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DREAMS IN WHICH THE DREAMER KNOWS HE IS ASLEEP *

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“ZU den interessantesten Punkten der Traumpsycho-
logie”, writes Dr. J. M. Vold, “müssen die zum Teil recht
komischen Träume gerechnet werden in denen der Versuch
gemacht wird zu entscheiden, ob man wach ist oder träumt”.†

But in spite of their great interest few writers have done justice to such dreams, most often assigning them to the moment of waking, or to hypnagogic or reverie states. This neglect is doubtless due to the rarity of the phenomenon in the experience of all but a few observers. I myself have almost a hundred instances in my personal record; the late Dr. van Eeden had over three hundred, but F. W. H. Myers, who was as deeply interested as any one, experienced but three examples in ten years. The one he gives, hidden away as it is in an article on psychical research, may here be profitably quoted as an unexcelled introduction to the subject. Myers writes,†

“I have long thought that we are too indolent in regard to our dreams; that we neglect precious occasions for experiment for want of a little resolute direction of the will. . . . I mean . . . that we ought to accustom ourselves to look on each dream not only as a psychological *observation* but as an observation which may be transformed into an *experiment*. . . .

“I was, I thought, standing in my study; but I observed that the furniture had not its usual distinctness—that everything was blurred and somehow evaded a direct gaze. It struck me that this must be because I was *dreaming*. This was a great delight to me as giving the opportunity of experimentation. I made a strong effort to keep calm, knowing the risk of waking. I wanted most of all to see and speak to somebody, to see whether they were like the real persons and how they behaved. I remembered that my wife and children were away at the time (which was true), and I did not reason to the effect that they might be present in a dream though absent from home in reality. I therefore wished to see one of the servants; but I was afraid to ring the bell, lest the shock should wake me. I very cautiously walked downstairs—after calculating

* Received and acknowledged July 31, 1934.

† See appended bibliography.

that I should be more sure to find someone in pantry or kitchen than in a workroom, where I first thought of going. As I walked downstairs I looked carefully at the stair carpet, to see whether I could visualize better in dreams than in waking life. I found that this was *not* so; the dream-carpet was not like what I knew it in truth to be; rather, it was a thin, ragged carpet, apparently vaguely generalized from memories of seaside lodgings. I reached the pantry door, and here again I had to stop and calm myself. The door opened and a servant appeared,—quite unlike any of my own. This is all I can say, for the excitement of perceiving that I had created a new personage woke me with a shock.”

Myers thus shows an uncommon appreciation of the true importance of the state as making possible the formation of psychological judgments on the dream while dreaming. In fact, as I have found, it brings under observation even the transitions between dream-scenes. These transitions, normally unconscious, naturally seem like the process of waking up when first experienced by the critical conscious function. I venture to suggest that if Myers in his dream had rung the bell, as he feared to do, though seeming to himself to be waking up he would actually have witnessed simply the fading out of one dream-scene and its replacement by another: he might have dreamed of waking in some seaside lodging, where the same strange servant might have looked in and asked, “Did you ring, sir?”

I myself have sometimes striven to wake up from a dream of this sort and have at first secured only such a *false awakening*.* The feeling of being on the verge of waking up must therefore be regarded as altogether illusory. The assignment of this type of dream to the last moments of sleep is thus a natural but none the less serious mistake. Dr. van Eeden testified that his “lucid dreams” normally gave place not only to a false awakening but to further dream-episodes of the “non-lucid” type before he really woke up. The term “lucid” he applied to such dreams as involved not only the recognition that he was asleep but a more or less complete memory of his current waking concerns as well. It should be clear, in the example quoted, that Myers did not merely “dream that he dreamed”, or “dream that he remembered his family’s absence”, as if there were really some mistake about it. Nor may the state be dismissed with any other merely verbal tag such as “volition”, “l’attention”, or “Selbstbewusstsein”.

Another error lies in the confusion of this dream-state with

* On false awakening, see H. A. Carr in *Psychological Review*, 1912, xix, 62. Helen Keller also observes, “there is no difference between the consciousness of the *sham* waking and that of the real one.”—“My Dreams”, *Century Magazine*, 1908, lxxvii, 71.

that of "hypnagogic imagination".† The dreams that I am describing, as I have meant to make clear in the title, are genuine sleep-dreams. In hypnagogic visions the subject is not asleep but awake, fully aware of his real bodily position and therefore incapable of taking an active part in the visionary scene, of which he remains a mere spectator. Such visions also are very clear, in contrast to the unclearness noted by Myers in his dream-environment. Even the critical faculty exercisable in both cases is not the same. In the "lucid dream" it is chiefly concerned with the implications of the fact that it is a dream. In the visions its sole concern is with the imagery. Thus the dream cannot be simply a hypnagogic vision, though it may contain examples of this or any other mental process, as in the first dream quoted below, which presented a quasi-hypnagogic picture-show just as it was becoming "lucid" (if I may adopt Dr. van Eeden's word), *i.e.*, just as my dream-consciousness was becoming critical enough to raise the question, "Is this a dream?" But the passive gazing ceased and dream-activities were resumed on an increasingly lucid basis.

For the rest, I shall devote all my evidence to combating the fallacy that dream-lucidity is allied to daydreaming. Sante de Sanctis, for instance, treating of dream-volition, writes in Kafka's *Handbuch*, "Ein klassisches Beispiel dafür ist der Fall, dass man im Schläfe sagt: es ist ein Traum, ich will fortfahren zu träumen. Dies kommt nach meinen Beobachtungen immer knapp vor dem Erwachen (im leichtesten Schläfe), besonders im Tagesschläfe vor, der eine sehr grosse Ähnlichkeit mit der *rêverie* hat." The inaccuracy of this observation can best be shown by quoting several lucid dreams from my own record, where *reverie in sleep* often occurs in juxtaposition with *genuine dream-hallucination* recognized as such while dreaming. I have carefully written down these dreams on waking, numbering them for reference, and dating them as of that morning, they being characteristically morning dreams. I transcribe them without change except for the omission of some episodes for the sake of brevity, and the insertion of comments in parentheses.

79. June 20, 1934. After several ordinary dream-episodes involving my brother and his friends, I stand looking into a show-room. A velvet-covered exhibition-frame first contains some beer-steins; then, when I look again (unconscious transition), some neckties. Again, it has vanished and the counters are covered with bouquets of very colorful flowers. "Some

† On hypnagogic phenomena, see F. E. Leaning, "An Introductory Study of Hypnagogic Phenomena". Proc. S. P. R., 1925, xxxv, 289-409, with 5 pp. bibliography.

writers", I observe, "would call this a hypnagogic vision: the imagery is so eidetically distinct and scrutinizable. But it is not properly hypnagogic". The flowers fade and vanish (conscious transition), but, to my satisfaction, there appears—like one cinema-scene fading into another—a sparser display of equally brilliant flowers. We are called to the street window behind us. "What will I see out of the window?" I wonder, vaguely aware that I am dreaming, and fearing that it may wake me to look out. . . . I jump up into the air to make sure that I am dreaming (my standard test lately, and an infallible one, superseding the "right comical" tests such as Professor Vold describes). The first jump is light and feathery, but I do not go very high. . . . I am now fully aware that it must be a dream. "This is a lucid dream", I announce to my brother with great elation, thinking: "How strange and gratifying that another such dream has come so soon." (No. 78 was just two days before.) My brother, however, has disappeared: well, I can manage my dream alone. I consider what to do. I remember that I have planned to "call" (as Dr. van Eeden "called" images of deceased friends) a taxi, and to have a lucid dream to be named "Going Places". "Taxi"! I shout; "taxi"! I meet a hotel employé and ask, "Where do I get a taxi?" "Downstairs at the desk", he says, and thither I immediately descend by a short stairway. "Taxi"? I say to a uniformed young man who rises and leads me out to where a sport roadster is parked. . . . He starts the car and turns onto a broad suburban avenue which I at first take to be "Twelfth Avenue by the Hudson River". I consider asking to be taken to some theatre, but do not remember the name of any. It occurs to me that I need not talk to the driver, as he is not a real separate personality. "I suppose you know where I am to go", I say, and he nods affirmatively. It is more than I know, and I hope he will not take me to some undesirable dive. I bring a handful of coins out of my pocket, hoping that my dream-money will appear in convenient denominations. I turn my thoughts to the earlier stages of the dream to fix them in my mind; but it is a fatal mistake. Attempting to return to the taxi-scene, I find it wholly vanished. I can reconstruct it imaginatively, but in such *dream-daydreaming* I do not get anywhere. It does not take hold, and so I resign myself to waking up. But I was far from being awake: what followed was but a false awakening, in which I gather up my handful of coins from among the bedclothes in a baseball grandstand. Then I really wake up. I go over details of the dream for fifteen minutes and spend forty minutes recording it.

Note that I was able in my sleep to try to continue my dream by daydreaming, giving up the attempt, however, when I found that the unconscious spontaneity would not take it over. The first was not a successful continuation of the genuine dream-experience, nor was the other an awakening. Accordingly the supposition that lucid dreams are but daydreams, or that dreaming in

general is "imagination during sleep", must be abandoned. My original waking plan to conduct a lucid dream by calling a taxi was something of a daydream. But of such idle phantasies I make no record. The actual dream recorded above is more interesting in its abortiveness than was the anticipative daydream in its completeness. Reverie in sleep, it should be observed, occurs naturally in a lucid dream, being carried on by that special consciousness which longest survives the general blotting out incident to the shifting of dream-scenery. But far from being identical with lucid dreaming, this interlude of dream-daydreaming shows itself clearly as a separate and inferior phenomenon.

To mention specific differences, the reverie, whether in sleep or in waking, is never critical of itself: it does not invite tests nor afford an opportunity for experimentation. The judgment "I am daydreaming" is never a surprise but always an error, for the daydream has *ipso facto* been suspended when criticism supervenes. The genuine dream, however, whether lucid or non-lucid, is primarily the work of an unconscious shifter of scenery, who may be confronted by the critical consciousness, sometimes setting up for the latter an experiment in which both cooperate, sometimes opposing the conscious function, offering it the mockery of a false awakening in fraudulent exchange for its hard-won lucidity. The daydream, furthermore, once it gets under way, is largely an affair of the emotions, imagery being sketchy, understood rather than actually presented for inspection as in dreams proper. Excerpts from a few other examples will show how lucid dreaming contrasts with daydreaming, especially when the two alternate with each other in sleep.

60a. Dec. 2, 1933. After several vivid but non-lucid dream-scenes ending near a cabin on a cliff, I am amazed to conceive that I may be dreaming. . . . I jump up into the air and by the slowness with which I come down I am convinced that it really is a dream. . . . Running down the slope towards the precipice, I take off my coat and jump into the air to try to fly. I find that by turning almost head-downward I can stay in the air, and by waving my coat about near the ground I can progress horizontally. I come to the edge of the precipice and wish to fly out over the lake; but I feel the spontaneity leaving the dream. I think, "This is getting to be but little better than a very absorbing daydream." I continued to float out over the abyss, but the experience became so artificial as to hold no further interest. I was not quite awake (that is, not in possession of my sensorimotor functions) but felt that I could be so by an effortless redirection of attention, which proved (in this rather exceptional instance) to be the case. It was 5:00 A.M. and I wrote till 5:30.

60b. (Later the same morning.) After dreaming of a journey to a place supposed to be home, and of worrying about my money and baggage on setting out to return, I find myself walking across a bridge. The thought occurs that it would be interesting if this could be a dream, though it seems scarcely possible that such a realistic experience could be unreal. I jump up into the air as usual. The first test seems inconclusive, but on the next attempt it takes several seconds to come down. . . . I have long wished to draw a picture and make it real, thus gaining control of the dream-environment. I fumble in the pocket of my overcoat hunting for drawing materials, but I find none. . . . I walk on, noting that the dream-realism is beginning to fail (especially as regards the sense of weight as I walk). Spots of light appear overhead, as if intrusions of actual optical stimulation. I hop up to the bridge-rail, but this act wears the dream (or dream-scene) so thin that an actual dive would have been mere daydreaming—or *dream-daydreaming*, for that which supervened was merely a false awakening. I seem to wake up in my room, lying on my right side; then in a hotel room, my concern about my money and baggage reappearing. . . . I finally wake up and find I am really lying on my back instead of on my right side. It is 7:15. I write till 8:00.

74. April 21, 1934. At a desk by a window I think: "I am asleep." I hold up my hand. "If I wake myself now, will I find that I am sitting at the desk with my hand really in some other position?" I prefer to go on dreaming. "I am near waking, here at this desk", I think, "but if I am careful I may avoid full awakening". I look out of the window and picture myself standing outside on the veranda-roof; *but this piece of dream-daydreaming does not become a dream-reality. I am still at the desk.* I have a book with an index. "I have never in a dream looked up anything with an index. I will try it." Quite realistically I verify an indexed title. I walk about the room. . . . I continue the dream but without lucidity, waking at 7:00 A.M., surprised that I was really sleeping not in a desk chair but in bed.

76. May 7, 1934. (An eleven o'clock supper of mince pie and milk may explain the unpleasantness but not the lucidity of the following. I arose at 6 A.M. remembering to put out a milk bottle, being alone in the house, and then went back to bed.) I see a boy in the kitchen, then a man. How did they get in with all the doors locked? Then with some elation I discern: "It's a dream; now I can experiment." I remember that I have thought, among other things, of trying murder in a lucid dream, and so I attempt to tear the boy limb from limb, but I cannot make the least impression on his body with my hands. The experiment is distasteful and I desist. I pass into an unfamiliar room, a kind of woodshed with a pit seven feet deep in the center. A man sits on the steps that lead into the pit. At first he is our friend the Rev. Mr. ———, but later he is more like a young hobo. I tell him he must be hanged. There is a noose dangling on the opposite side of the pit, and an apparatus

for winding it up. I find myself precariously poised aloft, trying to adjust the rope. I draw down what I judge to be a sufficient length and then descend to the rim of the pit. "You are about to enter the next world", I tell the young man. Again I feel an aversion to continuing the experiment, but reflect that it is certainly a dream, and can do no real harm, while it may be both interesting and informative if carried out. "Perhaps", I think, "if I somewhat let go of the reality of the situation, it will seem more tolerable". *I withdraw all imaginative cooperation from the dreaming function*, at the seeming risk of waking, but am satisfied to observe that I do not wake up, though the objects in the room have a very reassuring dream-like vagueness. "It is certainly possible—indeed now actual—to conduct introspections in a dream", I notice. The young man has obediently come around to be hanged. He jumps down onto a chair that stands on the floor of the pit. "He thinks he is to be lifted from there", I reflect; "evidently he does not understand hanging". I tell him to come back up. I adjust the noose, and, again reassuring myself with the thought that I am obviously acting in a mere dream-world, I lift the boy and plunge him into the pit. I almost expect the shock to tear his head from his body, but it does not even kill him. On the floor of the pit he sits up and raises his hands to his neck, seeming to suffer a great pain. As I stand looking down at him, I wake up. I have been lying on my left side. It is 6:45. I spend an hour writing down the dream.

The above examples illustrate not only the point for which they were selected but several others besides: dream-reasoning, the use of dream-gravity as a criterion, the memory of waking life and of plans for the conduct of lucid dreams. Other dreams than the ones so fragmentarily given might have illuminated these points more interestingly; but when it is a question of the very existence of a phenomenon secondary considerations can wait. The references to Dr. van Eeden, Mrs. Arnold-Forster, and E. H. Rowland, if consulted by the reader, should yield sufficient confirmation of the main point.

I have not succeeded in tracing dream-lucidity to any obvious cause, certainly not to a pathological cause, for observers (Thomas Reid, Dr. van Eeden, and the present writer) testify that these dreams occur only or chiefly in times of perfect health. A sixty-two day cycle has seemed to regulate some of my own dreams,—suggestion, possibly, though a lunar-monthly * chart, previously tried, led to no results at all. And Dr. van Eeden writes, "When I have been flying in my dreams for two or three nights, then I know that a lucid dream is at hand." A dream that can be either

* Cf. J. Nelson, "A Study of Dreams". American Journal of Psychology, 1888, i. 401. He finds a lunar "eebolic" cycle affecting dreams generally.

predicted by characteristic signs several days in advance, or caused by suggestion at even longer range, cannot be laid entirely to the dietary sins of the evening before, though they may influence its content and even facilitate its appearance.

I do not offer any explanation of the state, but only insist that to experience it is to recognize it as a special mental condition not to be confounded with the reverie state, the hypnagogic state, or any other familiar state unless it be a kind of auto-hypnosis. The hypnotic cultivation of this variety of dream would seem to be a promising experimental project.

The following bibliography contains all the references that I have found directly bearing on the subject, though only the first five items have much to contribute.

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