

The Significant Dream as Emblem of Uniqueness:

The Fertilizer Does Not Explain the Flower¹

Roger M. Knudson²

Recent, renewed attention to "big" or significant dreams calls into question many widely held assumptions about dreams. This essay focuses on the assumption that dreams can be accounted for in terms of the dominant emotions and concerns of the dreamer at the time of the dream. That assumption is found to be inadequate to account for at least some significant dream experiences. Archetypal psychology's aesthetic, phenomenological approach to dreams is presented as providing an instructive, illuminating alternative for understanding the on-going significance of significant dreams.

Key Words: significant dreams; impactful dreams; highly memorable dreams; aesthetic understanding; archetypal psychology.

After a period of relative inattention, the literature on "big" dreams has been rejuvenated by a series of new book-length studies. Kelly Bulkeley's (2000) *Transforming Dreams: Learning Spiritual Lessons from the Dreams You Never Forget* is organized around four broad categories of dreams: dreams of reassurance, dreams of making love, nightmares, and dreams of death. The book expands on the argument that Bulkeley has made elsewhere (e. g. Bulkeley, 1994, 1995) that at least some dreams present a true revelation of the divine. Marc Ian Barasch's (2000) *Healing Dreams: Exploring the Dreams that can Transform Your Life* presents a New Age perspective on the healing and transformative potentials of significant dreams. Finally, in Deirdre Barrett's (2001) *The Committee of Sleep: How Artists, Scientists, and Athletes Use Dreams for Creative Problem Solving—and How You Can Too*, we find an extraordinary collection of examples from a broad array of disciplines demonstrating the ways dreams contribute both creative inspiration and at times explicit solutions to problems faced by the dreamer. Read together, these texts dramatically increase our appreciation of the multiple ways dreams contribute significantly to our lives.

At the same time, these texts present, at least implicitly, significant challenges to the dominant paradigms for dream research. I have similarly argued that the study of individuals' truly significant, "big" dreams requires both different methods and different conceptual frames from the study of their ordinary, "little" dreams (Knudson & Minier, 1999; Knudson, 2001). In particular, we need to understand better the ways in which such dreams, as on-going living residents of the dreamer's psychological life (Aizenstat, 1994), continue to enrich, animate, and inspire the dreamer. Such an inquiry necessarily moves beyond a quantitative analysis of categories of dream content to the qualitative study of the dreamer's on-going experience of and psychological relationship with the imagery of the dream.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

A detailed description of the methodology and the methods of the overall study from which this article is derived is presented in Knudson and Minier (1999). Some aspects of that methodology require further elaboration here.

The Defense of the "Little" Dream

This research takes as one inspiration Jung's well-known statement that significant dreams "are often remembered for a lifetime" and moreover may "prove to be the richest jewel in the treasure-house of psychic experience" (1974, p. 76). How, I have asked, does the dreamer experience these dreams? In what sense are they significant, treasured "jewels," and this in on-going ways?

Not previously discussed in this research is an important challenge, coming interestingly enough from within orthodox Jungian circles, to the big dream/little dream distinction. Two examples are Martin (1992) and White-Lewis (2001). I will elaborate here only on Martin's version. Martin (1992) asserts provocatively, ". . . there is no such thing as a small dream, only small dream perspectives" (p. 37). He goes on to argue that, given the proper perspective on the part of the dreamer, the seemingly small dream "reveals not only valuable information about the dreamer's personal attitude toward life, but about his or her larger destiny as well" (p. 37). Not surprisingly Martin views Jungian analysis as the path to such a proper perspective. He writes, ". . . the value of a small dream depends greatly on the dreamer's ability to be aware of it. To come to this place, the dreamer must be educated, initiated, enthused, and at times pushed by the therapeutic process toward a new vision of the potential import of even the smallest, most modest fragment. Once that has happened, a dreamer's dream life can grow exponentially in emotional size and meaning" (pp. 35 - 36). Martin adds, "Thus, an essential aspect of the therapeutic alliance is often the establishment of a relationship with the therapist through which the dreamer can discover and integrate the psychological faith that his or her process, limited as it may feel, presents dream material every bit as amazing as those of legendary figures like Freud or Jung" (p. 36).

Martin's argument is directed primarily to those who come to Jungian analysis aware of Jung's writings on dreams and expecting "knock-your-socks-off, unequivocally archetypal dreams" (p. 31). Correspondingly such patients are inclined to regard dreams that contain "little if any strange, portentous, highly emotional or patently mytho-archetypal content," that do not "jump out at you," that are "not obviously numinous" (p. 35), in other words most if not all daily dreams, as not worthy of attention. Rather than viewing Jung's distinction between "big" and "little" dreams as inviolable, Martin urges dreamers, and therapists as well, to relinquish what he characterizes as an heroic attitude in favor of a more humble Hermes/Mercurius outlook in which even the simplest dream fragment may be seen as providing an opening to deeper inner work.

Several things should be said about the current project in light of Martin's argument. Most immediately, perhaps, I am in basic agreement with the assertion that little dreams are of great potential value. In asking individuals to provide us with accounts of the significance of their self-defined "most significant" dream, my co-researchers and I did not intend disdain for any of their other dreams.

Our focus was not, however, on individuals pursuing therapy or analysis. None of the individuals whose dreams are presented in this or the two previous articles was in therapy/analysis at the time of the dream. The dreams reported did not serve as an inspiration to enter therapy for any of the participants. None of these dreamers seemed aware of Jung's theoretical distinction between big and little dreams and most appeared naïve regarding psychological theories about dreams in general.

All this said, recognizing the value of the "little" dream does not alter the fact that at the level of ordinary experience there are dreams that individuals experience as significant. At the outset of our inquiry, this was an open question. In a culture where dreams are not widely regarded as important, I frankly wondered whether American Midwesterners would respond to an advertisement soliciting accounts of significant dreams. The response was both immediate and substantially larger than anticipated. What the participants reported was the experience of dreams that without the benefit of therapy, without the aid of psychological theory, often without explicit interpretation by the dreamer or anyone else nonetheless had significant consequences for the dreamer's life. I have been interested in exploring, in as much detail and depth as possible, the dreamers' own accounts of just how these dreams were significant for them.

The Question of Jungian Theory

My reference to Jung's statement about little versus big dreams has led some to view the project as an effort to provide evidence in support of (or challenging) Jungian theory. It is important to emphasize that it has no such intention. Jung's elaboration of the distinction between significant and insignificant dreams was articulated in terms of his theory of individuation and the corresponding phenomenology of what he termed the Self. As Martin points out in the article cited above, "It is important to recognize that, for Jung, the Self was the psychological experience of the divine in human life" (p. 33). Neither the notion of a specific developmental model such as Jung's individuation nor Jung's specific conception of the Self has figured in my conceptualization of big dreams.

This is not to say that I have somehow positioned myself "against" Jungian theory. More simply the theoretical ground of my work is elsewhere. Bulkeley's (1994) detailed discussion of what he termed "root metaphor" dreams provided one cornerstone. Another was the aesthetic perspective on image provided by the archetypal psychology of Hillman (1977, 1978, 1979) and the related discussion of "dream tending" by Aizenstat (2001). Finally, I have relied extensively on the work of Hunt (1989, 1995) for his extensive account, which is importantly both theoretical and empirical, of multiple dream types as well as for his elaboration of the distinction between representational versus presentational imagery.

In drawing on these sources, I view my work as simply outside Jungian theory. In our use of Hillman's work in particular, we have not attempted to join the debate over whether archetypal psychology is "Jungian," "post-Jungian" (see Samuels, 1985), or perhaps "something else"; and it would be well beyond the scope of this article to attempt to do so.

Anecdote Versus Exemplar

A third challenge to the line of inquiry presented here is captured by a slogan, familiar no doubt to many psychologists from their graduate classes in statistical analysis and research design: "The plural of anecdote is not data." The implication is that no collection of accounts of single dreams, no matter how "significant" those dreams are claimed to be and no matter how careful or rich the analysis, will ever add up to generalizable conclusions about dreams and their role in human life.

One area of psychological research where this distinction has been of considerable significance is the study of what has been called "episodic" or "autobiographical" memory. These are memories of events of exceptional significance. Some may be in relation to public events. Just as those of the World War II generation say they can all recall exactly where they were when Pearl Harbor was attacked, most Americans now can recall exactly where they were on September 11. Other episodes may be more personal: the occasion on which one met one's spouse for the first time, a fatefully influential comment from an admired teacher, a moment when one's life was in grave danger. Whether public or personal, such events persist in memory and are believed by the individual to have profoundly influenced his or her life.

In an extensive study of individuals' memories of life-shaping events, Pillemer (1998), who calls individuals' memories of these life-shaping events "personal event memories," presents an instructive discussion of reasons these memories have been largely neglected by psychology. In spite of the important influence such memories have in human life, Pillemer states that they are generally not regarded as suitable material for scientific study. In the first place, he notes that such memories are idiosyncratic, emotion-laden, and messy in sharp contrast to the controllable and potentially replicable experiences preferred by scientists.

A second reason for the neglect of such memories is the consistent research focus in psychology on general knowledge acquisition in terms of abstract knowledge structures (rules, schemas and scripts, concepts, prototypes) as opposed to recollection and learning from particular events. The framing assumption in mainstream research, according to

Pillemer, has been that knowledge is represented in semantic memory and is both general and broadly applicable. It has not been assumed to be represented in episodic memory and therefore to be specific and idiosyncratic. Furthermore, the acquisition of general knowledge has been viewed as far more important for adaptation than is specific experience.

Even more provocatively, Pillemer argues that the idea that specific life episodes can profoundly influence the life course is contrary to the dominant (and he notes, reassuring) perspective that human life is continuous, predictable, and organized thematically. Both individual personality and the individual life course are widely assumed in the dominant discourse of scientific psychology to be consistent over time. Challenging this view, Pillemer writes, "the potential power of the specific may be an unpalatable idea to many, but it is an idea that is nevertheless worthy of serious scholarly attention and scientific investigation" (p. 7). As yet, he goes on to say, we have no comprehensive theory of specific instances—either how they are remembered or how they influence the life course.

Pillemer does identify several substantive issues such a theory must address: First is the important distinction between properties of events versus properties of memories. On the one hand, we need to understand what kinds of events are likely to be remembered and to have a lasting effect on the individual. On the other, we need to understand how such an event is represented in memory, how the memory comes to influence the life course, and what psychological functions are served by remembering as well as how these functions are revealed in thought and behavior (p. 26).

In relation to the latter set of concerns, Pillemer points out that personal event memories apparently involve two levels of representation: image and narrative. He argues that the relation between these two modes of memorial expression needs to be better understood. He asserts that the phenomenal experience at the time of a momentous occurrence is primarily imagistic (including visual imagery but also frequently other forms of relived sensory experience) and only secondarily translated into a coherent story-like verbal narrative (pp. 52 - 54).

The relevance of Pillemer's analysis for the study of significant dreams is direct as well as obvious. Dream research too has been shaped by the dominant scientific research paradigm. It consequently has shared the biases Pillemer identifies against the study of the specific, the emotion-charged, the messy, the nonreplicable. The emphasis in dream research has often been on "typical" dreams or on patterns that are continuous and thematic over a series of dreams. As noted at the outset, few researchers have taken up the study of significant dreams, and programs of research have rarely been sustained over time. The series of studies by Kuiken and colleagues (e. g. Kuiken & Smith, 1991; Kuiken & Sikora, 1993; Kuiken, 1995; Busink & Kuiken, 1996; Sikora, 1989), to cite one notable example, seems not to be continuing.

In terms of the bias against the "anecdotal," the problem facing dream researchers is even more difficult than the one facing students of personal event memories in at least one sense. That is, while everyone can report personal event memories, not everyone reports having had a "significant" dream and certainly not one that reaches the significance implied by Jung's description of a dream remembered for a lifetime, much less "the richest jewel in the crown of psychic experience." In the research from which this article is drawn, to reiterate a point made above, we did not begin by requiring participants to meet some predetermined standard for significance. We simply invited volunteers to provide an account of their self-defined "most significant" dream experience.

This article continues to follow Hillman's arguments in favor of studying the exceptional case (e. g. Hillman, 1986b), which as he has pointed out repeatedly cannot be understood by accumulating or amplifying the typical. Perhaps we could say that while the plural of anecdote may not be data, no amount of data from typical cases adds up to an account of the exemplary.

The particular focus of this article is the widely held assumption that dreams may be accounted for by, that is are the product of, the dominant emotions and concerns of the dreamer at the time of the dream. I will argue in terms of two exemplary dream reports that this assumption is inadequate for at least some significant dreams. Then I will continue the argument made in the papers referenced above that archetypal psychology, in concert with Hunt's theory of the nature of consciousness, provides a useful, alternative approach to understanding such dream experiences.

TWO SIGNIFICANT DREAMS

The first dream was contributed by a dreamer, "Ann," who was at the time of the interview a 21 year-old college student. She reported that the dream occurred late in junior high school when she was 13. Eight years had elapsed since the dream, but it remained for the dreamer both vivid and intense. She was visibly emotional in recounting it aloud. It was, she said, the most significant dream she had ever had. The dreamer titled the dream, "Home Alone."

Home Alone

In my dream it's nighttime and it's very, very late and I'm home alone which is odd, and I can feel that, I can feel that I'm, I'm nervous or tense 'cause I'm home alone. And I'm in the kitchen in my house, which is a ranch size house so I'm, I'm level with the ground, and the window in the kitchen is basically to my chest, so it's a pretty high window. And in the dream I'm in the kitchen and the lights are off in the house, and it's, it's quiet, there's like—there's nobody home, and that's unusual also, I know that. And in the dream I hear, I hear my dad's car pull into the driveway. And in our house—it's a ranch-size house and the garage is set behind the house. And so from the kitchen you can see the garage sort of in the backyard. And I, I can hear my . . . my dad's car pull into the driveway. And I go to the window and I'm standing there, and it's, it's nighttime so I can see the headlights coming closer, landing on the—on the garage door. And the garage is shut and it's white and his lights are on the, on the, on the garage, and he gets out, and at that time we didn't have a garage door opener, so he gets out to walk over to open the garage door, and as he's opening it up, all of a sudden he's thrown back and he lands underneath the window where I'm standing watching. And I like—I crouch down real quick, and I let the curtain fall and basically I'm peeking out, and a figure had thrown him back, and through this—the headlights were through this haze, this big fog, there was a lot of fog so it wasn't really clear, and I'm looking through the fog and this figure was a woman with red fiery hair a beautiful figure, curvy figure wearing a black leather tight outfit covering her whole body except for basically her hands . . . and her face. And she threw him with great force and he lands right underneath the window and I can see him below the window all bloody and gory and we have rocks beneath the window. He landed in, in the big rocks and I can tell he's hurt very badly. He's kinda just laying there like "Ahhhh . . .," you know. And she's laughing hysterically like that it's so funny that she did this. And . . . she, she's pointing vigorously with her finger in every direction throwing—throwing flames around him. So that, so he's kinda trapped there, and, I'm scared to death. I, I don't know what's going on. And the first thought that ran through me at the time was "Oh, she's gonna steal my dad's big white LTD car. That's what she—that's what she—that's what she wants, it wasn't that she was trying to hurt my dad first. And then she comes forward, and she's looking at him. And she's laughing and she's laughing and at this point I realize I'm home alone, she's gonna come in and get me. So, I . . . I'm running around the house trying to find a safe place, and I end up hiding myself in, in our main bathroom, in the bathroom in the closet, and pull—the only thing we store in there is sheets and towels. I end up pulling a sheet over my head, and . . . I don't

know at this point at the time am I pulling down really hard to hide myself or if I'm pulling it down really hard to like suffocate myself cause I don't want her to come hurt me or something. And then . . . the dream flashes back to her, and I'm thinking—I'm in the closet thinking she's coming after me. And she laughs at my dad some more, and then gets in his car and drives away.

While there are a number of things that might be said about the dream itself, what motivated my inquiry was the ways dreams such as this have not only an immediate influence on the dreamer's waking experience but continue to be influential for years or even decades. What I had not anticipated was Ann's remark that the real significance of the dream was still ahead, in her future!

Those familiar with the literature on the relationship of dreams to stress and trauma (e. g. Barrett, 1996) will not be surprised that at the time of the dream Ann found herself in an intensely stressful home environment. Her parents had recently separated for the second time after her father, an alcoholic, had hit her mother. Ann reported that, upon awakening, her initial understanding of the dream was in terms of her anger at her father and her related wish that her mother could be stronger. Her first "interpretation" of the woman in the dream was as a symbol of the power Ann wished her mother could have.

But, in a way that I observe frequently with respect to dreamers' experience of their most significant dream, this first interpretation, while useful, proved somehow inadequate, insufficient, incomplete. We need to be careful with the language here. It is *not* that the dreamer is *dissatisfied* with her first interpretation. She reported that she did not feel a need for or a desire for additional meanings. Rather the experience she reported is that the dream continued to be an active presence. The dream continued unbidden to come to mind.

As she continued to reflect on this dream, Ann increasingly experienced the significance of the dream as inclusive of more than her wish regarding her mother. She came to see it as "incorporating everything in (her) life: stress, emotions, anger, getting back."

One immediate consequence of the dream came in Ann's relationship with her father. She reported feeling a "new confidence" in her dealings with him and as a result changed a number of features of the relationship.

The potential of the dream to influence Ann did not stop there, however. Ann reported she was able to carry over this "new confidence" to her dating relationships. Here Ann was often consciously aware of the influence, the felt presence, of the fiery woman from the dream, now understood not only in relation to her mother but also in relationship to herself. "Her confidence I carry with me," Ann reported, "she knew what she was doing." Quite tellingly, Ann expressed succinctly the interpersonal significance of this dream-inspired confidence when she said, with a smile, "I have a short threshold for crap from men."

The influence of the dream continued to expand after high school. In the interview, Ann reported that she would soon graduate from a university with highly selective academic criteria where she felt "less naturally smart" than most other students. She was quite conscious too that she came from a far less economically privileged background than most of her fellow students. She had had to work to support herself through college and so had needed an extra year to complete her degree. Here, too, the dream had been, consciously and frequently, a "source of strength" as well as a "calming influence." "I'm tougher (than the other students)," Ann said, and echoing her earlier description of the woman of the dream, "I know how to handle this."

None of these consequences of the dream, significant as they seem to be, fully captured Ann's sense of the dream's importance in her life. The truly important role for the dream,

she insisted, was ahead, that is to say, in her future! More important than the ways the dream was valuable to her as a teenager in reshaping her relationship with her father or with other men, more important than the ways it had figured in her crafting of her own identity, Ann located the real value of the dream in the role it would play in her choice of a husband. As she described it, should Ann ever begin to seriously consider marrying a man, she intends to tell him this dream. Unknown to him, this will be a test. His reaction to the dream, how he "understands it," how he "handles it," will determine whether Ann continues with him further down the path toward marriage.

In listening to this account, there is no mistaking the fact that Ann experienced the dream as a treasure. Ann reported that she was carefully "protecting" the dream for its future purpose—indeed she reported that she was "scared to forget it" and so at times actively recalled it. At the same time, she could not say just what sort of "understanding," what type of "handling" of the dream her prospective (and at this point, we might add, imaginal) husband would need to display. Ann herself found this perplexing. She was educated, articulate; yet something here resisted full expression in words. She was certain only that in some way she will know.

If we take Ann seriously, the significance of her dream is in the future. The question I have been pondering is how we should understand this claim.

I mean of course to propose an answer, but before taking up that argument, let me present a second dream. It, too, is the dream of a teenage girl, "Beth," who was age 14 at the time of the dream. At the time of our interview, Beth was a 20 year-old college student. She did not title the dream, but for reasons that will be clear, I have called it, "So Then I Learned Russian."

So Then I Learned Russian

The first part I remember was being on a bus, I'm not sure how I got on the bus, or anything before that, but I was sitting on a bus, I was sitting beside my boyfriend at the time. He was sitting by the window. And I was sitting near the aisle and he was holding my hand. We were sitting somewhere in—I don't know—somewhere near the middle of the bus, and, and then my best friend was sitting right across the aisle . . . outside of the seats, right beside me. And, there were lots of other people on the bus, but I don't remember who any of them were, I don't think I knew who any of them were. And, it was a school bus. We were driving in a place that I had never been before. I kept noticing how dark it was, and I think that's something that has stuck with me for, you know, six years, but it just, I don't know. It was really odd. I remember the fading light and how it turned the vinyl seat covers from a bright green to a murky brown. It just kept getting darker and darker. And, it's not cold, in my dream, it was—I don't know—it was just an odd . . . darkness that didn't make sense. And, we drove for a while, and, everyone was quiet, no one really talked on the bus. I didn't talk. And, we got to a bridge. And—I don't know what kind of bridge it is, like one on a kid's play set—it's, it's one of the ones that has the big wires, and it has like the planks, and you walk on it. It shakes back and forth. I was scared. Which is funny, because I've never been scared of bridges. And, for some reason the bus thought that it could get over the bridge. And I knew the bus couldn't get over the bridge, so I was really upset, because the bus was driving towards the bridge. Everyone else was just calm. They were like "OK, whatever." And so I was really frustrated about that. And so somehow the bus drove onto this bridge. And the . . . it had the—it was like a bridge you would see in a pathway, sorta like handrails on the side, and it drove up, and the wheels were on the other side of the handrails (laughs). And so it's just sitting there. And the bridge is swaying back and forth and it's rocking. So people get a little bit scared then. But, the next thing I knew it tumbles off the side of the bridge. And there's some body of water, maybe

a lake—I don't know, I don't think it was saltwater, so I guess it was a lake. And so, then everyone was panicked, you know, and, except for me. I was calm, like everything was OK. And everyone was trying to get off the bus. And people were, you know, pushing each other and yelling and screaming and trying to open the windows, and—I don't know, like some person was trying to get out. And they were too big, and they could fit out the window and people were trying to push them out, and all this stuff. And, I don't remember the bus driver at all. I don't remember if there was a bus driver, but, The bus started sinking a little bit in the water, and, I really—I didn't feel like the need to leave the bus, for some reason. And, my boyfriend was holding onto my left hand. And my best friend was holding onto my right hand. And, they were both trying to get out of the bus. And they were both trying to like swim out the windows, cause it was kinda half under water. And, it was really weird, because as soon as the bus fell, everything started getting lighter. And once we were in the water, everything was really clear, and it was bright. But, they were both trying to pull me out of the window with them. And they kept pulling on my opposite arms, so I wasn't going anywhere. I was just sitting there in the middle of the bus. And, it seemed like a really long time—I know they always say that dreams are really short but it seemed like forever that I was just there being pulled. And, after what seemed like an hour of struggle the bus was lying on the bottom of the lake. Finally neither of them could pull any harder. They somehow just like slipped away from me because they were pulling so hard. And, so they both swam up to the surface. And I just stayed in the bus. It was bright and clear.

Now again, those who wish to understand dreams in terms of the emotional conflicts or concerns of the dreamer at the time of the dream would not be surprised by the dreamer's life context. At age 14, the dreamer in her daytime life was feeling caught in a tug-of-war between her boyfriend and her best friend since age 5, also male. The best friend did not approve of the dreamer's new romantic relationship and was threatening to end the friendship if the dreamer continued to see the boyfriend.

This, however, is not what Beth referred to when we invited her to discuss the significance of the dream. Beth said with some emphasis that she experienced the dream as "a revelation." Then she added, "I knew that I was going to learn Russian."

I was understandably perplexed. Briefly, here is the account the dreamer gave of her reflections on this dream: In calling the dream a "revelation," the dreamer reported that the dream seemed to provide a solution to "so many things." This began with the realization, which Beth reported as present upon awakening, that, "Maybe I didn't want to be saved. Maybe I'm fine by myself!" She added, "I realized that I was not doing what I really wanted to do. I went along with the crowd. But I realized when I woke up that I don't have to be a shapeless amoeba, and I asked myself 'how do I become unique?'"

This, of course, links the dream to the current events in Beth's life but failed to explain her reference to becoming unique much less that the dream meant that she would learn Russian. I repeated my request that she elaborate on the latter remark. Again her reply was somewhat indirect. She first stated that some of the things she was not doing, that *she*, in fact, wanted to do, were immediately possible in her life. For example, she had been thinking about doing volunteer work in a nursing home but hadn't because her friends had rejected the idea. Within days after the dream, she began this volunteer work on her own, without any friends, and reported that she continued this activity throughout high school. She also broke up with her boyfriend *and* broke off with the former best friend within a week of the dream, saying, "I was focused on them staying friends, and the dream made it clear I don't have to put up with this."

Then, finally coming to the way the dream's revelations also referred to her future, Beth reported that one of the things she had always wanted to do was "learn an exotic language

and live in a foreign country." When she awoke from the dream, for reasons she still could not explain at the time of the interview, she specifically thought of Russian. She said that along with the idea that she did not want to be rescued by her friends came the realization that she "could survive in places others can't." As she put it, "everyone was in a panic but me. I felt no need to leave the bus. I was under water so I should have been drowning, but I wasn't. Instead, everything was light and clear. I was calm." She said that she awoke from the dream knowing confidently that she would go to college, major in Russian, and "never live in small-town Ohio again."

Six years had passed since the dream occurred. Beth said she often would dream in series and that these dream series seem to present solutions to problems she was facing. None, however, had the on-going significance of this dream. At the time of the interview, she was, in fact, in college, majoring in Russian and minoring in diplomacy and foreign affairs with a goal of working in the Foreign Service. Similar to Ann, Beth saw the dream's significance continuing on into the future. She spoke of friends in her high school class who stayed at home in "small-town Ohio" who were now getting married and having children. She thought of the dream often in this context because it was such a powerful revelation that her life would lead elsewhere. Beth reiterated that the dream forced her to ask, "How can I become unique?"; but at the same time, she said, it symbolized for her the answer to that question.

EMBLEMS OF UNIQUENESS: AN ARCHETYPAL APPROACH

As we attempt to understand these accounts of on-going dream significance, we of course turn to theory. One of the things of interest to me about these dreams of enduring significance is that they seem to complicate if not confound altogether our usual frames for understanding not only dreams but imagination in general.

By "usual frames" I mean all those interpretive approaches from Freud on that take a reductive approach to image. Freud defined image in terms of repressed impulses disguised behind an imagistic veneer. The psychoanalytic approach was then presented as a method for interpreting such images—image as symptom to be diagnosed and then traced back to its origins in conflict, in repressed desire. This approach, of course, accords with the general view, long dominant in the West and certainly in psychology, that image, including dream image, is necessarily secondary, derivative. Image, so it has been argued since classical Greece, cannot create but instead only imitates. Image represents, that is it represents what has been presented before, what was already there, given, prior.

Yet it is precisely this view that has seemed to me so inadequate to dream experiences such as the two just recounted. While both of the examples presented have clear roots in the immediate life context and the emotional conflicts and concerns of the dreamers, and while at least some of these connections were immediately apparent to each dreamer, in neither case did these connections determine in any full sense the on-going significance of the dream. Something else, something more seems to be at work in these dreams beyond their roots in the biographical events of the dreamer's life. Their orientation is not exclusively toward the past; indeed, their significance lies, as Ann explicitly informed me, in the way they open toward the future.

For this, we need another perspective. In my previous work on significant dreams (Knudson & Minier, 1999; Knudson, 2001), I have argued that archetypal psychology (e. g. Hillman 1977, 1978, 1979) as well as on the work of Hunt (e. g. 1989, 1995) provide such an alternative view. I have been particularly influenced by Hillman's aesthetic approach dream image as scene, as context, as mood—a place that in the experience of dreaming we enter into and in turn are embraced by. As Hillman writes, "It (the dream image) doesn't lead somewhere else like a story. Thus the mind's activity can find nowhere to go but more deeply into the image" (1978, p. 160). As Minier and I argued in an earlier article (Knudson & Minier, 1999), perhaps the significance of the significant dream lies precisely in the fact that the dream images do *not* become pinned down by any particular interpretation, are

never literalized into any single fixed concept or "meaning. Instead the dreamer returns or is drawn again and again to an experiential "living in the image," with new meanings potentially emerging over time as one goes in Hillman's words "more deeply into the image."

Hillman's approach to image is powerfully extended and enriched by Hunt's extensive discussion of the distinction between representational versus presentational symbolism as fundamental forms of symbolic cognition. While in representational symbolism the connection of symbol and referent is fixed, singular, and arbitrary, in the presentational symbolisms of aesthetics symbol-referent connections are polysemous, open-ended and therefore novel and unpredictable (Hunt, 1995, p. 42). More to the point of this discussion, Hunt repeatedly emphasizes how in presentational symbolism meaning emerges directly from an experiential absorption in the medium of expression itself (e. g. Hunt, 1995, p. 216). Equally important, Hunt also points out how the human presentational symbolic capacity can be understood as "expressions of self-reference for its own sake (presentational), in contrast to the subordination of our self-referential capacity to the representational symbolisms of a more practically preoccupied 'everyday life'" (Hunt, 1995, p.123).

Hillman (1978) makes the same point when he writes,

a poetic understanding does not consider the dream as a report or message giving information about something other than, or prior to, the dream. Rather, the dream is like a poem or a painting which is not about anything, not even about the poet or the painter. The painted lemons on the plate must not refer to the lemons on a plate which the painter used as model; the painted lemons can be experienced altogether without reference to those lemons, or any lemons anywhere. (Nor do they refer to an invisible archetypal essence of lemons—lemonhood, lemonness; they refer neither to physical lemons nor to metaphysical ones.) They may analogize with and evoke all sorts of lemony experiences; but the image transcends such referent evocations—that is, we might buy the pointing, not because it so well represents lemons on a plate, but because it speaks so well to and of our soul. So, too, with the lemon in a dream (p. 170).

Hillman's approach to image has deep roots in the work of the French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard. Following Hillman, I want to draw out two ideas from Bachelard's phenomenological analysis that powerfully supplement the alternative way of reading dream accounts presented by both Hillman and Hunt.

The Fertilizer Does Not Explain the Flower

Bachelard contested both orthodox psychoanalytic approaches that seek always to analyze image in the service of locating its origins in the neuroses of the imager's past and his contemporary Sartre's efforts that cast image in a similarly pathological light. Bachelard's analysis led him to define imagination not pathologically but as the ultimate "happiness of expression" and image, therefore, as something to be admired and appreciated for its own sake. He insisted that image is much more than an expression of frustration or sublimation. Rather it is a free expression created not from pressure but from play, not from necessity but from inventiveness. As Bachelard (1969) famously phrased it, "the fertilizer does not explain the flower" (p. xvi.).

Hillman (1986a) discusses Bachelard's reformulation as follows:

Under his scrutiny the complexes are not so much lesions or problems as emblems. In Bachelard's hand psychoanalysis shifts from an examination of complexes as disorders which separate one from the world to an appreciation of complexes as emblems of the ways one engages and

embraces the world. That is why, again and again Bachelard insists, not suffering but joy is concomitant with the appearance of complexes . . . Their appearance makes the world anew (p. 106).

Imagination Deforms the Given in Order to Change It

Hillman's assertion leads to the second key idea I want to draw from Bachelard, that rather than a repository of childhood trauma, imagination is instead the cradle of a *renewed world* (Kearney, 1991). In contesting "representational" theories of imagination, whether in psychoanalysis or academic psychology, Bachelard's analysis corroborates a fundamental phenomenological conviction that imagination rather than being determined by individual psychology, "constitutes a realm that is autochthonous, autogenic" (Bachelard, 1964, p. 110). Image is to be understood presentationally rather than as mere representation, as a genesis, not an effect. And imagination then is an act that *transforms* reality, freeing the imaginer from the constraints of both past and present. Quoting Bachelard (1987), "imagination is always considered to be the faculty of *forming* images. But it is rather the faculty of *deforming* the images offered by perception, of freeing ourselves from the immediate images; it is especially the faculty of *changing* images." Continuing on, he writes, "The imagination is essentially *open, evasive*. In the human psyche, it is the very experience of *opening* and *newness*" (p. 19). Or in another of his phrasings, "imagination is not the faculty forming images of reality, it is the rather the faculty of forming images which go beyond reality, which *sing* reality" (p. 15). Rather than imagination being a realm of the "un-real," Bachelard sees it as "sur-reality," not denying reality per se but surpassing that reality *in order to change it* (Kearney, 1991).

In terms of human living, we could say then that the creative imagination operates precisely on the boundary between being and becoming, constantly deforming our routinized, habitualized ways of being, informing them with the status of becoming. This deformation is not an annihilation of the real world; rather Bachelard suggests imagination mobilizes its potencies of transformation. It surpasses the real toward a renewed reality. In this sense, its orientation is toward the future.

In his *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard (1969) makes this point explicitly:

By the swiftness of its actions, the imagination separates us from the past as well as from reality; it faces the future. To the *function of reality*, wise in the experience of the past, should be added a function of irreality, which is equally positive. Any weakness in the function of irreality will hamper the productive psyche. If we cannot imagine, we cannot foresee (p. xxx).

I should be careful here not to overstate this point. Just as for Hunt presentational symbolism stands in contrast with what he termed the "subordination of our self-referential capacity to the representational symbolisms of a more practically preoccupied 'everyday life'" (Hunt, 1995, p.123), Bachelard was not interested in what the image can do for us in some pragmatic, even life-orienting sense. His interest was, as one anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this article put it, "in how the image is precisely itself, before meanings are given to it which in turn destroy the image. The image has no choice but to hurl itself toward the unlimited suggestabilities it arouses in the mind . . . What he wants us to see is that the image, ever changing, ever on the move, is a thing of beauty and *immediate* self-fulfillment, not usefulness." An image is valuable unto itself because it "releases the imagination from the confines of personal and interpersonal life."

With these ideas in mind, let us return to our two dreamers. Two 14 year-old Midwestern girls face difficult interpersonal situations. Each dreams a dream with obvious roots in these situations and, in fact, uses the dream immediately to make changes in that interpersonal situation. For those who wish to account for dreams entirely in terms of the emotional context of the day world, this constitutes an adequate explanation of the dreams. But in accord with Bachelard's pithy assertion that fertilizer, no matter how

important, does not explain the flower, the significance of the dream goes far beyond the immediate interpersonal situation, far beyond its resolution. In each case, the current situation is indeed "deformed" via the dreamer's experience of the dream in ways that open toward the future for the dreamer.

In Ann's experience, if we listen carefully, the dream was an active agent over the weeks and months following the original dreaming. She experienced it as "pursuing" her, continually expanding its range of significance in her relationships and self-concept. While interpretations suggested themselves to her, what is instructive about her account is how no single interpretation managed to pin down the dream, fix it to a single meaning. Instead, Ann was drawn to continuing reflection on the dream and drew increasing empowerment from it. (Again, at the risk of overly belaboring the point, let us not read this account as evidence that the dream came *in order to* inspire, to enrich, to empower. As emphasized above, archetypal psychology's poetic approach to dream image refuses to subordinate dream to practical application. At the same time, it does not deny the potential value of sticking to the image and its activity.) For Ann the dream clearly became over time, to use Hillman's term, "emblematic" of something essential in her character. As she felt herself embodying the fiery power of the woman in black, embodying her confidence and her capability, Ann grew increasingly clear both about who she was and what she expected from others. We could say that for Ann the experience will go further, with the dream serving not only as this kind of emblem but also as a "talisman" with the power to guide her choice of life partner and to protect her from a wrong choice.

For Beth, the experience of the dream *upon awakening* was one of having experienced a revelation, one that she reports experiencing in terms of openness and freedom, which she immediately understood as a kind of permission to escape from the constraints of conventional small-town life. Reflection on the dream led Beth to new self-understanding as well. She began to know herself as a survivor, one who could go where others could not; and Beth too carried the dream with her "emblematically," touching back on it for this experience of openness as she faced toward her unique individual destiny.

In the concluding paragraph of his study of the nature of consciousness, Hunt (1995) asserts that the structure of our experience as self-referential beings "rests on a perceptual dimension of presence-openness which must open us up and out in a way that cannot be finally 'closed' within any conceptual system or order" (p. 295). So long as the images of the dream experienced by the dreamer as "significant" are not trapped in a single meaning, it continues as an animating, enlivening presence in the dreamer's life.

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