



Dreaming Aloud; an Essay on the Similarities between Poems and Dreams

The group with whom I learned dreamwork evolved from an Alchemical Dream Workshop given at the C.G. Jung institute in Boston by Robert Bosnak, the author of the best seller "A Little Course in Dreams" and "Trekking in the Wilderness of Dream." The work that went on in this group is surprisingly close to the heart of the poetic process. Both the poet and the image-oriented analyst play the role of a blind diviner. Both discover a Munda Imaginalis where opposites co-exist, a world where truth moves, elusive, effusive, never fixed.

Often the poem, like the dream, rises from the unconscious through images already complete, and like the dream, it too speaks a foreign language. In the alchemist's chamber, the poem is a container which holds the entire range of all possibilities. It cooks the polarities of its tensions much in the way the dream cooks the contradictory aspects of the psyche. Yet where the dream is a totally unconscious process, the poem needs the faculties of the conscious mind to give it form and language. To use Pound's terms, the dream relies more on phanopoeia, a simultaneity of the image making mind whereas the poem, while heavily indebted to its imagery, draws on logopoeia, or the "dance" of the verbal mind.

Memory surfaces unexpectedly in the dream, shifts images, mixes our sense and dusts off the hall of mirrors in which the mind lives. Through memory we create the future as well as the past, because memory carries our imaginative perspective of the extended moments which have been significant in our lives. The unshed ocean of anger toward an absent parent. The train of swallowed sighs at the initial moment of heartbreak. The partitioned square of envy for the parquetry of a neighbor's sparkling foyer. Passion poured into the ice trays. The murderous rage rubbed out by the dissolved oils in the bath.

The eternal moment that one re-imagines in memory is the same moment that extends into the future reinforcing the attitude that already developed with its own built-in emotional freight. Memory relates to change and loss, for we are always losing something-- our youth or our childhood, which we may continually recreate. Since we are naturally inclined toward those images which we believe entrap or liberate us, the strength of our convictions can paradoxically create both a personality complex and its cure. These images live and grow like wild children. And the magic of poetry is that the poem takes on its own life and lives as a household shelter for these children as well.

Poems make connections and are themselves a place where the mind lifts off from memory. Some of the memories which trigger dreams may not always produce the beautiful image, yet they do tend to haunt us with the powerful image. And the poet is usually first moved to write from an emotional response. Through imagery and association one then builds the pieces of the collage. By thinking metaphorically one approximates a sensation and works with it, expanding and naming. If the poem succeeds, it articulates a discovery. Thus the act of the work is its own purpose and wins for us its own immeasurable rewards.

Like dreams, poems reweave experience imaginatively, extend beyond a linear time continuum, and resolve by compensation. Imaginative dream work relates to the poetic process in that it reworks the images until they yield their emotional core. When we work with dreams, we are looking for the glue that holds the given images in relationship, usually the clustered constellation of feelings, beliefs or attitudes that delivers new insights to the dreamer. Likewise, we learn about our own psyches from the poem as it creates itself.

Often we do not know where the poem is headed, and if we have an intention to begin with, it's quite possible we will conclude by saying something we had no intention of saying. Something we didn't know we knew. Our poems offer us a type of psychological salvation not unlike the saving grace of our dreams.

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