, the dream is a series of images that embody the ideas of the dreamer. In waking life, symbols and referent objects are used interchangeably to communicate ideas; it has never been suggested that the object of using symbols in waking life is to hide one's thoughts. On the contrary, symbols are often thought to be more expressive than referent objects.⁸

Since dream symbols are ways of expressing conceptions, it is not surprising that some people can decipher their own dreams. On the other hand, we would not expect all people to have this ability since many people are not aware of their conceptions. Probably a great deal of thinking, which we define as the forming of conceptions, is unconscious.

The present theory integrates dream symbols with other symbolic forms of expression, such as slang and figures of speech, and provides thereby the basis for a general theory of symbolism. The task of formulating a general theory of symbolism has already been done by Susanne Langer (7), and our special theory of dream symbolism is congruent with this larger formulation.

With respect to multiple symbols for the same referent, it is asserted here that the same referent object, not the same referent, may be symbolized

⁸Dr. Dwight W. Miles, who read this paper in manuscript, has raised the question as to why symbols are used on some occasions and why referent objects are used on other occasions. To this important question, I would give the following answer, realizing as I do so that it leaves much to be desired. One uses symbols for reasons of economy; they are a form of shorthand, by which complex ideas can be rendered simply. A figure of speech in a poem may be freighted with meaning; indeed we find that the interpretation of a poetic phrase often requires a lengthy discourse. Much meaning can be compressed within a symbol. For example, a dreamer may represent his mother as performing nurturant acts or he may sum up his conception by saying in effect "My mother is a cow." In order to convey the full significance of the latter statement by having the mother act out the dreamer's conception might require a very lengthy dream. Why should he choose a more difficult task when a simple substitution of cow for mother does just as well? For less complex ideas, it may be just as easy to use the referent object directly. To sum up, we would say that referent objects appear in dreams when the conceptions of these objects are relatively uncomplicated and may be readily conveyed by the behavior or appearance of the referent objects, and that symbols appear in dreams when the dreamer's conceptions are complex, and are not easily portrayed by actions and appearances of referent objects.

in various ways. The referent is always a conception of a referent object; thus, the versatility with which a referent object may be symbolized is restricted only by the number of ideas that can be developed regarding a given object.

Finally our theory does not rest on the assumption that during sleep one performs complex mental operations such as is assumed when one sees the dream as an elaborate subterfuge. We believe that dreaming is a simple form of thinking in which one uses the language of pictures instead of a more abstract mode of expression. We agree with Freud that dreaming is a regressive and archaic mental process.

What takes place in a hallucinatory dream we can describe in no other way than by saying that the excitation follows a retrogressive course. It communicates itself not to the motor end of the apparatus, but to the sensory end, and finally reaches the system of perception. If we call the direction which the psychic process follows from the unconscious into the waking state *progressive*, we may then speak of the dream as having a *regressive* character (1, p. 492).

. . . *primitive* modes of operations that are suppressed during the day play a part in the formation of dreams (1, p. 527).

. . . dreaming is on the whole an act of regression to the earliest relationships of the dreamer, a resuscitation of his childhood, of the impulses which were then dominant and the modes of expression which were then available (1, p. 497).

Evidence obtained from studies of children, primitive people, psychotics, and brain injury cases suggests that their modes of thought bear some resemblance to the characteristics of dreaming.

Having introduced this paper with a discussion of dream books, let us bring it to a conclusion on the same theme. Is it possible to develop a dream book on the basis of the ideas presented in this paper? This is tantamount to asking whether there are any universal symbol-conception connections. In order to establish universality it would necessitate collecting a representative sample of dreams from the world's population. Obviously, such an undertaking would present difficulties of such magnitude that it is hardly worth considering. About the most that could be done would be to investigate whether there are *common* symbol-conception associations in a given culture or sub-culture. Since no such studies have been done, we can only speculate about what might be found. Having read thousands of dreams, it would not surprise the writer if some fairly common symbols for conceptions of referent objects exist. We have been struck by the prevalence of guns and other weapons in dreams, and how often they seem to stand

for the conception of the penis as a dangerous weapon. Similarly, pocket-book or purse are fairly common dream objects and appear to symbolize a conception of the female genitals as a place where valuables are stored. It seems to me, after studying a large number of dreams of normal people, that many of the symbol-referent linkages discovered by psychoanalysis are valid. However, I would warn against any mechanical decoding of dreams using a psychoanalytic dream book for two reasons: first, because more proof is needed of the fixed connection between symbol and referent, and second, because it is the conception in the mind of the dreamer and not the referent object that needs to be discovered.

I suspect that many condensed symbols exist in dreams, symbols that express a variety of conceptions like the example of moon mentioned earlier in this paper. It may very well be that there are types of condensed symbols which correspond to the types of ambiguities discussed by Kaplan and Kris in a penetrating article on esthetic ambiguity (6). They distinguish four main types of ambiguities: (a) *disjunctive*, when the separate meanings are alternatives, excluding and inhibiting one another, (b) *additive*, when the separate meanings are not fully exclusive but are to some extent included in each other, (c) *conjunctive*, when the meanings are linked, and (d) *integrative*, when the meanings form a unified, coherent system.

To speak the language of Gestalt, in disjunctive ambiguity there are several distinct and unconnected fields; additive ambiguity consists in a restructuring of a single field to reveal more or fewer details; in conjunctive ambiguity several fields are connected though remaining distinct; with integrative ambiguity, they are fully reconstituted—integrated, in short, into one complex meaning (6, p. 420).

If there are such types of condensed symbols in dreams, then the task of constructing a dependable and useful dream book is made more difficult.

Until more evidence is made available concerning the prevalence of fixed symbol-conception linkages in dreams, it would be well for the dream interpreter to be wary about depending upon such short-cuts as dream books provide. We believe that dream interpretation can best be accomplished by working on a series of dreams and by setting as one's goal the development of an internally and externally consistent formulation of the person's conceptions.

SUMMARY

Freud's theory of dream symbols as disguises for reprehensible referents has been examined and found wanting in several respects: (a) it does not explain why censurable referents appear in some dreams in their naked form

and in other dreams as symbols, (*b*) it does not explain why some people are able to decipher their own dream symbols with facility, (*c*) it does not take into account the self-conscious and intentional use of slang and figures of speech for referent objects which are symbolized in dreams, (*d*) it does not deal adequately with the question why there should be multiple symbols for the same referent object, and (*e*) it assumes that the mind during sleep is capable of performing exceedingly complex operations.

Starting from Freud's other hypothesis regarding dream symbols, that which he called *regard for representability*, the following theory of dream symbols has been formulated: (*a*) the referent of a dream symbol is the dreamer's conception (idea) of a referent object, (*b*) a dream symbol is substituted for a referent object in order to express clearly and economically the conception that the dreamer has in mind, (*c*) symbols are employed because conceptions are abstract and must be represented by visible embodiments if they (conceptions) are to appear in dreams, and (*d*) a symbol is selected because the dreamer's conception of the symbol is identical with his conception of the referent object.

Dream symbols may be decomposed into conceptions by making use of various clues: (*a*) clues that are present within the context of the dream itself, (*b*) clues from other dreams of the person, (*c*) free association, (*d*) acting out as exemplified by dreams that terminate in nocturnal emissions, and (*e*) evidence from slang, figures of speech, myths, fairy tales, etymology, and the visual arts.

The theory presented in this paper has been called a *cognitive* theory of dream symbols because it assumes that the process of symbolizing is a function of the cognitive system of the ego.

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