

Dreamlife and Dream of Life

SOFIE LAZARFELD, *New York, N.Y.*

Dreams and their interpretation have interested people in all cultures and in all ages. Opinions range from the passionate denial that dreams have any meaning at all to the firm belief that they are prophetic. Very seldom does anyone stay just neutral when the dream-problem is discussed.

In times gone by girls were taught never to relate a dream *because to do so was not decent*. This attitude existed long before the scientific discovery that dreams often reveal things which are better hidden from the public and it proves that some unconscious knowledge of the importance of dreams has always been alive in the minds of average people. There was a proverb that the goose could dream of nothing except maize, which proves that another knowledge was unconsciously alive, namely that everyone dreams about his own interests and problems. No matter to what extent dreams may seem to concern other people, it is always about ourselves that we dream.

Shakespeare, when he lets Mercutio tell Romeo about dreams, makes it clear that in dreaming we are always concerned with ourselves:

O then, I see Queen Mab has been with you—
She is the fairies' midwife . . .
And in that state she gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on court'sies straight;
O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees;
O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream,—
And sometimes comes she with a tithe-pig's tail
Tickling a person's nose as 'a lies asleep,
Then dreams he of another benefice;
Sometimes she driveth o'er a soldier's neck
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats . . .

We see Queen Mab using external factors like tickling, etc., for provoking dreams; but among the dreamers, as the parson, the soldier, the lover, every one of them uses the external factor for producing that kind of dream that concerns his special problem. Yet even among parsons, soldiers or lovers, every one of them will transform the external factor according to his own personality.

At the University in Vienna an experiment was made in which several individuals were hypnotized with no other order given but that they should dream. Nothing was said about how or about what they were to dream.

After having fallen asleep they were all exposed to the same external factor; for instance, the sound of a whistle or the light scratch of a needle. When awakened they had to tell their dreams; all of them had used the external factor,—it appeared within every dream, but each dream had used it according to the dreamer's personality. Optimistic people had produced rather funny dreams, pessimistic dreamers had dreadful ones, and so on. Therefore, dreams cannot be adequately understood or interpreted without exact knowledge about the dreamer, his whole personality, his situation and conditions of life.

Yet even the same dream, dreamt by different people, may have different meaning and, on the other hand, apparently very different dreams may represent exactly the same meaning. The same goes for symbols. A symbol may have different meanings when it appears in the dreams of different people; and quite different symbols often have the same meaning. Thus, one should be very careful when interpreting dreams. Furthermore, to use dream interpretation as a social game, as is often done, can do harm and should be avoided.

Our conception of life in general and our individual ideal of what our personal life should be, that is to say, our dream of life, is deeply interwoven with our dreamlife, each mutually influencing the other. The difference is only that while dreaming we are more reckless and audacious. This fact is expressed idiomatically when we speak about something very unusual: we say, "I never would have dreamed of it." Aristotle formulated the same thought in the sentence that good men differ from bad men only in their contenting themselves with dreams of what the bad ones do.

Modern psychology has beyond doubt revealed that dreams are an important part of our life and has stressed the point that behind every dream there is always an unsolved problem. When the problem is solved, it does not appear within dreams. This is very clearly to be seen in persistent repetitive dreams. As long as we are wavering between solutions, the same dreams are repeated; when the solution is made, the dream-life is no more concerned with it. For instance, a man, married to one woman but much in love with another woman, could find no solution to his situation however hard he tried. He repeatedly dreamed that he had a fairly good but not quite satisfactory job and that he just was at the point of taking another more appealing one. But before he could make up his mind whether to keep the old or to take the new job, he would regularly awaken; he never dreamed to a decision. After a time, one of the two women died and the man never again had this special dream. There was no more unsolved problem to dream about.

Freud was of the opinion that every dream originates from some suppressed wish. He did not say "sexual" wish and even insisted that he did *not*, but that he explicitly had said "some" wish. Yet the wrong idea that

Freud meant sexual wishes is so generally accepted that it is necessary always to clear this point. That many dreams are dreadful and, therefore, surely not what one should wish to come true is not contradictory to Freud's conception. As the wish had been suppressed for this or that reason, might it be that in our waking life we take the wish as a forbidden one, or might it be that we lack the self-confidence to realize this wish by real means? It is easy to understand that in such cases the wish-fulfillment might threaten us.

The influence of wish-fulfilling dreams depends entirely upon the whole personality of the dreamer. An active and courageous person will feel spurred by achievement in his dreams to take up the matter in reality; a passive or fatalistic person will use the dream pessimistically and might be more inclined to give up real achievement.

There is a story from ancient Greece about a man who wished to spend one night with a famous courtesan. The amount he offered for her favors was very high. But the woman wanted to think it over for twenty-four hours. In this night the man dreamed that he enjoyed the courtesan's favors and the next day he withdrew his offer, being contented with his dream enjoyment. Was he a Harpagon who was glad to have saved so much money or was he so wise as to know that the fulfillment of our deepest wishes very often falls short of the expectation? We do not know anything about this man; therefore, we cannot even guess what was going on within his mind; yet we know that everybody would have drawn different conclusions from the same dream.

An important point for understanding dreams was introduced by Alfred Adler, that is, "dreamtraining." Within our dreams we often prepare ourselves for solutions which for some reason we are not yet ready for in our waking life. This occurs either because we are not yet ready to accept this special solution (although we know we should accept it) or because we lack self-confidence in carrying out the solution. Within our dreamlife, where no real consequences are threatening, we try to find out by trial and error what would happen if we dared to accept solutions or make decisions. In such cases dreams often help us to prepare for necessary activity. Here the mutual influence of daylife and dreamlife becomes very clear.

A man had become very dependent on his mother and her conception that love and sex were something unclean and had to be concealed from others and, if possible, even from oneself. He was far from acknowledging this dependence and its consequences until he understood it through one dream. He was much in love with a woman but was anxious to conceal this fact not only from his mother but from everybody. Of course, that made the love-relation a very complicated one and the woman was on the point of breaking away from him. She had told him so but he did not be-

lieve her. At that time he dreamed that he was in a room happily together with his beloved and enjoying her company immensely. All of a sudden the gay atmosphere darkened and he had the sensation that his mother had entered the room. His mood instantly became gloomy to such an extent that he wanted to leave the room immediately. So he did, taking with him his beloved. Yet when on the point of stepping on the street, he withdrew into the house asking the woman to stay there until he would come to fetch her, which he would do very soon. Thus they separated and the man left without her. He wanted to take only a few steps but went farther and farther and finally never found the way back to her. He had lost her forever. He described the anxiety of the dream, when he tried to get back but could not find the way, as something terrifying.

If one does not know the dreamer, one might presume that here is a dream of wish fulfillment and because of bad conscience it is a dreadful dream. A man who wished to get rid of his beloved but did not dare to do so, could easily have the same dream. This was not the case with this man; he, on the contrary, because of the deep emotional shock he had experienced by this dream became much more accessible to what his re-adaptation to normal life demanded. He gradually freed himself from his urge for concealing and step by step learned to stand up for his love.

Folklore often considers dreams as prophecies and, as a matter of fact, dreams sometimes come true. Yet there is no prophetic power behind them. First, we dream a great deal. When afterwards reality makes true what we have dreamed, we are inclined to keep in mind a relevant dream and to disregard the many dreams we had that did not come true at all. Often the prophecy of dreams is just the result of our dreamtraining. We are simply putting into action what we have prepared in dreams; the dream is anticipating what we are aspiring to accomplish and by this anticipation our self-confidence often improves, thus facilitating the accomplishment.

The most famous example of this kind of dreams is the dream of the biblical Joseph. He dreamed that sun, moon, and stars bowed down to him. This he took as being prophetic of his elevation far above his brothers, who would have to bow to him. The brothers, as we remember, really came and had to bow to Joseph due to his high rank at Pharaoh's court. Yet we remember too what had happened before. Joseph had been the exclusive favorite of the Patriarch Jacob, his father. The brothers envied him and to get rid of him sold him to the Egyptians. We know that spoiled children often through their whole lives try with all means to re-establish their childhood situation, especially when they have lost their Paradise cruelly. There are two ways to re-establish it; either they try to remain children throughout life, thus forcing their surroundings to take care of them (this they do when they have completely lost self-confidence); or, if they are active and ambitious enough to take matters into their own

hands, they compensate by trying to establish themselves in a superior position in real life—often to the detriment of others. Joseph, as the Bible shows him, was without doubt of the latter type. We may easily suppose that awake as well as asleep he was practicing those qualities which could guarantee the goal he was seeking: to be the most admired again and at the same time to get even with his brothers by humiliating them as they had humiliated him before.

Some use dreams to reinforce activity. Others have lost confidence in their ability to put into action their dream of life and concentrate their action within their dream-life. In Georges Du Maurier's novel, *Peter Ibbetson*, we meet a man who has done so to perfection.

Born in England, Peter came with his parents to live in France, near Paris, at the age of five. Here he spent his early youth in complete happiness. When he was twelve years old, his parents died and a relative took the penniless boy back to England, changed his French name to the English name Peter Ibbetson, and treated him in a way quite different from that to which he had been accustomed. We remember that social insecurity is related to the feeling of inferiority and we see both these facets in Peter's nature. We meet him as a child who is taken care of under ideal conditions by ideal parents and other people who spoil him very much. Suddenly this Paradise is lost to him and he is transplanted into strange and unfavorable conditions. He longs for his lost Paradise; all that is French he adores, all that is English he despises, including the character and way of life of his English relative. Peter's thoughts are directed toward his past; what he would have liked best would have been to remain the little child in France. He mentions especially one dream: he sees himself as a small girl guided by the hand of an old lady. Discouraged people frequently dream about themselves as little children, often of opposite sex.

Peter is frustrated in friendship as well as in love; he does not pretend to anything for himself. Yet, concealed behind a facade of modesty he is very haughty and describes himself as being very handsome, much taller than any other man, high-spirited and brave physically. But he is extremely shy, is isolated from friends, and never dares to approach any woman:

A poor, shy, virginal savage . . . a chaste medieval knight, born out of his due time, ascetic both from reverence and disgust, to whom woman in the abstract was the one religion; in the concrete, the cause of fifty disenchantments a day.

As a child, in France, he was in love with a friend of his mother, the most beautiful and at the same time the tallest woman of the town, the mother of his playmate. We shall see that later too only the "ideal woman" can be the object of his love. In his first love, the mature Peter describes himself:

Nor was I more fortunate in love than in friendship. All the exclusiveness in the world cannot exclude good and beautiful maidens, and these were not lacking . . . There is always one maiden much more beautiful and good than all the others . . . There was such a maiden . . . but her station was so humble . . . that even the least exclusive would have drawn the line at her! She was one of a large family, and they sold tripe and pigs' feet, and food for cats and dogs . . . she was the eldest, and the busy, responsible one at this poor counter. She was one of Nature's ladies, one of Nature's goddesses—a queen! Of that I felt sure every time I passed her shop and shyly met her kind, frank, uncoquettish gaze. A time was approaching when I should have to overcome my shyness, and tell her that she of all women was the woman for me, and that it was indispensable that we two should be made one—immediately! at once! forever!

But before I could bring myself to do this, she married somebody else, and we had never exchanged a single word! . . . After this disappointment I got myself a big dog.

Peter calls this event a “disappointment” but can one truly call it so when one has not made one single move to avoid it,—is it not rather a vanished dream?

Now Peter has his dog and it is not only a big one but a giant of its kind. Everybody admires the dog and Peter is very much pleased with his only friend, since with an animal he may be sure that his love is responded to. But again he is disappointed, for after a few months the dog dies.

Finally he falls deeply in love with the Duchess of Tower, again a very tall woman (as befits the name chosen by Du Maurier). The Duchess, of course, is not only most beautiful but an ideal woman, admired by everyone. Here we see Peter compensating for his own feelings of inadequacy through the remarkable qualities of his beloved.

Peter meets the Duchess quite casually in a social gathering. He does not dare to approach her. But afterwards he dreams quite differently about the meeting. By chance they meet once more and it turns out that she is in fact his former playmate, the daughter of his childhood love. He does not recognize her, because she is no longer the homely child but a beautiful woman. In spite of some feeling of familiarity, she does not recognize him either, because she is misled by his English name. He tells her about his dream and, miraculously, finds that she has dreamt exactly the same dream. After this discovery they decide that they must never meet again because the Duchess is married. Thus they part forever in real life. But she teaches him to “dream true,” so that they may deliberately direct their dreams to such an extent that their dreaming becomes a perfect substitute for reality. Thus they meet every night through their dreams; no planning or agreement is needed,—they always have the same dream and,

dreaming, they share the highest delights love can give—abstract love, of course. They travel together without limit of space or time; all the treasures on earth are at their disposal. They need to do nothing except to look out upon a world which passes them by. They attain perfect happiness without obstacle, achievement without effort. This they call "true dreams" but are these not the very true dreams of many people who are inadequate for life?

Meanwhile, what happens in Peter's outside life is far less satisfactory. He is still completely isolated. Eventually he commits murder. Then follow twenty-five years of prison and several years in an asylum for the insane. This is all that real life has in store for him. But the "true dreams" go on and he still feels he lives in Paradise. Finally the Duchess dies, but even this does not break their relationship; she comes back from heaven to meet him again in their "true dreams."

There is one more striking psychological detail, namely the unusually high principles exhibited in Ibbetson's dreams. He and his beloved are the only two individuals in the world who are able to live together through dreams; nobody can hinder them and nothing is out of their reach; they are able to accomplish whatever they wish. They are deeply in love with each other, thus one would think that they would have a splendid love life. But far from that. As the Duchess is a married woman, Peter in his dreams never goes farther than to touch her hands, and she, too, in their dreams does not dare to kiss Peter until she has divorced her husband in real life. Only then do they permit themselves one single chaste embrace and that is all.

Here then is an extreme picture of a fugitive from life, one of those frightened individuals who do not dare to cope with the general rules of life, feeling not adequate, seeking shelter wherever it is to be found. They might find refuge in science, or social reform, or they may become martyrs. For such people any retreat will be right if only it serves the essential purpose: to guarantee the unquestioned integrity of their personality which they do not dare to expose to the trial of real life.

Dreams always serve some purpose. One of them is to guarantee the integrity of our personality, or what we think we should be. To reach this point Ibbetson retreats into dreams to such an extent that they become more real to him than reality ever could be. An extreme case, as we have said, but instructive for understanding how deeply our dreamlife is interwoven with our dreams of life.