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WRI194 Image and Imagination

1 December 2012

Blurring the Lines Between Reality and the Subconscious in Theater

In watching a play at the theater, we as audience members are momentarily taken away from our current surroundings and lives to focus on what is being presented to us, an unfolding story. This story can defy the concepts and laws of time and takes place in a sort of alternate reality to the spectators. Similar to the idea of an alternate reality, we can define dreams as “structures of the unconscious imagination,” which also seem to defy basic physical laws on space and time (McDougall 107). When we analyze certain plays, such as some of sixteenth century English playwright William Shakespeare’s most renowned plays, we are taken a level further into the realm of imagination, when we see a dream within the play. There are many hypotheses regarding the interpretation of a play as the subconscious works of the actor or playwright, but then through those lenses how do we approach the next level of sub consciousness, found within the play itself? What role does the concept of reality play when analyzing a dream within a play, and how does that relate to what we as the audience perceive in context to the dream, the play, and reality?

In answering these questions, we must first explore the scientific knowledge and studies of dreams in order to better understand the way in which they are used by the playwright. In his study of dreams, psychoanalyst Alan Roland provides a strong conceptualization of the function of dreams. Firstly, he notes that “any interpretation of a dream must take place in the context of the dreamer’s ongoing life situation.” (Roland 44) In order to interpret a dream, we must first step into the shoes of the dreamer, take on his or her psychological thought processes and state of mind. In regards to theater, we must see through the character’s reality as if it is our own. Secondly, the uniqueness in dreams is that they are able to shed light on a problem that has settled in the subconscious, usually through multifaceted symbolic expression (Roland 48). When analyzing dreams, psychoanalysts take a metaphorical approach to try and uncover the thoughts and issues that may be buried deep in the subconscious of the dreamer. Certain projections of people, objects, or settings may connect with a significant memory, feeling, etc. As we deal with the question of reality in the theater, we must keep in mind the contextual and symbolic understanding with the concept of dreams.

A playwright may use this concept of dreams to portray a subconscious struggle or idea within a character. Historically, “the dream served as an authenticating device, guaranteeing the objectivity and authority of the vision and offering a psychological model that put the dreamer/narrator’s imagination in the service of philosophical reason as he ascended to the truth.” (*Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare* 101) William Shakespeare certainly employed this technique, utilizing dreams to perhaps allow the audience to go further into the understanding of a character’s inner psyche. In analyzing a number of Shakespeare’s greatest works, author Marjorie B. Garber states that “…the dream world is able to exercise a controlling power beyond that of any of the play’s characters.” (89) There is only so much that characters can say or do to exhibit themselves, and thus by delving into the dream world the playwright can showcase the thoughts an ideas of a character that the character cannot (so to say in their respective world) actively control, unlike words and actions. Dreams create a certain separation within a character, between perception and truth; they isolate a character’s self-knowledge and internal content (Lewin 184). Many times dreams take the form of some kind of metaphorical truth, and without the dream the character cannot realize this truth.

For example, in Shakespeare’s historical play *Richard III* about a tyrannical brother who murders and manipulates his family and acquaintances in order to gain absolute power in the kingdom, dreams are used on multiple occasions to not only foreshadow events, but to also showcase a character’s subconscious. One of the clearest examples may be near the end of the play, the night before Richard is to fatefully battle a soldier named Richmond who is determined to defeat Richard and end his tyrannical rule. In his dreams Richard is visited by a series of eleven ghosts who represent his victims and all whom he has killed in his path to power. In the scene each ghost speaks to Richard, in a way that could parallel to a voice of his conscious. The spirit of the Duke of Buckingham tells Richard, “Dream on, dream on, of bloody deeds and death: Fainting, despair; despairing, yield thy breath” (Barnet V.iii.152). These feelings of restlessness, guilt, and haunting despair showcase Richard’s troubled soul due to his sin (Garber 19). Furthermore, as Richard discusses this dream with his adviser Ratcliff, he explains, “…shadows tonight have struck more terror to the soul of Richard than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers” (Barnet V.iii.215-219). These shadows, acting as projections of Richard’s subconscious, have brought forth a newfound fear within him. This is but one example of how dreams in the context of a play can delve the audience deeper into understanding their true feelings and ideas.

Now that we have seen the context of a dream within a play, we can step outside the play world and analyze the relation between the play and the world external to the play. The play itself is an alternate reality to the audience, created by the playwright, and potentially, interpreted by the subconscious of the audience. When we analyze a play, it is notable that we usually interpret the action of the theater “as if it were at a level of rational, casual activity.” (McDougall 107) We read a character’s actions, question his motives, and hypothesize his inner thoughts, as if he were a real person. This is without considering that the creation of a play forms a type of conversation between playwright, actors, and spectators. In fact, it is suggested that “the world only exists on stage as a vehicle for the soul, or a reflection of the will. So objects and figures can be transformed to correspond to the emotional state of the dreaming or visionary mind.” (Chapter 4: THERAPY AND SUBLIMINAL THEATRE) Whether we view the action of a play to be a physical representation of an author’s projection of his inner self, a method of unleashing the audience’s subconscious interpretation and thought, or an actor’s energy to accurately depict a character, the play parallels the idea of dream. It is again the idea of being involved in the action, but being also being separated at the same time. Roland comments, “…the viewer must attend to the plays flexibly, to remain on the threshold of rational attention to character interaction while facing inward into old imagoes and emotional fantasies of the psyche itself… the viewer must live in the interstices between the psyche and social reality.” (136) By watching a play, the spectator undergoes a tension between reality and what is presented in the play- the audience members must be able to engage themselves in the action of the play but interpret the play through their own reality.

Now we add another layer, and look at the dream within the play. Dreams have the power to disorient characters from their fixed path, to transform characters and their ways of seeing. (McDougall 107-108) Dreams within a play create a tension between the reality of the play and a character’s subconscious alternate projection, which adds on to the tension between the world of the play and reality of the audience. Because imagination is a multi-layered concept, we must analyze how these multiple layers effect the base of the concept, the audience. Author Gordan McDougall argues that “the illusion that occurs on stage acknowledges itself to be a part of a wider whole but suggests that it is closer to ‘reality’ than the rest of the whole.” (112) Interpreting this argument, while the illusion of a character’s dreams serves a purpose within the context of the play, it hits closer to the audience’s reality than to the play itself.

To support this claim, we must again look at the concept of dreams in plays, but now from the context of multi-layered imagination. Garder writes that “…the theme of consciousness, which unites the inner world of private vision with the outer world of visible reality, deliberately blurs distinctions between the factually ‘real’ and the purportedly ‘imagined,’ so that the audience, as much as the protagonist, is forced to make wholly subjective choices among equally possible truths.” (91) When the layers of imagination are stripped of any defined reality lines, it is much more difficult to differentiate between subconscious projections of the audience and the character on stage. In fact, it is, as Garder puts it, “the metaphorical equivalency of interior and exterior worlds” that creates this dynamic between the playwright, the spectators, the actors, and their characters. (93) One way to categorize these metaphorical worlds is to consider the audience as the exterior world, viewing the play within, or the interior world. However, we can twist this view slightly so it is instead the audience members being subjected to the interior world of the play, and the dreams of the play representing the subconscious exterior of the audience. Taking this viewpoint, the audience is focusing on the play, being constrained to the limits of the play, and the audience subconsciously interprets the dreams within the play in a way that identifies closer with reality.

Not only do the lines of reality versus subconscious blur as layers of imagination increase, but also we find an inseparability between dream and so-called “reality.” While stated earlier that that dreams are utilized as a separation from perception and truth, undoubtedly there is a mutual exchange between the ideas and thoughts of the psyche and the projections of the dream. The dream cannot exist without the conscience of reality, but many times the dream uncovers the truth that we cannot see on the surface. McDougall writes, “…illusion is acknowledged in theatre as a stepping stone to reality, to a form of contact which cannot take place outside the theatre…” (113) The important phrase to note here is that this specific stepping stone to reality is constrained to the theater. The illusive dream worlds that the audience can only experience in the theater through a play connect to the reality of the audience through the medium of the play. McDougall continues by saying, “the more the stage acknowledges itself to be a stage – and not life – the more it is capable of invading life, of flooding it and effecting a sea change.” (113) In order for the play’s dream to connect with the audience’s reality, the play itself must act as the medium of the illusory world. If the stage were to take the role of reality, the audience would be forced out of the relationship. Instead the stage becomes the illusory world to the audience, so the subconscious projections within the play may relate with the audience’s perceptions.

After exploring the role of the stage in the merged dimensions of reality and subconscious, another complexity we must take into account is the relationship between the quality of consciousness and our sense of time. Consciousness is not a physical or tangible concept. Thus there is no other way to explain the concept except as a sort of illusion, something we perceive to be true but with no physical evidence (McDougall 113). Instead, we experience consciousness through a series of events. These events create a feeling of reaction and reflective thought within ourselves, or what we consider our consciousness. This chain of events corresponds to subsequent events that take place in the theater, except in a world without time, which creates a whole different form of free-flowing consciousness. We can identify theater as “an activity of consciousness in which origins disapper, the subject is unstable, and you can’t be sure of the end.” (Blau 204) With no definite and known structure, we are left to the acts of our subconscious to formulate and connect the threads of our consciousness. Furthermore, we recognize consciousness as the act of thinking, rather than the thought itself. (McDougall 114) In theater, this act of thinking takes the form of the scenes of the play, in the actions of the characters. In order for this to happen the play must be exposed to the subconscious of the spectators, who release these thoughts that are represented through the actions of the play. McDougall suggests that “a new consciousness can only be created by access to the unconscious…” (115) As the stage takes on the role of consciousness, we again see the play acting as a medium between the dream within and the audience. Access to the unconscious does not only refer to the thoughts of the spectators used to create the interpretation of the action of the play, but it also refers to the access of the unconscious within the play. If the play does not explore the subconscious of the conscious, then we are not receiving the full depth of the conscious. Without either of these aspects of unconsciousness and both of their relations to the play, this new form of consciousness of action could not be created.

A detail that has not been addressed yet is the action that precedes the act of dreaming – sleeping. The act of sleeping opens the character to his own “private space of obliviousness” in which “sleep registers a private access to worlds that lie outsides his immediate, daily life…” (Lewin 186) However, in the theater, sleeping does not only open the character to a untouched level of knowledge, but the audience exterior to the play is also now exposed to the subconscious of the character. Sleep has the power to provide characters, and thus the audience, with a deeper level of knowledge that cannot be actively accessed (Lewin 186). This deeper level of knowledge comes usually in the subtext and meaning of a dream; a sense of reality that is now being openly showcased to the audience through the medium of the character’s sleep.

The idea of a deeper knowledge or reality being hidden in a character’s dream world, only accessible through sleep, corresponds with the idea that theater conceals in order to expose (Blau 208). It can be simply put that the desires of a character’s psyche that is crucial in understanding the play can be hidden away in a dream with the sole purpose to expose those desires. However, it becomes a bit more complicated when we view what’s hidden in a play to be the audience’s desire of the play from the exterior, not the interior. Author Herbert Blau notes that “the property of concealment is, then, an aspect of the grammar of theater which posits the certainty there of life… If there is an interpretation of reality, individual or social, we have to ask what the interpreter wants… what you want is what you’ll see.” (211) Blau is making the point that as audience members, much of what we want to see is hidden within the play, but as our subconscious projects through theater and our illusory characters delve into the dream world, what is being concealed becomes uncovered. This again connects the character’s dream world with the audience, through the audience’s desires for the theater. McDougall states that “we represent something in the theatre only to suggest what is unrepresentable.” (112) This similar idea reiterates that the audience cannot simply be shown what it wants, and that the wants lie deeper in the subconscious, to a point where it is “unrepresentable.” There must be an extra layer so that the audience can go beyond the illusion of the play. The dreams become the audience’s reality to what they want to see.

Metaphorically speaking, we can think of the characters of a performance to be wearing a mask, showing the physical qualities of a character through actions and dialogue, but hiding the inner psyche. Blau writes, “The realism of performance is the remnant of a mask.” (207) What then, is the remnant of the mask? Perhaps it is the idea that the mask has dissolved and we can see the inner psyche and true conscious of a character, which could thus be in the form of a dream. But it is not the uncovering of a mask, it is the remnants. Reality in the theater is not simply the dream- it is the character transforming from the dream. The dream is helping shed light on the subconscious of the character, and thus the character, once exposed to these hidden feelings, undergoes a sort of metamorphosis. It is this metamorphosis of the character realizing his subconscious that allows the audience to connect to the reality of the performance.

But again, there is another layer beneath this character mask. There is another mask that the actor wears to hide himself and to put on this alternate reality for the audience. McDougall comments, “As with character metamorphosis, what the actor portrays is always a part of himself but revealed with the skill that encourages our imagination to believe his someone else…” (110) This actor’s mask is the way he presents himself, and this creates the illusion of the play. If his mask dissolves, the illusion dissolves along with it, which again supports Blau’s statement that the remnants of the mask create reality. If the actor presents himself with only remnants of the mask remaining, we as the audience can clearly find the distinction between reality and the illusion. Just as the character undergoes a metamorphosis as his mask dissolves to show the audience reality, the actor undergoes a metamorphosis to create his mask and create the illusion on stage, hiding reality on the stage from the audience.

Because consciousness and the subconscious are simply concepts, there is no way to draw physical lines to draw the distinction between subconscious in reality. The boundaries are further blurred when we enter the theater to watch a performance, and dreams within a performance add another layer of imagination. Blau believes that as audience members, “We are always looking for a theater where the boundaries are erased… between function and person, character and actor, illusion and truth, self and other, art and life, inside and out.” (207) The theater creates a sense of alternate existence, with no time regulations and a series of hidden and concealed personalities, ideas, and psyches. Within the layers of subconscious however, we find relationships between the playwright, actors, spectators, and characters in which ideas and perceptions are exchanged so that each undergo transformations within the theater. Ultimately, the stage takes on the role of the illusion that takes the audience from their reality, parallel to the role of a dream. The role of the dream within the play, thus forms a bridge from audience to their reality, through the illusion of the play. The subconscious projections within the play connect more strongly with the spectators than the play itself. This relationship between exterior and interior worlds adds a dimension to the idea of theater, in that reality of the exterior can be found concealed within the interior, brought out by the subconscious.

Dee,

This is \*very\* promising work on the role of dreams in theater and in Shakespeare’s works in particular. I am particularly impressed by your subtle yet clear charting of the theories of theatrical representation that you’ve researched. Still, there’s more to do to transform this into a research paper with a well defined goal and structure that draws on your excellent readings and writing in the strongest way possible. Some thoughts about how to move forward:

**Thesis and Motive** : I would recommend reworking your motivating question so that it is more precise and centered on some specific exhibit, which could be a theoretical text but might also be a play. The advantage of having a play as your exhibit is that it gives you a common object against which to text the various theories you introduce. This in turn gives you a measure for determining your own relationship to the theories. Without this, you are in a position of evaluating the theories on their own merits and in their own terms without any specific object against which to test them, which is more challenging. If you choose the latter option, you will want to examine the arguments for internal consistency, concept formation, persuasiveness, and implications, weighing the relative merits of the various arguments you introduce. Here too you would want to draw on examples from theatrical works, but these could be subordinated to the analysis of the theoretical texts.

**Conversation Building**: This will be very important to your revision. You will want to ensure that it is clear who is saying what in your paper, and that you can clearly delineate your own voice and opinion from those of the other authors whose ideas you present. You may be helped by the source use handout I’ve posted on blackboard (a flawed version of which I handed out yesterday) in this regard.

**Key terms**: Since you deal with some challenging theoretical material, it is particularly important that you define the key terms of the works you introduce and of your own argument as well. I’ve noted places where attention might be given to this, but it’s something you’ll want to strengthen in general in your revision.

Again, this is a very promising and imporessive draft. I look forward to seeing how it develops in your revision.

Walter

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14 December 2012

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In watching a play at the theater, we as audience members are momentarily taken away from our current surroundings and lives to focus on what is being presented to us, an unfolding story. This story can defy the concepts and laws of time and takes place in a sort of alternate reality to the spectators. Similar to the idea of an alternate reality, we can define dreams as “structures of the unconscious imagination,” which also seem to defy basic physical laws on space and time (McDougall 107). When we analyze certain plays, such as some of sixteenth century English playwright William Shakespeare’s most renowned plays, we are taken a level further into the realm of imagination, when we see a dream within the play. There are many hypotheses regarding the interpretation of a play as the subconscious works of the actor or playwright, but then through those lenses how do we approach the next level of sub consciousness, found within the play itself? What role does the concept of reality play when analyzing a dream within a play, and how does that relate to what we as the audience perceive in context to the dream, the play, and reality? We can define reality as the state of surroundings that a person lives in and interacts in. Using Shakespeare’s historical play Richard III, we can analyze the theories brought forth regarding the role of the subconscious in theater and establish a strong correlation between the audience’s reality and the dreams within a play.

In answering these questions, we must first explore the scientific knowledge and studies of dreams in order to better understand the way in which they are used by playwrights. In his study of dreams, psychoanalyst Alan Roland provides a strong conceptualization of the function of dreams. Firstly, he notes that “any interpretation of a dream must take place in the context of the dreamer’s ongoing life situation.” (Roland 44) In order to interpret a dream, we must first step into the shoes of the dreamer, take on his or her psychological thought processes and state of mind. In regards to theater, we must see through the character’s reality as if it is our own. Secondly, the uniqueness in dreams is that they are able to shed light on a problem that has settled in the subconscious, usually through multifaceted symbolic expression (Roland 48). When analyzing dreams, psychoanalysts take a metaphorical approach to try and uncover the thoughts and issues that may be buried deep in the subconscious of the dreamer. Certain projections of people, objects, or settings may connect with a significant memory, feeling, etc. As we deal with the question of reality in the theater, we must keep in mind the contextual and symbolic understanding with the concept of dreams.

A playwright may use this concept of dreams to portray a subconscious struggle or idea within a character. In interpreting many of Shakespeare’s most renowned plays, “the dream served as an authenticating device, guaranteeing the objectivity and authority of the vision and offering a psychological model that put the dreamer/narrator’s imagination in the service of philosophical reason as he ascended to the truth.” (*Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare* 101) Shakespeare utilized dreams to perhaps allow the audience to go further into the understanding of a character’s inner psyche. In analyzing a number of Shakespeare’s greatest works, author Marjorie B. Garber states that “…the dream world is able to exercise a controlling power beyond that of any of the play’s characters.” (89) There is only so much that characters can say or do to exhibit themselves, and thus by delving into the dream world the playwright can showcase the thoughts and ideas of a character that the character cannot (so to say in their respective world) actively control, unlike words and actions. Dreams create a certain separation within a character, between perception and truth; they isolate a character’s self-knowledge and internal content (Lewin 184). Many times dreams take the form of some kind of metaphorical truth, and without the dream the character cannot realize this truth.

For example, in Shakespeare’s historical play *Richard III* about a tyrannical brother who murders and manipulates his family and acquaintances in order to gain absolute power in the kingdom, dreams are used on multiple occasions to not only foreshadow events, but to also showcase a character’s subconscious. One of the clearest examples may be near the end of the play, the night before Richard is to fatefully battle a soldier named Richmond who is determined to defeat Richard and end his tyrannical rule. In his dreams Richard is visited by a series of eleven ghosts who represent his victims and all whom he has killed in his path to power. In the scene each ghost speaks to Richard, in a way that could parallel to a voice of his conscience. The spirit of the Duke of Buckingham tells Richard, “Dream on, dream on, of bloody deeds and death: Fainting, despair; despairing, yield thy breath” (Barnet V.iii.152). These feelings of restlessness, guilt, and haunting despair showcase Richard’s troubled soul due to his sin (Garber 19). Furthermore, as Richard discusses this dream with his adviser Ratcliff, he explains, “…shadows tonight have struck more terror to the soul of Richard than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers” (Barnet V.iii.215-219). These shadows, acting as projections of Richard’s subconscious, have brought forth a newfound fear within him. This is but one example of how dreams in the context of a play can delve the audience deeper into understanding their true feelings and ideas.

Now that we have seen the context of a dream within a play, we can step outside the play world and analyze the relation between the play and the world external to the play. The play itself is an alternate reality to the audience, created by the playwright, and potentially, interpreted by the subconscious of the audience. When we analyze a play, it is notable that we usually interpret the action of the theater “as if it were at a level of rational, casual activity.” (McDougall 107) We read a character’s actions, question his motives, and hypothesize his inner thoughts, as if he were a real person. This is without considering that the creation of a play forms a type of conversation between playwright, actors, and spectators. This conversation supports the idea that “the world only exists on stage as a vehicle for the soul, or a reflection of the will. So objects and figures can be transformed to correspond to the emotional state of the dreaming or visionary mind.” (Chapter 4: THERAPY AND SUBLIMINAL THEATRE) Whether we view the action of a play to be a physical representation of an author’s projection of his inner self, a method of unleashing the audience’s subconscious interpretation and thought, or an actor’s energy to accurately depict a character, the play parallels the idea of dream. It is again the idea of being involved in the action, but also being separated at the same time. Roland comments, “…the viewer must attend to the plays flexibly, to remain on the threshold of rational attention to character interaction while facing inward into old imagoes and emotional fantasies of the psyche itself… the viewer must live in the interstices between the psyche and social reality.” (136) By watching a play, the spectator undergoes a tension between their reality and what is presented in the play- the audience members must be able to engage themselves in the action of the play but interpret the play through the reality of the audience.

Now we add the final layer and look at the dream within the play in order to establish a relationship between the spectators and the subconscious of the characters in the play. Dreams have the power to disorient characters from their fixed path, to transform characters and their ways of seeing. Dreams within a play create a tension between the reality of the play and a character’s subconscious alternate projection, which adds on to the tension between the world of the play and reality of the audience. Because imagination is a multi-layered concept, we must analyze how these multiple layers effect the base of the concept, the audience. In analyzing the relationship between the acts of theater paralleling a dream, author Gordan McDougall argues, “the illusion that occurs on stage acknowledges itself to be a part of a wider whole but suggests that it is closer to ‘reality’ than the rest of the whole.” (112) Interpreting this argument in the context of dreams within a play and the audience, while the illusion of a character’s dreams serves a purpose within the context of the play, it hits closer to the audience’s reality than to the play itself.

To support this claim, we must again look at the concept of dreams in plays, but now from the context of multi-layered imagination. Garder writes that “…the theme of consciousness, which unites the inner world of private vision with the outer world of visible reality, deliberately blurs distinctions between the factually ‘real’ and the purportedly ‘imagined,’ so that the audience, as much as the protagonist, is forced to make wholly subjective choices among equally possible truths.” (91) When the layers of imagination are stripped of any defined reality lines, it is much more difficult to differentiate between subconscious projections of the audience and the character on stage. In fact, it is, as Garder puts it, “the metaphorical equivalency of interior and exterior worlds” that creates this dynamic between the playwright, the spectators, the actors, and their characters. (93) One way we can categorize these metaphorical worlds is to consider the audience as the exterior world, viewing the play within, or the interior world. However, we can twist this view slightly so it is instead the audience members being subjected to the interior world of the play, and the dreams of the play representing the subconscious exterior of the audience. For example, in the same excerpt from Shakespeare’s *Richard III,* as spectators to the play we are limited to Richard’s world, which Shakespeare creates for us. The subconscious string of projections that represent Richard’s victims help the audience step outside Richard’s world and connect with their own consciences, realizing the level of Richard’s wrongdoings. Taking this viewpoint, the audience is focusing on the play, being constrained to the limits of the play, and the audience subconsciously interprets the dreams within the play in a way that identifies closer with their reality.

Not only do the lines of reality versus subconscious blur as layers of imagination increase, but also we find inseparability between dream and so-called “reality.” While stated earlier that dreams are utilized as a separation from perception and truth, undoubtedly there is a mutual exchange between the ideas and thoughts of the psyche and the projections of the dream. The dream cannot exist without the conscience of reality, but many times the dream uncovers the truth that we cannot see on the surface. McDougall writes, “…illusion is acknowledged in theatre as a stepping stone to reality, to a form of contact which cannot take place outside the theatre…” (113) The important phrase to note here is that this specific stepping stone to reality is constrained to the theater. Taking McDougall’s argument, we can conclude that the illusive dream worlds that the audience can only experience in the theater through a play connect to the reality of the audience through the medium of the play. McDougall continues by saying, “the more the stage acknowledges itself to be a stage – and not life – the more it is capable of invading life, of flooding it and effecting a sea change.” (113) We see that in order for the play’s dream to connect with the audience’s reality, the play itself must act as the medium of the illusory world. When we analyze *Richard III,* we consider how Richard’s projections in the dream relate closely to the subconscious of the audience, while Richard’s actions act as the medium between the two. Richard’s tyrannical rule becomes a vehicle for the spectators to access their moral consciences in the context of the play. The moral conscience that the audience realizes when seeing the vengeance in Richard’s dreams cannot be accessed to the same depth without witnessing Richard’s actions through the theater. If the stage were to take the role of reality, the audience would be forced out of the relationship. Instead the stage becomes the illusory world to the audience, so the subconscious projections within the play may relate with the audience’s perceptions.

After exploring the role of the stage in the merged dimensions of reality and subconscious, another complexity we must take into account is the relationship between the quality of consciousness and our sense of time. McDougall argues that consciousness is not a physical or tangible concept. Thus there is no other way to explain the concept except as a sort of illusion, something we perceive to be true but with no physical evidence (113). Instead, we experience consciousness through a series of events. These events create a feeling of reaction and reflective thought within ourselves, or what we consider our consciousness. Considering this argument, we note that this chain of events corresponds to subsequent events that take place in the theater except in a world without time, which creates a whole different form of free-flowing consciousness. We can identify theater as “an activity of consciousness in which origins disappear, the subject is unstable, and you can’t be sure of the end.” (Blau 204) Unlike in our own realities, in a play we are only shown pieces of a character’s life that relate to the plot at hand. With no definite and known structure, we are left to the acts of our subconscious to formulate and connect the threads of our consciousness. Furthermore, McDougall recognizes consciousness as the act of thinking, rather than the thought itself. (114) In theater, we analyze this act of thinking takes the form of the scenes of the play, in the actions of the characters. In order for this to happen the play must be exposed to the subconscious of the spectators, who release these thoughts that are represented through the actions of the play. McDougall suggests, “…a new consciousness can only be created by access to the unconscious…” (115) Using McDougall’s statement in our context, as the stage takes on the role of consciousness, we again see the play acting as a medium between the dream within and the audience. Access to the unconscious does not only refer to the thoughts of the spectators used to create the interpretation of the action of the play, but it also refers to the access of the unconscious within the play. If the play does not explore the subconscious of the conscious, then we are not receiving the full depth of the conscious. Without either of these aspects of unconsciousness and both of their relations to the play, this new form of consciousness of action could not be created.

A detail that has not been addressed yet is the action that precedes the act of dreaming – sleeping. The act of sleeping opens the character to his own “private space of obliviousness” in which “sleep registers a private access to worlds that lie outsides his immediate, daily life…” (Lewin 186) However, in the theater, sleeping does not only open the character to an untouched level of knowledge, but the audience exterior to the play is also now exposed to the subconscious of the character. Sleep has the power to provide characters, and thus the audience, with a deeper level of knowledge that cannot be actively accessed (Lewin 186). This deeper level of knowledge comes usually in the subtext and meaning of a dream; a sense of reality that is now being openly showcased to the audience through the medium of the character’s sleep.

The idea of a deeper knowledge or reality being hidden in a character’s dream world, only accessible through sleep, corresponds with the idea that theater conceals in order to expose (Blau 208). It can be simply put that the desires of a character’s psyche that are crucial in understanding the play can be hidden away in a dream with the sole purpose to expose those desires. However, it becomes a bit more complicated when we view what’s hidden in a play to be the audience’s desire of the play from the exterior, not the interior. Author Herbert Blau, who analyzes the relationship between the audience the characters on stage, notes that “the property of concealment is, then, an aspect of the grammar of theater which posits the certainty there of life… If there is an interpretation of reality, individual or social, we have to ask what the interpreter wants… what you want is what you’ll see.” (211) Blau is making the point that as audience members, much of what we want to see is hidden within the play, but as our subconscious projects through theater and our illusory characters delve into the dream world, what is being concealed becomes uncovered. This again connects the character’s dream world with the audience, through the audience’s desires for the theater. McDougall states that “we represent something in the theatre only to suggest what is unrepresentable.” (112) This similar idea reiterates that the audience cannot simply be shown what it wants, and that the wants lie deeper in the subconscious, to a point where it is “unrepresentable.” This supports that there must be an extra layer so that the audience can go beyond the illusion of the play. The dreams become the audience’s reality of what they want to see.

Again, we use the scene from *Richard III* to apply these theories. As Richard ascends to dictatorial power, the audience is not exposed to any sort of feeling of guilt or vengeance until the end of the play. Instead the audience focuses on Richard’s plot, and although we as spectators have a moral conscience and recognize Richard’s actions as cruel and tyrannical, this conscience is not tapped into until the dream scene. In context of McDougall’s argument, we could say that the morality is being hidden, and Richard’s dream exposes this representation of morality. This use of subconscious allows the audience to stray from focusing on Richard’s rule and instead, actively question his actions in the play. The dream reveals the audience’s conscience beyond the illusion of the play.

We can better understand these relationships through use of metaphor. Metaphorically speaking, we can think of the characters of a performance to be wearing a mask, showing the physical qualities of a character through actions and dialogue, but hiding the inner psyche. Blau writes, “The realism of performance is the remnant of a mask.” (207) What then, is the remnant of the mask? Perhaps it is the idea that the mask has dissolved and we can see the inner psyche and true conscious of a character, which could thus be in the form of a dream. But it is not the uncovering of a mask, it is the remnants. Reality in the theater is not simply the dream- it is the character transforming from the dream. The dream is helping shed light on the subconscious of the character, and thus the character, once exposed to these hidden feelings, undergoes a sort of metamorphosis, which the remnants of the mask symbolize. It is this metamorphosis of the character realizing his subconscious that allows the audience to connect to the reality of the performance.

But again, there is another layer beneath this character mask. There is another mask that the actor wears to hide himself and to put on this alternate reality for the audience. McDougall comments, “As with character metamorphosis, what the actor portrays is always a part of himself but revealed with the skill that encourages our imagination to believe his someone else…” (110) Taking McDougall’s statement into metaphorical context, the actor’s mask is the way he presents himself, and this creates the illusion of the play. If his mask dissolves, the illusion dissolves along with it, which again supports Blau’s statement that the remnants of the mask create reality. If the actor presents himself with only remnants of the mask remaining, we as the audience can clearly find the distinction between reality and the illusion, which takes away the show of the theater. Just as the character undergoes a metamorphosis as his mask dissolves to show the audience reality, the actor undergoes a metamorphosis to create his mask and create the illusion on stage for the audience.

Because consciousness and the subconscious are simply concepts, there is no way to draw physical lines to distinguish between subconscious in reality. The boundaries are further blurred when we enter the theater to watch a performance, and dreams within a performance add another layer of imagination. Blau believes that as audience members, “We are always looking for a theater where the boundaries are erased… between function and person, character and actor, illusion and truth, self and other, art and life, inside and out.” (207) The theater creates a sense of alternate existence, with no time regulations and a series of hidden and concealed personalities, ideas, and psyches. Within the layers of subconscious however, we find relationships between the playwright, actors, spectators, and characters in which ideas and perceptions are exchanged so that each undergo transformations within the theater. Using analyses of the dream scene in Shakespeare’s *Richard III* where the ghosts of Richard’s victims haunt him, we can see that ultimately the stage takes on the role of the illusion that takes the audience from their reality, parallel to the role of a dream. The moral conscience of the audience is reflected in the dream, where we finally realize the emotional magnitude of Richard’s wrongdoings. The role of the dream within the play thus forms a bridge from audience back to their reality, through the illusion of the play. The subconscious projections within the play connect more strongly with the spectators than the play itself. This relationship between exterior and interior worlds adds a dimension to the idea of theater, in that the reality of the exterior can be found concealed within the interior, brought out by the subconscious.

**This paper represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.**

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