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Article

DREAM WORK AND POETIC PROCESS: DRAMATIZATION, RHYME, AND PROSODY

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Dramatization in dream work unfortunately has been ignored in psychoanalytic literature although it was emphasized early by Freud in *On Dreams* (1900) and late in *An Outline For Psychoanalysis* (1940). In addition to explaining the need to elaborate on dramatization, I propose that two further poetic devices dream work seem to make use of be considered. They are rhyme and prosody.

Ella Freeman Sharpe in her *Dream Analysis* (1937) brilliantly compared the condensation in dream work to the metaphoric processes the poet uses. She well illustrated how a single dream can be understood by seeing it in terms of metaphor, that language most closely connected to the body and, therefore, to the unconscious. Her emphasis was on how to get at latent content, manifest content in her time still considered only a façade for what is latent.

It wasn't until nearly twenty years later that ego psychologists using the structural model began to see manifest content as being more than a façade and containing meaning of its own. But their understanding was a bit limited. They usually saw the manifest dream as being more analogous to pathology rather than as a strong expression of health. Ernst Kris, like Sharpe, in his *Psychoanalytic Explorations of Art* (1956) compared dream work to the creative process but still as somewhat of a pathological state, as a regression in the service of the ego. Not being an independently functioning artist himself, Kris like most psychoanalytic writers used *applied* psychoanalysis to understand the creative process, particularly in relation to dreams, rather than an integrative approach where the analyst combines his or her experience with both crafts, which in turn would lead to a clear position on art and dreaming as expressions of health.

Laurence Kubie was the striking exception to most of the writers on manifest content. By using the *topographical* model in *Neurotic Distortion of the Creative Process* (1956) he saw creativity and implicitly dreaming as a means of enhancing flexibility which, simply put, was itself his determinant for health.

Ephron and Carrington (1967), without strongly stating that dramatization should be considered as a key to dream work, demonstrated what they had discovered in their sleep research laboratory, i.e. as a patient becomes healthier, his or her dreams develop plots with fuller and fuller characterization.

Pinchas Noy (1968) also made an important breakthrough that largely has gone unnoticed in understanding the primary process of the dream work. Using the computer as his model, he came to understand that primary processes has its own line of development, much as psychosexual stages and the development of the self, which moves both in dreams and creativity from primitive processes to more and more sophisticated and, therefore, healthier processes. So we might say that as the

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development of these five aspects of dream work – dramatization along with condensation, displacement, symbolization, and secondary elaboration -- leads not only to more and more sophisticated dreams but to a more sophisticated preconscious. As Kubie would have it when the preconscious strengthens, it can shuttle more and more easily between unconsciousness on its underside and consciousness on its top side.

{Later Susan Deri (1984) well-illustrated how if the preconscious becomes too rigidly attached to unconsciousness then a person develops hysteria and an acting out personality. If it becomes too rigidly attached to consciousness then the person manifests black and white, rigid obsessive qualities.}

This shuttling process, this intrapsychic flexibility, is yet another illustration of dramatization at work. In creating a poem or a play, both of which I have written for nearly 50 years, I am well aware of shuttling both in the text and the subtext -- what is manifest verbally, and also what is unspoken but revealed by action -- so that the audience and reader get emotionally involved. In writing poetry which I do rapidly without revision, shuttling is much easier for me than in creating drama because in my quirkily-wired brain my auditory imagination more easily hears than sees images.

When I first met my literary cohort Frederick Turner who had just published parts of my book-length poem *Manhattan Carnival: A Dramatic Monologue* in the *Kenyon Review* (1979) he asked me to show him how I played basketball. I thought this a strange request from a Brit, who didn't know much about the sport but he knew that I had started writing poetry after I was injured and could no longer play point guard. So we went to my local concrete park with a basketball and I began becoming what sports announcers call "unconscious" in my shuttling movements across court and to the basket.

Turner said, "I thought so. This is the way you write!"

"I wrote *Manhattan Carnival* quickly in couplets," I said, "because somehow by using rhyme I can hear metaphors better. As a poet, not yet in training as a psychoanalyst, I intuited that there was an unconscious connection between metaphors and rhyme."

"I know what you mean, in my own way. I myself am working on an essay with Ernst Poppel called "The Neural Lyre: Poetic Meter, The Brain, And Time." (His effort in doing analogous work would be published in *Poetry Magazine* and then reprinted in the 1989 anthology *Expansive Poetry*.)

"When I write a long dramatic poem in particular," I said, "working this way allows me to build in a subtext without too much consciousness on my part."

"Sometimes I write a narrative poem in the same way."

"Whereas I shuttle writing poetry without re-writing, it is harder for me to write plays because I don't hear stage images. I have to keep re-writing because I am more conscious."

"I have a similar process. But many other poets are different, slower."

"Sure. Even in the couplet of 'Adam's Curse,' Yeats defined his process as "A line will take us hours maybe..."

"Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought/ Our stitching and unstitching will be naught," we both said and walked off the court.

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That rhyme works for me to intensify the shuttling process seems to me yet another element in the construction of a manifest dream – and for all of us at times. No matter how everyone's brain is wired preconsciously, we use rhyme.

This was borne out at the beginning of psychoanalytic literature in a little quoted passage from Freud's *On Dreams*. When talking about condensation he said, "The most convenient way of bringing together two unconscious dream thoughts is to alter the verbal form of one of them and this brings it halfway to meet the other which may be similarly clothed in a new form of words. A parallel process is involved in hammering out a rhyme, where a similar sound has to be sought in the same way as a common element in our present case."

Psychoanalyst and linguist, Theodore Thass-Thienemann in *The Interpretation of Language* (1968) where he posited etymology is another royal road to the unconscious, said:

"Where there is an association of sounds, there will also be an association of meanings... If one inspects...one or another treatise on rhyme, one will find again and again an unwitting confirmation of the psychological interpretation through philological data... Sound associations elicit some pleasure from the store of narcissistic echolalia as experienced by the small child. It springs up from the earliest unconscious layer of language. It is genuine with the forgotten language of unconscious fantasies. The analytic interpretation tries to translate the language of unconscious fantasies into the common spoken language. The rhyme is one of the characteristics of this almost forgotten language."

Years ago I had a patient who couldn't remember his dreams. Though he wasn't a poet, writing rhymes provided him with a means of developing manifest content where the other elements of dream work failed him. Just before he went to sleep, as he was about to slip into unconsciousness, he wrote down rhymes on a yellow pad. He brought the rhymes into session which led him not only to the basic emotions he was trying to express as Ernest Hartmann (1998) said manifest content does, but also to a plethora of associations and deeper dream thoughts.

Now I would like to posit yet a seventh element of dream work I use in poetry -- which can lead us to health i.e. prosody, metrical emphasis. In the literary essay "Rhyme" (1990), I detailed how rhyme itself is a *rhythmic* device as well as a musical one. Some self psychologists listen for what they call prosody in a session and often when they are listening for the context of a dream. Going back to draw a parallel in poetry to Noy's conception of developed primary process, the more practiced and sophisticated a poet becomes, the more he or she will use better and better free verse rhythms and "formal" meters in their poems. In listening for a patient's rhythms, particularly in the repetition of a key metaphor over many sessions (in one dream or a series of dreams) prosody seems to support how metaphor has organized the split off, often disassociated part of the psyche. Further, by projection the rhythmically-driven and repetitive key metaphor comes to help create the psychoanalytic dialogue.

Thus we can by seeing the analogues between the poetic processes and dream work, by listening carefully for these three almost ignored elements of dream work: dramatization, rhyme, and rhythm -- along with the key metaphor that usually appears in all dreams -- we can better grasp the manifest content and the emotionality it conveys. In that way, as Hartmann (1998) contends, we don't always need the latent content to get the core emotions in the present. Also, from my point of view, we can intuit what is on the underside of our preconscious and in doing so we might be able to anticipate communication of repressed traumas as well as the fantasies connected to them.

I have illustrated the workings of metaphor in two clinical case studies published in *The Psychoanalytic Review*. In *“Metaphor And Trauma: The Bag Lady And Her Bag of Jewels*.

(2006) I tried to demonstrate how the key metaphors in her manifest content of short dreams led her to recall a series of related traumas. In *“The Man In The BMW: Manifest Content, Trauma, and Unconscious Fantasy”*(2008) I addressed how the manifest content of five dreams told over several years in which the key metaphor of his being “a car in neutral” revealed how treatment was progressing in the re-plotting of his initial narrative until he finally was able to turn the key in a his own real BMW.

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As I began to explore these processes in dream work I started to teach neuroscientific concepts in my seminars on Symbolization And Creativity. In contemplating Kubie and Deri’s work on the shuttling process I grappled with how neuropsychanalysis could account for it. I was enlightened by the findings of K.D. Hoppe who had been studying patients with brains split by auto accidents. They had severed corpus collosums -- that packed bundle of nerve fibers in the cortex that connects the right and left hemispheres – which interfered with their intrapsychic communications. Thus their inability to repair the damaged bridges in their mind had destroyed their abilities to condense their emotionally-charged thoughts into dream metaphors.

In the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (1977) Hoppe summed up his findings which enabled me to connect commissurotomy with stalled shuttling:

“Modern neuro-and psychophysiological findings on commissurotomy (‘split brain’) patients seem to confirm psychoanalytic theories. Twelve commissurotomy patients and one patient who had a right hemispherectomy had an impoverishment of dreams, fantasies and “symbolization. This might have been due to an interruption of the preconscious stream between the two hemispheres, which causes a separation of word-presentations from thing presentations, as well as to a predominance of a feedback-free primary process in the right hemisphere. The simple operational thinking of psychosomatic and split-brain patients leads the author to hypothesize a ‘functional commissurotomy’ in cases of severe psychosomatic disturbances.”

When in the early 1990’s the fMRI enabled neuropsychanalysts to see the living brain they were able to confirm what Hoppe had said about the corpus callosum and the preconscious. Now contemporary neuroscientists, particularly neurobiologists, are finding that evolution has made humans more intelligent and creative than other mammals because the neurons in their cortexes are more tightly packed – as computers became more advanced as they dwindled in size – so that the axons between shorter nerve fibers lead to quicker electrical communication. In *Scientific American* (2011) the writer Douglas Fox discussed such recent work in his essay “The Limits of Intelligence.” He made this point about the economy of neuronal and hemispheric communications in the corpus callosum which mirrors condensation by metaphor:

“Having smaller, more densely packed neurons does seem to have a real impact on intelligence. In 2005 neurobiologists Gerhard Roth and Urola Dicke, both at the University of Bremen in Germany, reviewed several traits that predict intelligence across species ... ‘The only tight correlation with intelligence,’ Roth says, ‘is in the number of neurons in the cortex, plus the speed of neuronal activity, which decreases with the distance between neurons ...’ If Roth is right, then primates’ small neurons have a double effect: first, they allow a greater increase in cortical cell number as brains enlarge; and second, they allow faster communications. Because the cells pack more closely elephants and whales are

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reasonably smart, but their larger neurons and bigger brains lead to inefficiencies. ‘The packing density of neurons is much lower ... which means that the distance between neurons is larger and the velocity of nerve impulses is much lower’ In fact neuroscientists have recently seen a similar pattern in variations within humans: people with the quickest lines of communication between their brain areas also seem to be the brightest.”

In the idiosyncratic way my brain is wired, the rapid shuttling of auditory communications through rhyme and meter lead me not only to *hear* metaphors but to preconsciously write poems rapidly. Perhaps a similar process happens in dream work where in rapid eye movement sleep we can’t see the external world but look visually inward and condense our dream thoughts often processed through rhyme and prosody.

Of course this ultimately is a speculation but I have experienced such workings of the brain/mind in patients communicating the result of their tightly packed or more thickly distanced neuronal packages. After all Deri and Hartmann, posited two extremes of individuals -- those with thin psychic boundaries who are hysterical and acting out and those with thick boundaries who are obsessive.

Those from my experience who have thin boundaries attached more to unconsciousness can’t help but flood the analyst with manifest dreams, whereas those who have thick boundaries bring in much fewer, much lesser detailed dreams often communicated in an overly conscious and even alexithymic way.

Then our job ultimately is what Kubie recommends i.e. through the psychoanalytic dialogue help to increase the brain’s flexibility that leads to health. From a neuropsychanalytic point of view this would mean to strengthen the corpus callosum on both the unconscious and conscious ends by making both secondary process interpretations and by eliciting and responding to more and more developed metaphoric communications – as I hope I have demonstrated in my clinical papers in this journal.

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