

Roman Telerovský

THE TISSUE OF POIETIC DREAMING (III)

Psychic automatism could be defined as *preconscious dream* (Havlíček, 1966), by which its location and nature are topographically given. And this brings us back to the beginning. Psychic automatism overlaps with what at the start I called the *dream space*, a region existing between the systems of the unconscious and the preconscious.

In short, this *dream space* is integral to our psyche and fulfills a specific function. It is a precondition for mental life. Usually we are not aware of it as the processes that pertain to it operate for the most part beyond the realm of consciousness, similar to the body's process of digestion. I am speaking here of *dreaming* as the unconscious operation of a "metabolism of imagination." To repeat, it is a *zone* that in my opinion is at the heart of the *poietic dreaming self*, and according to other authors it is also the locus where mental disorders originate. Accursed poet Karel Šebek, a poet who resisted psychosis and the daemons pulling him toward death in the course of his life, wrote in one poem: "I will never answer the question myself if the end of the poem isn't the end of life ... I write to keep from dying." In spite of his occasional descents into the maelstrom of mental illness, the power of his *poietic* dreaming self allowed him to live on the edge of the abyss and to maintain contact with himself and with the outside world up until the time he took the decision to disappear without a trace.

It is difficult to pinpoint the moment when the continuous and automatic process of *dreaming* changes into *poietic* dreaming and/or *poetry creating*, but it is not my intention here to provide a comprehensive answer to this question as it would take us too far afield; into the issues of particular poetic approaches, methods and modes of expression, of conscious and unconscious motifs in one's own writing and the promulgation of one's poetry, the question of the influence of personality, the Ego and other instances of mind, society and the cultural and artistic context in which works of poetry arise. Certainly we might agree with Zbyněk Havlíček', (who was



Robert Lindroth, dream from 1996

The Apparition

Marc Chagall, *The Apparition*, 1918

And dreams overwhelmed me: a bedroom, square, empty. In one corner, a single bed and me on it. It is getting dark.

Suddenly, the ceiling opens and a winged creature descends with great commotion, filling the room with movement and clouds.

A swish of wings fluttering.

I think: an angel! I can't open my eyes; it's too bright, too luminous.

After rummaging about on all sides, he rises and passes through the opening in the ceiling, carrying with him all the light and the blue air.

Once again it is dark. I wake up.

My picture "The Apparition" evokes that dream.

Marc Chagall, in *My Life*

both poet and psychoanalyst), and his dictum that *the work of poetry is higher from the qualitative point of view than the dream work* (Prolegomenon of Poetry, 1951), while at the same time recognizing that the work of poetry is not identical to conscious creation. The process of *dreaming* is modified in *poetry* (a) by the presence of a special state of inspiration in which the permeability of the inner and outer becomes wide open, (b) by the perviousness and openness for such mental activity in which imagination play along with conceptual thinking, (c) an ability to observe and record (in writing, for instance) dreaming's own movement, which necessarily influences and specifically shapes it in return.

In his conception of surrealism and poetic work, Breton was inspired in part by Freud's technique of free association, and it could be loosely

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Dreams by the Foot

I see, and Jim sees at the same time, a big bird, but I realize immediately that this is the first of a flock, which appears to be fanning out. There are at least one hundred birds. They fly slowly, like the flocks of birds that can be seen at sea. I count them in a second—they are 85. They pass not far from us and lower their flight. We then see that they are beautiful complete white birds, except for the neck and part of the legs; at the end of their legs they have extremely long and almost cylindrical feet, sugar-loaf feet. The symmetry of black and white feathers makes me think that these birds are wearing black suede shoes with straps on the instep of the foot and around the ankle, like those worn by women. These birds seem to wear shoes and black ties. Their feet dangle below them. "You'd swear, sportsmen skiing in the air," says Jim.

(fragment of a dream of Renée Gauthier, in *La Révolution surréaliste* No #1, December 1, 1924)



I dreamed that I got a package in the mail, the return address said it was from Ellen DeGeneres, but when I opened it it was really from Bruno Jacobs. It was filled with a crazy amount of fish and sea related surrealist objects. Concrete feet with fins coming off them, flat fish bowls, etc. There was also a letter which I didn't get a chance to read before I woke up, though it had a hole torn or burnt through it in the center, which I think is in reference to my copy of Kurt Seligmann's *History of Magic*, which has a center part of a page torn out rather mysteriously in the section on Kabbalah.

Steven Cline (Peculiar Mormyrid group),
dream of September 6, 2016



I had to enlarge two times a work by a certain artist and the specialist to do this kind of operation was Bruno Montpied. We were seated, B.M. and I, on a bench at a table and we were talking. B.M. showed me how he was going to do it: by using his bare foot (the left one), that he had taken out of his shoe.

Sasha Vlad, dream of March 21, 2014

Photo: Bruno Montpied

The Black Foot

A few years ago, I witnessed in astonishment several fortuitous and seemingly insignificant events. Their chain, of which I have managed to break only a few links, constitutes a proof of the objectification of chance in the direction of human desires. This chain began the moment I decided to make, based on an old dream, a three-dimensional object. The starting point was my dream of October 28, 1976, about black people:

“I take part in a scientific expedition to Africa. I then find myself among black people. I have to be introduced to them and they have to initiate me into their mysterious ceremonies. There is a clear relationship with black women. The people wear strange wigs on their heads. I expect ritual dances to begin. Someone shows me an object (I forgot its name) that men wear on their ankles during the dance. He explains that this object stings them as the dance becomes wilder, and increases their ecstasy. He demonstrates this on a black artificial foot, which has prickles attached to it. I show a strong desire to own this object. In the end I receive one as a gift. I see that the tips of certain prickles are broken and that several are missing.”

To make the object, I needed the plaster cast of a foot. I looked for one long enough, asking my acquaintances and searching places that might have had one. In the end, I resigned myself to making a cast of my own foot. It was exhausting work. I had

to sit by myself next to a water faucet, I was surrounded by bags of plaster... It took a long time but I was desperate to succeed. After multiple trials and improvisations I finally managed to obtain a suitable molding. This plaster foot was still unformed, so I had to laboriously shape, scrape and polish it. Finally, I painted it all black. That gave it a kind of ghostly monstrous quality. For a long time I didn't know what to do with it. I sometimes took it in my hands, only to put it out of sight immediately with mixed feelings.

Therefore, I had before me my own *free* foot, *isolated*, and also *black*, a symbol of my freedom and my activity (it being also “black”). A desire materialized as an ambivalent symbol. Through its history, it traced a difficult to see parabola that I had to follow in order to get to a momentary vital status. It was as though I had finally found the right key to my mental lock... and the connexities were animated. I felt like I put my foot in half erased traces, that I had good reason to believe had once belonged to me. This is what the poetic language of dreams, the compelling words of the unconscious, in many respects so close to the hermetic “language of the birds,” led me to.

It was precisely at that time that I first read with interest about the Greek myth of Melampus. One day I suddenly came up with the idea of comparing myself to that Egyptian who was looking for the “language of the birds” and who finally understood it, because, according to the legend, “young snakes had licked his ears clean.” The superficial impression produced by a seemingly casual remark was soon replaced by the anxiety of enlightenment—I understood that the Greek name meant *black foot*. The nature of this link took me back to the myth, which I was shocked to learn that it wasn't of Aeolian, but rather of African origin (the inhabitants of those regions were called in the past “melampodes,” i.e., *black feet*).

Thus, this circle of correspondences goes back to my “African” dream, to what is certainly not a starting point, but the first I was able to realize. A magic arc had connected myth and lived reality, the subjectivity of the dream having been dissolved again in the objectivity of desire.



Martin Stejskal, 1984



Robert Lindroth, dream from 1997



Wine Glass for Lovers, Bruno Jacobs, dream from 1987

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said that in the position of the patient during an analytic session he saw an analogy to the poet in the act of writing. I have offered a different analogy that posits a connection between the poet and the psychoanalyst, rather, the respective attitudes the poet adopts in *writing* and the analyst adopts in *listening* to the patient (Telerovský, 2008). I will once again have recourse to Bion and Breton to outline this analogy from a somewhat different angle. Bion suggests the concept of “reverie” as tool for the analyst. According to Grotstein (2009b) with this Bion points to somnolent, wakeful dreaming, wide open and passive, unfocused attention, the result of which is the formation of an ultra-receptive tuning of an analyst for unconscious resonance with what comes from the patient as well as from the analysts own unconscious. It is expected that the analyst will *dream* the session. Breton (1924) required that the poet achieve a similar state, unbiased, impartial to his own interests, morals, aesthetics, or anything else. Poets should be “modest recording instruments” who make “no effort whatsoever to filter” and in whose work they have made themselves “into simple receptacles of so many echoes.”

Both the poet and the analyst are looking for unconscious, emotional truth. This is uncovered for the patient by psychoanalyst through interpretation. The poet’s situation is slightly different. For a work of poetry to arise, even if a pure record of received echoes, which is more Breton’s ideal than an attainable end, it is necessary that at a minimum it takes shape through displacements and condensation as protective distortions that retains the poet’s unconscious emotional truth in an imagery and a conceptual disguise. Poetry *creating* or poetic thought at once reveals and conceals this unconscious emotional truth. It is a libidinal game of partially exposing and displaying secret and forbidden meanings (Havlíček, 1969) and revealing desire’s subversive nature and its capacity to reorganize, and at the same time a merciless battle and magical transforming of what oppresses the poet. The magnetizing power of poetic thought and the force of its imagery is a function of the poet’s ability to grasp his unconscious emotional truth and embody it in his work. The work of poetry sustains its effect and may retroactively evoke it in the receiver, but as has been pointed out many times this transpires only if the receiver also becomes a poet, even if temporarily. In the same way the analyst must dream the analytic situation, the receiver must dream the work of poetry (not conceive it in the context of rational or narrative discourse). The reception of poetry is *poietic dreaming*, or a misunderstanding.

Lautréamont (1870) envisaged that *poetry will be made by all*. I take this to mean not that everyone should write poetry, but as a reference to the

poietic dreaming power in each person. It is the poietic dreaming movement within that gives one’s life personal meaning – and more than it, it gives one this meaning to experience, to rediscover and recreate, and by doing so to shape oneself and one’s world. The work of poetry is a condensed formation that does not let one sleep because it evokes the *poietic* dreaming function of the self. The importance of surrealism and psychoanalysis lies in their pointing to how essential this *function* and *realm* are for mental life. It is nothing more than allowing this function to work and to prevent the stagnation of mental life.

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