

BOOKS

# WHO IS THE DREAMER WHO DREAMS THE DREAM?

*A REVIEW ESSAY. A STUDY OF PSYCHIC PRESENCES.*

By James Grotstein. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press (*Relational Perspectives Book Series*), 2000, 347 pp.

In an engrossing poem titled “I Am Not Even Dust,” Jorge Luis Borges ends with these thoughts:

*That I might be allowed to dream the other*

*Whose fertile memory will be a part*

*of all the days of man, I humbly pray:*

*My god, my dreamer, keep on dreaming me. (Borges, 1999, pp. 399—401)*

Most North American analysts would dismiss the last line, in particular, as religious mysticism, a leftover from a predifferentiated developmental stage, something to be resolved and not celebrated. John Gedo (1999), in his *The Evolution of Psychoanalysis*, goes so far as to state that recent neurological findings suggest that dreams have no meaning at all, implying that to attribute meaning to them is a mental presupposition unworthy of a scientific, biologically grounded, psychoanalysis (p. 204). While making a didactically clear and at times persuasive argument, Gedo’s position, as I read him, ignores our metaphorical modes of thinking as well as our culturally dependent awareness of a beyond in our midst, a beyond that has been articulated in terms of transcendence: either the absolute transcendence, which Western religious traditions have highlighted, or the relative everyday experience of transcendence, which Grotstein studies in his attempt to locate the dreamer who dreams the dream.

In a tour de force entailing a reading of Freud, Jung, Lacan, M. Klein, Winnicott, Heidegger, Matte-Blanco, and Bion, among others, Grotstein posits the basic function of the dream as a communication between what he categorized as “the ineffable subject of the unconscious” (the dreamer who dreams the dream) and “*the dreamer who understands the dream.*” He sets himself the task of decoding, for lack of a better word, the psychic presences that reflect and or deflect the ineffable subject of the unconscious. Grotstein writes that “the task of psychoanalysis is not the attainment of insight but, rather, the use of insight to attain transcendence over oneself, over one’s masks and disguises, to rebecome one’s supraordinate subject. [his task involves a transcendent reunion with one’s “ineffable subject” in a moment of *aletheia* (unconcealment)]” (p. xxvii). Grotstein grapples with the psyche’s mystery and comprehensibility; his work should be read, I believe, as more in the tradition of theoretical physics than Gedo’s

biological neurology. Comprehensibility and mystery are not necessarily antagonistic concepts; note Einstein's reflection "*the eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility.*"

The text is dense with awareness; not afraid to approach mysterious or mythological themes from a psychoanalytic perspective, Grotstein has given us a text more akin to an evocative poem—a work that has to be read quietly and, in sections, repeatedly. As Thomas Ogden writes in his preface, which offers an extremely helpful synthesizing overview, one cannot summarize a poem without reproducing it. One might, therefore, characterize this work as a text-poem.

Following Melanie Klein as his most useful model, with acknowledged updating from Ogden, Grotstein builds his case by fleshing out the psychoanalytic ramifications of his various theses. In revisiting his notion of autochthony—the fantasy of *self creation*—Grotstein offers an insightful and appealing reinterpretation of the Adam and Eve myth. Further expanding his perspective, he uses this concept to gain a better appreciation of trauma. Following Winnicott's thoughts on trauma as an intrusion into the psyche before a person is allowed to personally create the found world, Grotstein explains, in some detail, how persecutors have to be turned into enemies. Grotstein frees Kleinian thought from the confines of its informing specific and concretized developmental states; he does this by helping us appreciate the ageless child that is our companion throughout life.

Although Grotstein gives a flexible and creative reading of Klein, he occasionally suggests a level of verification not possible for psychoanalytic concepts. He writes, for example, of "Klein's discovery of projective identification" (p. xxii). He is certainly not alone in this mode of speaking. For example, analysts frequently speak of Freud's *discovery* of the unconscious or his *discovery* of the meaning of dreams, thereby inadvertently eclipsing an appreciation of the metaphorical nature of psychoanalytic concepts.

In this context I have elsewhere noted:

*Ultimately, then, it makes no sense to believe in anything that means forgetting the metaphorical nature of knowledge. Sir Peter Medawar (1982), the English research biologist and philosopher, is not alone when he reminds us that even in the empirical sciences "a hypothesis is an imaginative preconception of what might be true. "... Understanding the metaphorical basis of knowledge frees us of the Herculean burden of finding "the" truth. We can, instead, settle for "a" truth, or should I say several truths. (Gargiulo, 1998, pp. 418—419)~*

It is in light of these obvious considerations that I read such authors as Bion, Klein, or Winnicott, and their metaphorical encounter with the psyche's elusive complexity, and can subsequently read Grotstein's creative interpretations of them, among the many authors he studies.

By studying Grotstein's intelligent, clear and informative reading of Bion, the reader is invited to reflect on the *Beingness* that flows through us, an experience of which is the opposite of what Fingarette (1963) calls the "anxious ego." Grotstein speaks to this issue when he proffers his "own idea of a 'transcendent position' to account for the state of serenity that accompanies one who finally, after traversing the nightmares of the paranoid-schizoid position and the black holes and mournful inner cathedrals of the depressive position, is able to become reconciled to the experience of pure, unadulterated Being and Happening" (p. 282). In his psychoanalytic demythologizing of religious

themes, Grotstein exemplifies a mode of thinking that echoes William James (1993) in *The Varieties of Religions Experience*. The everyday transcendence of the indescribable or “ineffable” subject of the unconscious, locates in Grotstein’s reading, the significance of the “God experience” and “the Christ experience,” among other myth themes. Such observations issue from a mode of thinking where the unknowable real, the transcendent “0” that we are driven to find, are postulated as fundamental points of reference. Grotstein is not alone in this line of inquiry. His psychoanalytic integration of these themes, however, places him in the forefront of analytic writers. Robert M. Torrance (1994), a contemporary academic writer addressing transcendence in myth, religion and science, writes that the “objective truth of religious experience thus lies not in a changeless entity outside or beyond the human but in the continuity or interrelation between the individual and a kindred other—call it futurity, potentiality, or spirit—through which the individual self is expanded” (pp. 284—285). This is precisely Grotstein’s goal: the expansion of the self and thereby an expansion of the other.

As is clear from the foregoing, this is not a text that can be summarized or easily characterized. This is a work of kaleidoscopic complexity, as complex as the art of understanding ourselves. Although psychoanalysts assume individuated subjectivity as the locus of meaning and therefore of mind, there are other traditions that have grappled with similar issues from different and illuminating perspectives. On the contemporary scene there is the work of Marcia Cavell (1988), and within a different intellectual milieu, the reflections of medieval philosophers. ‘While Cavell locates meaning as coming from the community, Thomas Aquinas (1975, Vol. 2, pp. 215—227) and the Arabian philosopher Averroes argue as to whether there is one source of meaning, one mind, so to speak, which informs the myriad of human beings, or, as seems obvious, many minds (see Copleston, 1993; Gilson, 1955, pp. 216—220). This is not an idle observation, as it might first appear. One mind locates the subject of meaning as transcendent to the individual without being antagonistic to the individual. Zen Buddhism, which is not dissimilar to Averroes’s teachings, speaks of the illusion of the “I or ego” or achieving the experience of “no mind,” all of which, paradoxically, grounds one in a deeper reality (Gargiulo, 1997).

Struggling through the night, so to speak, with the angels of preternatural psychic presences, Grotstein returns, repeatedly, to his theme of the “ineffable subject of the unconscious,” wherein he locates meaning as both within and transcendent to the individual. I was reminded of the difference between Groddeck’s notions of the unconscious as reflected in his *The Book of the Id* (1923) and Freud’s more neutralized concept as reflected in his essay on “The Unconscious” (1915). Grotstein is in the tradition of those who experience the unconscious as alive and brimming over with creativity, not necessarily a seething cauldron of the repressed and the instincts. One ramification that follows from Freud’s model is the somewhat exclusive focus of many analysts on symptoms and defense, transference and its resolution. Without an expanded notion of the unconscious, however, and a recognition of the unknowable *real*, and/or *the “0”* of Bion, psychoanalysis can become an exercise in repetitive procedures, forgetting thereby that “theory as practice is a living bridge between patient and analyst, which the analyst and patient construct, repetitively” (Garginb, 1989, p. 158).

As I mentioned earlier, this text does not lend itself to any overriding summary; it is too rich and complex for that. Feeling some constraint, nevertheless, to summarize, I would say that Grotstein’s leitmotif is his explication of the “ineffable subject of the unconscious,” whereby two additional subjectivities, two more forgotten companions, have been brought to the analytic table. The Muse of the poet or the artist,

the creative intuitions of everyday life, the experience of mystery and awe have been reintroduced for both patient and analyst in their search for self-understanding and their encounter with the real.

Borges seems relevant again. In his poem “Borges and I” he notes, laconically, “if, in fact, I am a self” (Borges, 1993, p. 93)<sup>2</sup> In this line, Borges reflects, I believe, his sense of a deeper self, an unconscious self that defines the conscious self; a conscious self, which, in its ignorance, sees only itself, reflected in a mirror. Grotstein’s *Who is the Dreamer Who Dreams the Dream* not only shows us why we must ponder such questions, but also sets before us a path we can follow in our reflections.

#### NOTES

1. Martin Heidegger notes “that language is the House of being... the language we use tells the kind of world we can expect to find” (quoted in *Invent-big Reality —Physics as Language*, by Bruce Gregory [1988, p. 199], New York: Ranclon House). Gregory’s text is particularly helpful for anyone wishing to understand how theoretical physics views theory and language.
2. For an interesting discussion of this theme, see also Ogden (2000).

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