

# THE MANIFEST DREAM IS THE REAL DREAM: THE CHANGING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS<sup>12</sup>

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"The meaning of dreams forever evades us, not because that meaning is too vague for words but because it is too precise for words".  
(Ned Rorem)

## Introduction

110 after the publication of *"The Interpretation of Dreams"*, a foundational text of our discipline, the theoretical and practical panorama of psychoanalysis is complex and variegated, not to say worrisome. Ever since Wallerstein (1988, 1990) declared over 20 years ago that the theoretical and technical diversity is the rule and that there is no unique theoretical truth or practical approach, various works have come out in succession alerting about the fragmentation of knowledge (Fonagy 1999) and the chaotic appearance of contemporary psychoanalysis (Thomä 2000). The problem is that beyond a welcome pluralism what really exists is a mere plurality or, even worse, a fragmentation that makes a theoretical and practical dialogue among colleagues increasingly difficult. What is lacking is a methodology which can be applied systematically to compare the various theories and technical approaches. Thus, the menace spills over the *scientific discipline* nature of psychoanalysis. Wilson warns us that today's "pluralism" which has managed to remedy yesterday's authoritarian monism, 'can easily evolve into tomorrow's nightmare, unless some guiding principles chart an ever evolving integrative course' (2000, p. 412). According to Charles Hanly, the standing President of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA), 'at present, psychoanalysis has an abundance or even superabundance of theory and a paucity of theory-testing observations' (Hanly 2010a). In order to tackle this problem, the IPA recently set up two workgroups aimed at proposed strategies that would remedy the problems related to the theoretical and practical diversity in psychoanalysis. The task of a first such group consists in exploring means to define the so-called "clinical evidence"; in other words, 'to explore how clinical observations are being used, how they can be used and how they can best be used to test interpretations and theories' (Hanly 2010a). The task of a second such group is to search for methods to better integrate the psychoanalytical theoretical edifice. One of its purposes is 'to clarify theoretical differences where logically irreconcilable differences exist and to explore directions in which their resolution might be found and to find and clarify real agreement, when it exists, despite apparent difference and even contradiction' (Hanly 2010b). Whether or not these

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groups will make progress on any of these fronts is something that remains to be seen. The truth is that during the last decades many have attempted to clarify the complex relationship between theory and practice in psychoanalysis. (Thomä & Kächele 1975; Strenger 1991; Fonagy et al 1999; Bernardi 2003; Canestri et al. 2006; Jiménez 2006, 2008, 2009; Kächele, Schachter & Thomä 2008).

In a recent paper (Jiménez 2009), I stated that two main obstacles yet stand in the way of convergence and divergence in psychoanalytic practice: first, the epistemological and methodological problems in relation to the construction of theory in psychoanalysis and especially the inaccessibility, in any reliable way, of what psychoanalysts really do in the intimacy of their practice. I proposed to separate, at least in part, theory from practice in psychoanalysis, in an attempt to grasp and consider psychoanalysts' practice in its own merits. All things considered, however, the fact that psychoanalytic theory and practice have a certain degree of autonomy and that the degree of correspondence between each other is much less than believed, it does not mean that theory and practice do not interact, albeit this interaction is not as simple as it seems.

An area in which this interaction can be studied is the area of the theory of dream formation in relation to the technique of dream interpretation. What I stated back in 1990 continues to be valid today; namely, that few analysts will agree with the absolute emphasis Freud gave to the theory of wish fulfillment as an explanation for dream formation and dream work. However, alternative theories have had, in general, little success'. (Jiménez 1990, p. 445).

Lansky (1992) and Reiser (1997) highlight the fact that Freud's primary objective in *The Interpretation of Dreams* was to explain how the mind works when producing dreams. His interest was not placed on the psychoanalytical process or the place that working with dreams has in it.

For over 50 years, *The Interpretation of Dreams* was the most potent theory to explain the dreaming phenomenon. As a neurologist, Freud built his theory based on the neuroscience of his time and, although present-day neuroscience has substantially modified the parcel of knowledge available in Freud's time, his interpretation continues to be an unavoidable benchmark in scientific controversies about the act of dreaming, either to counter his points of view or to defend his "classical" theory of dreams as "wish fulfillment" (Boag 2006; Nir & Tononi 2009; Colace 2010). To be sure, it is not my intention to get into that controversy here.

### **The split between the theory of genesis of dreams and the technique of their interpretation**

In this presentation I attempt to show how the technique of dream interpretation has *de facto* assigned increasing importance to the so-called manifest dream, contrary to Freud's systematically repeated explicit warning that one should not fall into the temptation of regarding the manifest content as a *genuine* psychical product.

The following is representative of a large number of relevant passages: 'It is natural that we should lose some of our interest in the manifest dream. It is bound to be a matter of indifference to us whether it is well put together, or is broken up into a series of disconnected separate pictures. Even if it has an apparently sensible exterior, we know that this has only come about through dream-distortion and have as little organic relation to the internal content of the dream as the façade of an Italian church has to its structure and plan' (Freud 1916/17, p. 165).

The practice of dream interpretation has nevertheless followed a different path. Since the pioneering work of Erikson (1954), there has been a steady flow of publications stressing the important part the manifest dream can and does in fact play in the clinical use of dreams (Spanjaard 1969; Brooks Brenneis 1975; Curtis & Sachs 1976; Stolorow 1978; Grunert 1979; Ehebald 1981; Stolorow & Atwood 1982; Fosshage 1983; Thomä & Kächele 1987; Jiménez 1990; Reiser 1997; Blechner 2001; Robbins 2004). In 1954, Erikson described the situation in the following terms: 'unofficially, we often interpret dreams entirely or in parts on the basis of their manifest appearance. Officially, we hurry at every confrontation with a dream to crack its manifest appearance as if it were a useless shell and to hasten to discard this shell in favor of what seems to be the more worthwhile core (Erikson 1954, p. 17). This trend appears to have intensified during the last 50 years. Thus, Robbins states that, currently, 'much of dream interpretation in every day practice involves reflection about the dream as a primary gestalt expression of mind that is unique, rather than a cover-up for something else' (Robbins 2004, p. 357).

It could be said that in the technique of dream interpretation a split has arisen between the theory of the genesis of dreams, which was upheld by Freud to the end of his life and which supports the so-called 'classical' technique, and the technique that takes the manifest content seriously. This time, the development of practice has preceded that of theory: to this day there is no universally accepted overall theory of dream formation that bears out the *de facto* technical opinion that there is an 'organic relationship' between the manifest and the latent content, i.e. with the rest of the individual's mental life. All things considered, Greenberg & Pearlman (1999) are of the opinion that current neurobiological findings suggest 'that dreams serve an integrative and adaptive function and that we can see this, illustrated in the manifest dream without resorting to ideas about disguise. This leads to the idea that the language of [the manifest] dream is different from the language of waking life and that it needs translation rather than interpretation. Dreams can be understood as dealing with problems that are active at the time of dreaming but that are problems because of their connection with earlier unresolved problems' (Greenberg & Pearlman 1999 p. 762). Similar ideas were put forward by French and Fromm (1964), who suggested that the manifest dream expresses a focal conflict and an attempt to solve that conflict. Much earlier, Jung (1934) had suggested that "the manifest dream picture is the dream itself and contains the whole meaning of the dream... we would do better to say that we are dealing with something like a text that is unintelligible..." (Jung 1934 p. 149). To be fair, *The Interpretation of Dreams* contains a second theory about dream formation, which purports that dreams are the expression of the primary mental process that differs

qualitatively from waking thoughts and, because of that, they are incomprehensible from the perspective of the secondary mental process (Robbins 2004). Seemingly, such would be a sort of protolanguage (*Ursprache*) requiring translation, but not interpretation. Matte Blanco (1988) states that the translation of such language should consider the existence of a different logic, which combines in different ways with the Aristotelian or bivalent logic that is akin to the secondary mental process (Jiménez 1990).

All things considered, the so-called classical technique, proposed by Freud, is based on the assumption that all dreams are an expression of the hallucinatory satisfaction of repressed desires. The predominant contemporary trend – especially amongst the British school – is to understand dreams as the expression of a representation of the here-and-now transference of the psychoanalytic session. For some psychoanalysts, especially those influenced by the Ego Psychology, such manner of interpreting dreams neglects the recovery of memories; an important factor of the change process (Loden 2003). For Morton Reiser (1997, p. 895) 'the manifest dream reflects mind/brain processes as they attempt to resolve current life problems and conflicts, including the forms in which they are expressed in the transference. The meaningful content of the dream is related to these current life problems, as well as to the past. The manifest dream images are drawn both from the current life context and from images registered during earlier conflictual experiences relevant to the present'. But, this topic leads us into another controversy; i.e. the one about the possibility of recovering memories during the therapeutic process and the therapeutic value of it. For Mauro Mancía, the dream has symbol-generating functions which provide an outlet by which affective experiences and fantasies and defenses stored as part of an unrepressed unconscious in the implicit memory can be represented in pictorial terms, then thought and rendered verbally (Mancía 2004, p.530). All things considered, Fonagy thinks that implicit memories would only be accessible via the analysis of the transference (Fonagy 1999).

Of course, any theory of the genesis and interpretation of dreams inevitably runs up against the same core problem: the actual experience of dreaming is not accessible and can be deduced only from the record of the dreamer's recollections. We resort in this case to the 'hypothesis of distortion-consistency' (von Zeppelin & Moser, 1987), which postulates that the fundamental structure and dynamic of the dream as dreamt remains intact in spite of the lacunae and distortions to which the process of remembering gives rise. In this sense, I understand by manifest dream the account given by the patient of the dream, which may or may not be enriched with subsequent associations.

### **The construction of the meaning of dreams in the psychoanalytical process**

In the clinical material that I will submit next I intend to show how the joint work between the patient and the analyst with the manifest dream, within the context of a vigorous psychoanalytical process, builds meanings that contribute toward deepening the therapeutic process and thus facilitate the recovery of archaic memories and the integration of split parts of the self. I suggest that what Freud

calls latent content is the product of the joint construction of meaning between patient and analyst. In this manner, we turn around the Freudian model. Based on the manifest dream; namely, of the patient's dream narration, the analysts-patient dyad not only recovers implicit or repressed meanings, but also builds new meanings that become an integral part of the old ones. In other words, interpreting a dream consists not only of redirecting them to alleged original sources in latent thought, but continuing with the meaning-creating process that the brain is continuously working on.

In a previous paper (Jiménez 2009), I suggested that the analyst's task consists in a continued process of validation that includes validation, conversation and interaction. Thus, the knowledge achieved in the process is a social and linguistic construct of an inter-subjective reality between the patient and the analyst. This means that the interpretation of a given dream must be "negotiated" with the patient within the context of the patient's emotional history, of the history of the analytic process and of the here and now of the session. All things considered, the communicational validation does not suffice. If we are to take seriously the nucleus of the psychoanalytic theory about therapeutic change – which purports that investigation and cure go hand in hand – then, the construction of the narrative truth must also be validated by the curative effect of its rhetoric force (Spence 1982). In this manner, the interpretation of a given dream is validated with the changes observed in the patient. I would expect these concepts to become clearer with the clinical material that I will present to you next.

### **Carmen's dreams**

Carmen is just beginning her sixth year of analysis, with a frequency of 4 sessions per week. She came to consult me on her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, because she could no longer tolerate the depressive pain that had been afflicting her for many years. She had been involved in the resistance to the Pinochet dictatorship, during which she had been exposed to dangerous situations and suffered traumatic losses of companions of both sexes in the struggle. Fifteen years earlier her partner had been killed, and this had plunged her into profound mourning. Her husband inhabited within her, like a living dead. After his death, Carmen had felt (and continued to feel) empty, dead, immensely alone, with no emotional contact with her small children. One year later, she consulted a psychotherapist, but after some months, this relation came to a traumatic end after a session in which caresses became sexual intercourse. The feeling of void and the longing for nearness that she developed in the transference process was only comparable to her intense resentment toward the therapist after this episode. She never went back, although at times, she entertained the fantasy of confronting him which what she feels was a rape. After some years, there was a second marriage, this time to Pedro Pablo, with whom she had a child. According to her, this relation "helped her to survive". Another reason for consulting me was the symptom of being invaded by fantasies of disease and death whenever her children were away. On those occasions she had to fight against the impulse to call the police to report an alleged misadventure

whenever one of her already teenage children was even a few minutes late in coming back home after the agreed time.

She has two brothers and is her parents' only daughter. She described her father as quite depressive and a workaholic, violent to his children when they were young. When referring to her mother, she made it a point to say that she always thought that her mother preferred her brothers. Carmen is afflicted by amnesia episodes, and whole periods of her life have been blanked away as a result of repression. It was only after years of analysis that she could bring up the topic of her sexuality and her difficulty to attain pleasure. An interesting fact is that after about two years of analysis she surprised me with her recollection of having met me at the end of the 1960s at university.

The first years of analysis, in which there prevailed an atmosphere of brittle patience, were used up by the analysis of the mourning, her guilt feelings and the idealization of Roberto. The result was the progressive appearance of strong aggressiveness and an urge to compete. Carmen's apparent modesty and meekness broke down a couple of times with episodes of intense rage against me, during which she toyed with the idea of abandoning the treatment. As a rule, these episodes were unleashed by situations in which she could no longer fail to acknowledge that I was a different person, with independent opinions of my own: her intense rage emerged from the painful experience of humiliation. The idealization of the analyst was hiding feelings of envy and resentment against men, especially her father. When idealization decreased, there appeared a threatening erotic transference which, as an expression of a fantasy of erotic and narcissistic fusion, proved to be a defense against the awareness of her wish to be a man and of her deep feelings of worthlessness because of being a woman, all of which had recently clearly appeared in her dreams.

Shortly before the session that I am presenting, the last of the week, Carmen spent a week abroad for work reasons. The session takes place a few days prior to a break for a week-and-a-half on my account. So it is a session between two breaks, one of them of four sessions and the other one of six, this one on my account. The session was reproduced from memory immediately after the sessions.

**P.:** Last night I had a dream: I was with Pedro Pablo (her husband) and there were three other men dressed in black. One of them lifted his shirt and showed an area of his skin, red, covered in eczema, oozing some excretion and this made an impact on me. Another man said, "at long last I find somebody who has the same I have", and lifted his trouser leg up to his knee and also showed some inflamed skin, which was oozing some kind of juice. There was something the matter with the other man, but I can't remember. I didn't like all that and told Pedro Pablo that we should leave. We had to go across some desolate stony place: it was like those shots of the aftermath of a nuclear disaster in science fiction movies set in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We came across a group of people, this time women, all of them also wearing black. It was necessary to go across a place that was like a dam, a gully, but it was very dangerous to do so because at intervals the water gushed in and flooded everything. We were thinking of crossing over, but one of the women,

M., an old acquaintance of mine, told me that it was extremely dangerous, that she had decided not to come along, because there were just a few minutes to find a place where to cross before the water came. Pedro Pablo and I began our crossing, but in a weird direction. Instead of walking across, we walked along lengthwise. It was a place full of caverns, creepy. Eventually, there were some broad stone stairs that we could climb to get to the other side. I said, "this way we shall be saved", and we began to climb the stairs. But Pedro Pablo did something, some kind of movement that suddenly raised me, together with the stairs, and left me hanging, about to fall into a very deep gully. I panicked, felt the wind on my face and didn't want to die. I begged Pedro Pablo to please bring me down, that I could fall and die at any moment. I woke up terrified, at around 5 o'clock in the morning, and had trouble going back to sleep. I was afraid of going on dreaming the same dream.

*(After her account of her dream, long minutes elapsed. The dream itself had been described in a slow way, with dramatic intensity, in a cautious way, as if she was choosing every word. The narration engaged me, aroused my curiosity and immediately prompted my own fantasies. Fleeting ideas crossed my mind. I thought that today was Thursday, before the week-end break and a few days before a 6-session break because of me. Pedro Pablo... Is it me, Juan Pablo? Could this movement that leaves her hanging at the edge of the gully be related to my absence? And those men, could they be castrated beings displaying their wounds? The men and women in black, and the dismal setting made me think of the prolonged pathological mourning, Carmen's chronic depression and the analytic crossing. Men and women apart, a couple attempting to negotiate the crossing along a landscape already devastated by a nuclear catastrophe... What type of primitive tragedy was being staged in the dream? Oedipal? The account had taken about fifteen minutes, and I had the feeling that in it, what had not been said was much more than what had been voiced, that what was important was silenced. For this reason, I opted for a circumspect and expectant attitude. Naturally, I had many elements to use as the basis to break the long silence that followed the account, for example, to ask for associations or ask her about what might have made M. take the decision not to cross to the other side. Yet, I waited for some more long minutes. I kept thinking and observing how she snuggled up on the therapy couch, pulling the blanket over her. What a difference between now and when she started analysis, already five years ago. Then, on coming in or leaving, she barely looked at me and the expression on her face was always sullen and afraid. It had been very difficult for her to make up her mind to lie down on the couch: it was a couple of months before she gave up the face-to-face mode. Now, on the contrary, she greeted me with a wide smile, looking straight into my face and after taking the blanket, she wrapped herself in it and lay down smoothly on the couch.)*

[She interrupts my thoughts]

**P.:** The dream has to do with my sexuality. Umm... It's terribly difficult for me to talk about it. Umm...In spite of being in analysis for years, I feel shame, fear. I don't

know. Why so much difficulty? Why can't I speak more freely and simply tell you things?...

[After a new silence]

**A.:** Tell me things that you already know about your dream, but that you don't mention, that you leave unsaid in your silences, and pauses and in the slow and cautious narration. For example, I believe that you know why M. appears in your dream, you must know what type of difficulties prevented M. from going across the dam.

**P.:** Umm... M. is homosexual, she is enormously afraid of men. [Silence] Sure, this fear to talk about my sexual fantasies. I always tend to throw them out no sooner they appear, as if I was terrified of acknowledging them

**A.:** Terrified of getting excited? That's quite dangerous. Crossing over the gully, getting into the caverns, sex. Apparently, you've got to have sex but without getting excited, with no pleasure, no enjoyment. Excitement and pleasure lead you to the edge of the gully. The dam may fail and you may suddenly be flooded with dangerous pleasure.

**P.:** Umm... Well [in a resolute tone] Yesterday there was something that I omitted. In Italy I was assigned a wonderful room, with a spectacular view. I had taken along some books, my favorite music, and I enjoyed lying down to read and listen to music. It was an enormous pleasure. For three nights I had intense erotic dreams about the delegate from Mexico, the enfant terrible of the seminar, that man was the star, as you said yesterday. The same one. Umm...

**A.:** Lying down, snuggling up, and beginning to feel good here, to feel pleasure. There appear fantasies, talking to me about them here... That is very dangerous.

**P.:** All these days I have been thinking that I must go far away, to Europe, and meet an attractive and intelligent fellow, to be able to have sexual fantasies safely, with no catastrophe taking place. But, umm... I realize that the Mexican man is a substitute for you. This thing's got to do with you. I feel quite ashamed and, what's more, afraid. As if I was a girl and you were to punish me severely for these thoughts.

*(I cannot help thinking that not only the Mexican but also Pedro Pablo in the dream are Juan Pablo substitutes, that is, substitutes for me. I feel enveloped in erotic idealization. I allow myself to be brushed by it and think of the boundaries between analysis and life. Many times Carmen gives me the impression of "living" me as a primal experience, not as transference but as a first experience, something new. There is something fused together, undifferentiated in my relationship with her. A thought crosses my mind: how far can a transference interpretation go? If in an interpretation I was to identify with her husband saying something like "it's you and I as a couple that are going across the dam, and therefore it is I that excites you, etc..." wouldn't I be triggering iatrogenia? The catastrophe, to go to bed with one's analyst? I realize that Carmen is indeed right to perceive the danger. It must have*



*been like this when she ended up by having sex with her first therapist. I must tread the narrow path between accepting taking the place of her man, but without going over the line of seduction. I think of the taboo of incest. How shall I go about it? I decide to approach the erotic transference fantasies with caution.)*

**A.:** However, it appears to be evident that yesterday and today you feel more secure on the couch because little by little you are making me get closer to your sexual fantasies. Obviously, the problem is that as you snuggle here, wrap yourself in the blanket...

**P.:** Yes, sure, I get ideas that I dare not voice.

**A.:** Not only is it necessary that you should travel to Europe, but there should also be another step, something happening here, a bridge between your trip and my interruption of next week. There is no danger there. You can talk today, Thursday. Then there's a three day break; afterwards, next, a few more days and you won't be seeing me for six sessions.

**P.:** Yes, that must be what reassures me here...

**A.:** That no catastrophe can take place. In any case, there are many points in your dream, much information that we won't have enough time to analyze today. There are just a few minutes before our time is up. You've been taking your time; everything has been very slow, cautious. It's as if you were revealing yourself and not revealing yourself.

*(I stop there, although I would have liked to go on saying something along these lines: What is it that is hidden? Is the eczematous, juice-oozing, inflamed skin a painful, searing, sexual excitement? What are we talking about? About mutilated men within you? Of something of yours that you see in men? What's this thing about homosexuality? In addition, you have always shown a Pedro Pablo who is little interested in sex, not very attractive to you, who even makes you suspect that he might be a homosexual. Yet in the dream, that Pedro Pablo is capable, with just a little movement to excite you to the point of panic and death anxiety. Could this dream possibly be submerged until here, during the analysis, there may be another combination of circumstances that will make you feel secure?)*

[As I was thinking this last thought, she surprised me by saying]

**P.:** I hope that this issue won't get submerged. Because I realize that it is crucial and important. Many things depend on my understanding my sexuality. I'm different, many things have changed. I am not terrified by the things of the past. I feel more self-confident in life, at work, with myself. Some very important things, which I can't quite understand, took place within me during this trip. It seems that I feel I can do things in a different way, that I can indeed lead a different kind of life, with more enjoyment, taking more pleasure in life.

Upon resuming the analytic work after my absence, Carmen frequently alluded to topics that had appeared in the dream. I was especially intrigued by the reference

to homosexuality, although its meaning escaped me! I had the impression that there was something erotized but, above all, confused in her relationship with me. This state of affairs became gradually clearer in the weeks that followed. Now, some of the key points in the process:

A few weeks after this session, Carmen brought a dream in which she appeared in a white '69 Peugeot car (she herself associated that it was the same color as the walls of my office). She associated it with a summer in her adolescence when she and three girlfriends went "cruising" in a car of the same make but of a different colour, in some seaside town. This was in 1969, the year when she first met me at the university. Throughout the associations she suddenly remembered another dream. She was in her gynecologist's office, in the gynecological position and the doctor said to her she had an infected anal fistula that should be lanced immediately because the pus was pressuring the frontal area, contaminating her genitals.

The unconscious situation became clear in a flash and I interpreted: "We must talk openly of a type of hidden relationship you have with me, that you, in your fantasy, have concealed in your body, precisely, between the anus and the vagina. In this fantasy you and I are engaged in a sort of permanent sexual intercourse, a 69, in which you suck my penis and I suck your vulva, and thus, you get to convince yourself that the penis is at times yours and at times mine. It is a confusing relationship that is causing you great distress; it is exerting a lot of pressure, and contaminating your sexuality. If we persist in not speaking of this openly, the contamination of your sexuality as a woman will continue". She strongly rejected this interpretation and the connection I had made with the (anal) control that she exercised over me during the sessions.

However, some days later she brought the following dream: "I am inside a roofed gymnasium; there are lots of people engaged in athletics. Suddenly I feel an itch in the genital area and I ask S. (a co-worker with whom she competes) to go with me to the toilet where I ask her to look what I have down there. I pull my knickers down and, much to my surprise and fear I find that I have an enormous penis, with something like an allergy on the glans". Later she added that what was going on in the gym was an athletics competition for women: there were only women involved.

In an incidental way, these episodes shed light on the unconscious motives underlying her sexual acting out with her former therapist. They also made it possible to understand the great rage and subsequent disillusion: the unconscious fantasy of at least sharing the longed for penis with the therapist was drastically belied by reality; after which she felt more empty and incomplete than ever.

In the period that followed, Carmen questioned and was perplexed about her gender identity. She thought she had lived her entire life thinking of herself as a man not a woman and this had led her to making big mistakes in life. After this period, the early maternal transference appeared with much more clarity and the erotization disappeared completely. I then understood that the homosexuality in the first dream was an expression of confusion in her sexual identity caused by the

potent phantasy of being equipped with a phallus, probably, in turn, a defense against her devalued self-esteem.

## **Discussion**

Most likely, all clinicians would agree with me in that the therapeutic value of the interpretation of dreams varies with the very diverse clinical situations. There are patients that rarely bring a dream to their therapy sessions without damaging the process because of it; and yet, there are others, such as is the case of Carmen, good dreamers, who, in turn, have a special access to their internal world who are able to communicate their dreams constructively to therapists. Using the couch or not and the frequency of the weekly sessions are also factors that bear an influence and there are therapists who are more bent on using clinically the dreams than others. It is also true that the technique of eliciting associations remains valid. In this discussion I shall attempt to outline the technical principles that – I believe – guided by work with Carmen.

In the first place, I want to emphasize the willingness to listen to the narration of the dream in the session that I transcribed in detail above. I believe that such disposition matches Ehebald's (1981) recommendation of listening to the patient's narration in a manner such of "dreaming with her" (mitträumen), internally experiencing the emotions and occurrences that the dream awakens in oneself, within the context of the transference-countertransference. In this case, the focus was placed on the action of narrating the dream (Tucket 2000), especially, the manner in which Carmen was telling it, while observing her manner of accommodating on the couch (transference enactment?). The images and emotions that the narration awoke in me – basically, erotic fantasies and emotions – were also framed within the patient's history, which brought to my memory her traumatic episode with her previous therapist.

The second noteworthy aspect of this case is that the patient herself is who underlines the main theme of the dream; namely, "the dream has to do with my sexuality". I wish to highlight this point, because it shows what I understand as the co-construction of meaning.

Among the multiple meaning possibilities – of such an apparently bizarre dream – the patient points out a very clear one: it has to do with her own sexuality. At first, I could not understand how the dream imagery could relate to Carmen's sexuality, although for a long time I had been increasingly suspicious about the erotic transfer.

It is precisely at this point where I believe the manifest dream work begins. Cautiously, I keep confronting Carmen with dream images, relating them with her erotized manner of narrating the dream; always guided by my countertransference. She responds with associations that evidence the huge anxiety aroused by her sexual desires towards me. It is interesting to note, however, that this is an oblique dialogue, we never speak directly about the subject, even if we both know what we are talking about; our strict adherence to the manifest dream seems to keep us on

safe grounds. At any rate, the idea is to leave open the meaning horizon and not to saturate it with interpretations. In the construction of meaning, the patient has a much more important role than that granted by the classical technique. On this point, I believe to have followed Isakower's recommendation – as mentioned by Reiser (1997, p. 903) – in terms of committing the patient's interest in '*getting back into the dream*'.

The dreams brought by Carmen to subsequent sessions went on to clarify the central conflict and resolve the erotic transference that had interfered with our analytic work for a long time. The manifest content of such dreams revealed, in an extraordinarily precise manner, profoundly repressed childhood sexual fantasies.

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