“The Light Militia of the Lower Sky”: The Deeper Nature of Dreaming and Phantasying

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It is the author's belief that psychoanalytic interpretations of unconscious phantasies, rather than discrediting them vis-à-vis reality, actually reinforce and substantiate their functioning. Following Bion, it is his belief that all psychopathology can be considered to be id pathology, that is, pathology that results from an inadequate transformation of “O,” Bion's term for the Absolute Truth about Ultimate Reality (infinity, chaos). Normally, dreaming/phantasying acts as a containing contact-barrier between consciousness and the unconscious. Psychopathology is a testimony to a failure in the containment-dreaming-phantasying-contact-barrier continuum. Rather than defending against the libidinal and aggressive or destructive drives, an individual defends against the “truth instinct,” which emanates from evolving “O.” Dreaming and phantasying are first conducted for the infant by its mother, who, in a state of reverie, “dreams” him and “becomes” him in a non-Cartesian mode of knowing him and his pain. This process is repeated by the psychoanalyst.

Know, then, unnumbered Spirits around thee fly,
The light militia of the lower sky:
These, though unseen, are ever on the wing,
Hang o'er the box and hover round the ring.
—Alexander Pope, “The Rape of the Lock”

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The year 1897 was a watershed in Freud's conception of psychoanalysis. That was the year in which, in a letter to his confidante, Wilhelm Fliess, he revealed that he had discovered the presence and importance of unconscious phantasy (Freud, 1897). Three years later he published his epochal Interpretation of Dreams (Freud, 1900). Since then and until recent times, dreaming and its fraternal twin, phantasy, all but dominated the way in which analysts thought and practiced. Today, things have changed. Because Freud all but neglected the relevance of environmental factors, (except insofar as they evoked the responses of the id in cases of trauma), current analysts, save Kleinians, have reacted to that polarity by reassessing the importance of the fostering or nonfostering environment of the analysand and the impact of good versus damaging or of depriving relationships on his developmental legacy. As a result, the importance that was accorded to unconscious phantasy has significantly declined.

Bion was one of the few major analysts who maintained an evenly balanced perspective on the importance of the internal and external worlds. Bion stands out because of his elaboration of yet a third world of reality, that of “O,” a world that is extraterritorial to and yet interpenetrating the worlds of psychic and external reality. “O” is characterized as the Absolute Truth about Ultimate Reality, infinity, and chaos and is associated with Kant's noumena, things-in-themselves, and primary and secondary categories, Plato's Ideal Forms, and “godhead” (the imagined deity that can encompass the Unknowable Unknown) (Bion, 1965, 1970). It can be thought of as the relentless activity (evolution) of the “ultimate indifference of circumstance” as it impacts our lives. “O” characterizes our raw experience of the other as well as our own self-experience. Thus, every interpersonal/intersubjective as well as intrasubjective encounter can be thought of as “O” (self) ↔ “O” (other), which, in turn, is characterized by “emotional turbulence,” awaiting transformations into personal subjective meaning.

In this contribution I present two theses: (1) the concept of a “truth instinct” and (2) the concept, derived from Bion's theory of dreaming, that mental health is a direct function of successful dreaming/phantasying and, conversely, that all psychopathology is a function of insufficient or defective dreaming/phantasying.

Part I: Notes on the Unconscious

Before I enter into the discussion of unconscious phantasies, I should like to prepare the way by presenting some preliminary views of their host, the unconscious. I wish to superimpose the perspectives of vitalism and teleology, especially that aspect known as entelechy, onto the conventional conception of the unconscious and by so doing hope to lend new
dimensions and perspectives to our understanding of it. The concept of unconscious mental life acquires greater breadth, depth, and humanness when it is contemplated from the consideration of vitalism rather than of scientism, that is drives and the like. Vitalism, which is actually a holographic concept, predicates that the unconscious is an organic entity, as “Gaia” is for the Earth, and is a dwelling that is inhabited by indivisible numinous presences, phantoms, demons, or spirits who constitute the permanent cast of an ongoing unconscious dramatic series in repertory, otherwise known as phantasies, that highlight and play out ontological themes from the “dailies” of our normal lives in a veritable cinematographic “mixing room.”

In this “mixing room,” that is, System Pcs., the “existential film editor,” interlaces the samples or assays of our quotidian existence with samples from their counterparts in our collective and personal, historical memory bank. All of this is done against the backdrop of “O,” Bion’s (1965, 1970) recondite pseudonym for the Absolute Truth about Ultimate Reality, things-in-themselves, noumena, inherent preconceptions, Ideal Forms, chaos, infinity, Ananke (Necessity—or, as I translate it from the Greek, “the indifference of Circumstance”), godhead (the imagined numinous Presence who is accountable for the preceding)—all of which converge to “Life-As It Is.” Teleology predicates an inherent destiny that the individual feels preordained to fulfill, one that seemingly becomes confirmed at birth by way of primary identification with mother (Lichtenstein, 1961). Entelechy is the actualization of this destiny. Shame is our awareness of our forfeiture of it. We know entelechly as it relentlessly actualizes as growth, development, and maturation.

Of immediate relevance for this article are Bion’s unique ideas about dreaming and phantasying (Grotstein, 2002). First, like Freud, he assumed that the two are virtually synonymous. Second, he assumed that all experiences, whether originating in the internal or the external world, must first be dreamed (unconsciously phantasied) before they can become “mental,” that is, remembered, thought (about), repressed, or reflected on. He proffered the term alpha-function for this process, and alpha-elements for its product. He also states that: (1) all experiences in consciousness and in the unconsciousness must first be rendered unconscious (by dreaming) to become transformed into alpha-elements in order to qualify for mentalization, and (2) that another of the functions of alpha-function is to create and reinforce the selective permeability of the contact-barrier between Systems Ucs. and Cs.

If Bion is correct in suggesting that all internal and external experiences must first be dreamed, then it follows that all psychopathology is a function of inadequate, insufficient, or misguided dreaming (phantasying) by a container/object, originally mother, then father. The object/container then becomes internalized within the self. This defect becomes manifest as a defective function of the selective permeability of the contact-barrier and the presence of internal objects, which represent the internalization of the end result of defective containment by objects. Consequently, it is the purpose of dreaming/phantasying to effect a mental transformation from the cosmic indifference of “O” to an acceptance of one’s own personal, emotional, subjective response to “O” and to accept this response as one’s legitimate portion of circumstance. All psychopathology, consequently, represents unprocessed (undreamed) “O.”

A second hypothesis, following, upon the first, is that accurate (enough) interpretation of unconscious phantasies—and dreams—rather than distilling their fiction in favor of reality, serves to repair the phantasy-dream network that continuously accompanies, subtends, and supports our understanding of reality. Thus, dreaming(phantasying) constitutes “the light militia of the lower sky.” A third hypothesis is that all psychopathology is id pathology. A fourth hypothesis, using Bion’s (1965) concept of “binocular vision,” is that psychic reality and external reality constitute obligatory binary oppositions that are not necessarily conflictual, but, like the thumb and forefinger, offer differing but complementary and collaborative, oppositional perspectives on internal as well as external objects.

A Proposed Revision of the Psychoanalytic Conception of the Unconscious

To explicate the theme of this article, that effective psychoanalytic interventions bolster the id and its creative functioning(dreaming/phantasying), I should first like to propose a revision of how we might now conceive of the unconscious. Much of our attitude toward it as psychoanalysts is due to our looking at it from the vantage point of consciousness or the ego. If, by imaginative conjecture, we regard consciousness from the vantage point of the unconscious, we come up with another point of view. First of all, rather than regarding the unconscious as an impersonal set of nonsubjective functions and as a “seething cauldron” that impulsively and psychopathically seeks wantonly to irrupt, we

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1 I choose to employ the Kleinian spelling of phantasy rather than the classical spelling, fantasy, the former designating its roots in System Ucs. and the latter in Systems Pcs. and Cs. This distinction was arrived at as a convention during the Controversial Discussions (King and Steiner, 1992).
might more empathically consider it to be a preternatural, personal subjectivity in its own right, one that we are enjoined by psychoanalysis to identify with and become—and regard this unconscious subject as a conjoined twin, an alter ego, to the ego. We also would regard the objects of the external world through our personal, subjective, phantasmal filter as created in our own image.

I suggest that the unconscious comprises not “objects” but phantoms as well as “presences” or “intelligences.” Among these are: “the ineffable subject of the unconscious” and “the phenomenal subject of the preconscious,” who are also known as “the dreamer who dreams the dream” and the “dreamer who understands the dream,” respectively. It is my hypothesis, derived from Bion, that the ineffable subject of the unconscious represents, undisguised, pure emotion and is the one who dreams the beta-elements emerging from the intersection of relentlessly evolving “O.” Using its alpha-function, it transforms (dreams) “O” into alpha-elements and transmits them to the dreamer, who understands the dream (the phenomenal subject of the preconscious). The presence of psychopathology denotes that the ineffable subject suffered from an incapacity to dream fully “O,” thereby creating a disharmony in its communication with the phenomenal subject. Successful analytic interpretations facilitate the completion of the dreaming-of “O” and thereby heal the communication between the two subjects (presences).

Freud’s (1915) “seething cauldron” can now be arrogated from the drives and assigned to ever-evolving “O,” which, though felt to be in the internal world, is extraterritorial to it. The internal world constitutes its putative container.

The “Truth Instinct”

Now let us place that idea in context with Bion’s conception of “O,” which both transcends and interpenetrates Systems Ucs. and Cs. Let us next invoke Bion’s (1965) conception of “binocular vision,” which I think of as a “dual-track” (Grotstein, 1978). Systems Ucs. and Cs. can be considered to be like two eyes or two cerebral hemispheres that are receptive to the intersections of the ever-evolving “O” from their respective vantage points. Now let us consider my concept of the “truth instinct” (Grotstein, in press). Ever-evolving “O” relentlessly and inexorably intersects with (thrusts against) the individual’s unconscious emotional frontier as “Absolute Truth,” “Ultimate Reality.” It makes an impact on the emotions, which seemingly function like sentinels to register Truth’s impact and relay its “take” of this impact to the mind of the individual, who can then feel his emotions (Damasio, 1999) and thereby realize his ongoing ontological status.

The Two Unconsciouses: Consensus on What We Mean by “The Unconscious”

Before I proceed, I wish to comment about what is meant by “the unconscious.” Freud (1915) defined it as having two major components, Systems Ucs. and Pcs. as operating in two theaters, the unpressed and the dynamic unconscious. All Freud’s specifications of the unconscious presuppose the existence of an “internal world” for the individual psyche. Lacan (1966) made at least two major revisions of this conception: (1) the unconscious is constituted like a language and is socio-cultural-historical; that is “the infant is born into the symbolic order of language in the name of the father,” and this symbolic order becomes his or her unconscious; in other words, an unconscious that is first and foremost external to the individual, that is socio-cultural-historical; (b) the Other is that inchoately split-off aspect of the self from birth that is ultimately indistinguishable from the primal object. The Other is the Unconscious as well.

As Bion (personal communication, 1975) often stated, “The past is rumor and is unanalyzable.” Here I can only hint at what I have explicated elsewhere—that the unpressed unconscious is the

Platonic-Kantian unconscious of a priori transcendent categories that format as they anticipate our imminent experiences (Grotstein, 2000, p. 125). Further, it is my impression that the dynamic unconscious can be equated with Sandler and Sandler’s (1984, 1987) past unconscious, and this, in turn, can be understood to be under the aegis of System Pcs., which has been underrated, even by Freud. To me it is the “mixing room” and “search engine” at its two frontiers between System Ucs. and System Cs. respectively, which it interposes. I shall reluctantly forgo a discussion of an important and fascinating corollary theme to the unconscious, that of primal repression, because of space considerations.
**Systems Cs. and Ucs. When Viewed “Binocularly”**

Bion (1970, 1992) proffered the notion of binocular vision, by which he meant what I have termed a dual-track for perceiving and conceiving of phenomena (Grotstein, 1978). Here is how I conceive how his stereoscopic model works for the unconscious: First, let us reduce the drives from a primary status to that of a mediating status. They mediate something even profounder than they, the truth instinct, which inexorably seeks its rendezvous with “O.” I would add that aspect of “O” that is appropriated to entelechy, which also relentlessly surges forward as “O.” System Ucs. becomes one pincer or caliper-blade of judgment about “O” (and generates unconscious phantasies to both approximate and disguise “O” while at the same time containing it).

System Cs., which ideally is cooperatively counterposed (dialectically oppositional to, not conflictual with) System Ucs., extends the other caliper-blade so that between these two embracing pincers the perceiving subject can obtain an informative, three-dimensional “reading” of the object. The pincers of System Ucs. are emotions; of System Cs., feelings—ultimately about the emotions (Damasio, 1999). The drives mediate the emotion's readings in System Pcs. In other words, “O,” as well as the inexorable swelling of entelechy, constitutes the ultimate source of destabilization within the unconscious. Dreams and unconscious phantasies intercept and process them as the first line of defense prior to and in anticipation of rational thinking.

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4 Bion's (1965) way of addressing this is as follows: he nominates “L” (love), “H” (hate), and “K” (knowledge) as inseparable emotional linkages and valences between self and object. We know (“K”) an object by how we feel (“L” or “H”) about it.

But there exists another set of calipers, that of Bion's (1965) concept of the dialectical interrelationship between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions (P-S ↔ D). From that hint of Bion's I believe that P-S and D also constitute a binary oppositional function in which each collaborates with and complements the other in confronting the relentless evolutions of “O.”

Freud (1911) thought that System Ucs. was dominated by the pleasure principle and System Cs. by the reality principle—and that the principles were separate. Bion (1962, 1963, 1965) believed that the two principles are conjoined as binary oppositions in both systems and normally function cooperatively. He conflated the two in his conception of alpha-function, which includes both primary and secondary processes and which functions both in the unconscious and in consciousness.

Two more comments are in order in reconceiving the unconscious. The first is to call attention to the differentiation between the repressed unconscious and the unrepressed unconscious. The former relates to the repression of lived experiences, and the latter relates to the hardwiring of the unconscious, that is, those aspects of mental life that are inherited and can never become conscious—the inborn defense mechanisms, the Platonic Eternal Forms, noumena, things-in-themselves, primary categories, and so on. The second is to invoke Matte-Blanco's (1975, 1988) concept of bilogic, infinity, and the dialectic between symmetry and asymmetry. For our purposes here, I should like to focus on infinity and the infinite sets of all categories. If we were to apply this idea of infinite sets to Bion's concept of “O,” with its attribution of Absolute Truth and Ultimate Reality, along with noumena, things-in-themselves, and godhead, we would conceive of “O” as infinite in all categories and thus experienced as chaos.

**Interpretation as Restoration of Impaired Phantasying (Dreaming)**

One of the principal tenets of psychoanalytic treatment is that the cure comes from making the unconscious conscious, an act presupposing that an unconscious belief or phantasy that is the nucleus of the disorder dissolves or falls away once the correct (corrective) interpretation is made. Associated with this idea has been another in

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5 I assume, following Bion (1992), that dreaming and phantasying are interchangeable.

which the unconscious belief has been omnipotent and unwilling to relent until subdued by the truth embedded within the interpretation. A third assumption has been that there are only two realities, the psychic reality of System Cs. and that of the external reality of System Cs. Following Bion, we now have three realities at our disposal, the third being Ultimate Reality, the reality that transcends imagistic and symbolic reality, a Reality that is beyond our knowledge or comprehension.
With this in mind, we can now see that we must defend ourselves not against our drives, but against the Absolute ineffable Truth about Ultimate Reality itself, that is, the revelations of our Truth Instinct. The drives now become understandable in this perspective as mediators of our emotional contact with the Truth about Reality. From this perspective, the symptom becomes understood not as a conflict between differing drives, but as the existential choice whether or not to accept the emotional verdict that emanates from one's experience with “O,” the Absolute Truth about Ultimate Reality, as it is delivered by way of the Truth Instinct to one's unconscious emotional frontier for one to ponder, accept, absorb, feel, accommodate to, transform, and then transmit to the phenomenal subject of System Pcs. It is “O” that is felt to be omnipotent and omnipotently imposing on us. Thus, our capacity to adjust and to accommodate to changes without altering our authenticity (our flexibility short of being elastically malleable)—in collaboration with our ability to mourn losses—becomes decisive in our ongoing, relentless rendezvous with inexorable, ever-evolving “O.” In brief, every symptom represents a potential breakthrough of “O,” a Truth that we believe at the moment that we cannot tolerate.

Interpretation as Containment. Why is it, then, that a truth exists that we believe we cannot tolerate, yet, when an analyst properly interprets this truth to us—employing the right timing and dosage—we experience relief? Perhaps the Truth embedded in the interpretation is something about which we already had a premonition but were unable, on our own, to bear. But we could bear it when it came from someone with whom we have a unique relationship of dependency, especially mother or analyst, but also father, sibling, friend, or mate. Our new-found ability to tolerate a Truth after an interpretation that we could not tolerate before the interpretation suggests that there was more to the interpretation than just the cognitive and emotional message articulated within it. I believe that the missing element is transference itself, but transference reconsidered in a new way—transference as containment.

We are all familiar with the “visual-cliff” experiment (Gibson and Walk, 1960) in which an infant and mother are placed on opposite sides of a large plate glass that is situated atop two separated tables or desks. As the infant crawls toward its mother atop the plate glass, it initially has the solidity of the table or desk underneath the glass to remind it of it safety. Suddenly the infant approaches the visual cliff where the glass continues but the desk or table top does not. The infant looks to its mother for cues. If mother seems frightened, the infant will not continue to crawl. If mother is encouraging, the infant will continue across the cliff. This is an experiment in collaboratively confronting “O.” Thus, the analyst's interpretation becomes tantamount to the mother's encouragement of her infant. Put another way, the analyst's interpretation is not only an interpretation of emotional Truth; it is also a confirmation by the analyst that he believes that it is safe for the analysand to accept the truth of what she already knows but has hitherto forewarned to believe because the analyst, by uttering the interpretation of the truth, vouchsafes the analysand's sense of safety in accepting it. The analyst, by uttering it, demonstrates that he, the analyst, feels safe in knowing the truth. Bion believed that, in the act of containment, the analyst or mother must first become the analysand or infant, “become” the distress that the infant or analysand experiences—and then transcend it. I believe that the vouchsafing of the safety of an interpretation may constitute the ultimate meaning of containment.

Before I continue, I should like to define interpretation. I understand an interpretation to constitute an intervention that links the analysand's conscious emotional experience with his or her unconscious emotional experience. That experience is expressed as an unconscious phantasy embedded in a causal relationship—in conjunction with nominating the maximum unconscious anxiety, the defenses, or impulses that were recruited to defend against it, and the cost of using those defenses. The following would constitute a generic interpretation: “You (the analysand) could not endure my long holiday absence and therefore sought to disappear as a self in order to protect yourself by taking drugs, which only made you feel worse by creating images of a retaliatory me who now persecutes you.” In this instance, the analyst's interpretation, beginning as it does with his or her nomination of the current maximum unconscious anxiety, empathically addresses the distressed aspect of the analysand's infant self in regard to its contemplation of its own distress, what it felt compelled to do to mitigate the distress in mother/analyst's absence, and the cost of employing that defense. It also addresses the “because” factor (linking consciousness with the unconscious) and is articulated in the genre of unconscious phantasy. By supplying the (name of the)phantasy, I am suggesting that the analyst is supplying a more nearly complete narrative to patch up or repair an inadequacy or incompleteness in the standing phantasyhitherto resident within the analysand.

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5 Bion's (1970) concept of “becoming” owes its origin, I have come to believe, in the “Theaetetus” portion of Plato's Dialogues.

7 This “becoming”—“transcending”—aspect of containment inescapably reminds me of exorcism.
The analyst's interpretation, consequently, not only would seek accurately to address the distress and all its parameters, but also adds the empathic understanding of the analyst, who demonstrates his or her awareness of "where the analysand was coming from" and a hint of a regret that he, the analyst, was not there in time to help the analysand. The interpretation of unconscious emotional fact elides into an empathic understanding. Bion's (1965, 1970) way of understanding this clinical phenomenon was to conceive of it as a process by which the analyst, in a state of reverie, operates as a container who, using his or her alpha-function, symmetrically matches up (resonates) with the nature of the analysand's distress by "becoming it" and "dreaming it." Bion referred to this process as the analyst's transformation of the analysand's experience of "O" into "K," knowledge about "O," which can then be interpreted to the analysand.

Of importance for our theme here is that the analyst's interpretation naturally emerges from his or her "dreaming embrace" of the analysand and his or her distress, not unlike what happens in exorcism or shamanistic practices. Thus, the act of containing is equivalent to the analyst's "dreaming"—and thereby "becoming" the analysand. This act of "dreaming" or "phantasying" serves both as an empathic act of understanding and as a "rehabilitative" narrative.

As a consequence of this theory, all mental symptoms devolve into failures on the part of the analysand to contain "O" with their own inherent and/or acquired alpha-function. Put another way, the analysand was unable sufficiently to dream, that is contain, phantasize, his or her personal portion of "O." The analyst's corrective effect is to reinforce the analysand's dreaming through containment, which is empathic and rehabilitative narrative repair.

What Does It Mean “To Dream the Analysand?”

Bion not only suggested that the mother must dream her infant and the analyst must dream his or her analysand; he also suggested that, in the act of containment (with the use of alpha-function in a state of reverie), the mother must become her infant and the analyst must become his or her analysand. Bion distinguished between phantasied experiences of fusion between subject and object, which is psychotic, and "becoming," which is partial fusion with the presence in both the mother and the analyst of an intact contact-barrier. Bion (1965, 1970) termed this kind of "knowing" a "transformation in 'O.'" I believe that, by invoking the verb become, which grammatically is a linking verb, Bion discovered a non-Cartesian mode of "knowing" the subject without objectifying it.

Vitalism and the Unconscious: “Something Is Lost in Translation”

An analysand of many years stated the following:

I wish I could allow myself to write so as to be published. I can write beautifully—for others, for school reports or dissertations, technical writing when I worked at a job that required it, etc. I am so afraid to write as myself for myself and subject myself to the possibility of the criticisms of those who will read what I write. It'll be too self-revealing.

Owing to the fact that we had repeatedly dealt with her feelings of shame and her fear of self-revelation as a consequence, I took a different tack this time. I said:

It's like reporting a dream. The dream you experience is wondrous, indescribable, ineffable. When you then have to relate the dream to me, you feel frustrated that you cannot reproduce the dream as it was. Your keen esthetic sense then feels betrayed, especially when you carry this metaphor over to your writing, and you say to yourself, "What's the use?" You are the unseen critic who shamefully criticizes your failure to have done justice to your inner vision.

The analysand responded:

Exactly!

What I am getting at is that the mind and its workings are holistic and holographic, vitalistic; but to comprehend and discuss them we are reduced to "analyzing" them, to tear them apart into recognizable linear particularities. Thus, System Cs, by default, must resort to nonvitalistic scientific techniques to tear down and tear apart the beautiful, vital, seamless structure of dreams and unconscious phantasies and dehumanize the phantoms, demons, and presences by lifting them out of their ethereal contexts for purposes of "biopsy."

The Problem of Perspective. When we view the unconscious from the vantage point of consciousness, we hypothesize "instinctual drives" and "internal objects." But, when we view the objects of consciousness from within the domain of the unconscious, we are face-to-face with "phantoms," "demons"s (both positive and negative), "spirits," "angels," and a whole
lexicon of numinous preternatural “presences,” all holographically intermixed with external objects. To the cast of these internal denizens I should add yet another vitalistic entity, the “supraordinate subject of being,” whose unconscious aspect is the “ineffable subject of the unconscious” and which is counterposed to the “phenomenal subject of consciousness” (Grotstein, 2000). They are complementary to one another and intercommunicate across amystic network of discontinuous continuity, as in the Möbius strip. In a recent work I proffer such pseudonyms for the ineffable subject as the “dreamer who dreams the dream,” “the dreamer who understands the dream,” “the dreamer who makes the dream understandable,” “the infinite geomiter, the numinous dramaturge,” and, following Bion (1965, 1970, 1992), “godhead” (immanent, not transcendent) (Grotstein, 2000, p. 3).

I also posited there that what have traditionally been called “internal objects” actually constitute split-off “alien,” or “rogue” subjectivities

or presences hidden, as in mimicry, within the camouflage of the image of the external object. Further, every “internal object” constitutes ipso facto the experience of the subject's encounter with a failed container. Consequently, each internalized subjective object is composed of: (1) not only the image of the object per se, and (2) those aspects of the subject which are projected into the (the image of the) object, but also (3) the results of the experience with the object as a failed container of the subject's experience of “O” (the Absolute Truth about Ultimate Reality, i.e., beta elements).* 

Part II: Notes on Unconscious Phantasies

Isaacs (1952), explicating Klein’s theory of phantasies, stated that they constitute the mental representations of instincts. More recently Spillius (2001) clarified the differences between Freud's and Klein's understanding of phantasies:

In Freud's view, although there are phantasies in the system unconscious, the basic unit of the system unconscious is not phantasy but the unconsciousinstinctual wish. Dream-formation and phantasy-formation are parallel processes; one might speak of “phantasy work” as comparable to the “dream work”; both involve transformation of primary unconscious content, and dreams are a transformation of it. For Freud, the prime mover, so to speak, is the unconscious wish; dreams and phantasies are both disguised derivatives of it. For Klein the prime mover is unconscious phantasy [p. 362].

Klein developed her idea of phantasy gradually from 1919 onwards, stressing particularly: the damaging effect of the inhibition of phantasy in the development of the child; the ubiquity of phantasies about the mother's body and its contents; the variety of phantasies about the primal scene and the Oedipus complex; the intensity of both aggressive and loving phantasies; the combination of several phantasies to form what she called the depressive position … the paranoid-schizoid position was to come later. Essentialy, I think that Klein viewed unconscious phantasy as synonymous with unconscious thought and feeling, and that she may have used the term phantasy rather than thought because the thoughts of her child patients were more imaginative and less rational than ordinary adult thought is supposed to be [p. 364].

From Spillius's account, believing that they constituted unconscious thinking, Klein seems to have accorded unconscious phantasies a central role. Further, she believed that all fundamental communications and relationships between self and self (internally) and self and others (internally and externally) are conducted through unconscious phantasies. She also believed that all defense mechanisms are themselves permanent (concretized) phantasies—whether they be the schizoid mechanisms (splitting, projective identification, idealization, or magic omnipotent denial) or the manic defenses (triumph, contempt, or control) and the obsessional defenses, even repression.
Part III. “The Stranger Within Thee”: The Phantoms of the Unconscious

In 1759, in his Conjectures on Original Composition, Edward Young gave this counsel to beginning authors: “Nor are we only ignorant of the dimensions of the human mind in general, but even of our own… Therefore dive deep into thy bosom; Know thyself … learn the depth, extent, bias, and full fort of thy mind; contract full intimacy with the Stranger within thee” [cited in Cox, 1980, p. 3].

In the 18th and 19th centuries, novelists and psychiatrists alike expressed considerable interest in the mysterious double, the Doppelgänger, alter ego, or second self, who was considered to be one's more demonic or preternatural self. Dostoevsky's The Double, Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and Mary Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein are but a few of many examples. At the same time psychiatrists who studied hysteria discovered the factor of dissociation that characterized this entity. Breuer and Freud (1893-1895) listed “double conscience” (by which was meant “double consciousness”) as an invariant characteristic of hysteria.

Later, after Freud (1900) had formulated the original principles of psychoanalysis, he formulated the topographic theory (1915) in which he rotated the axis of the two parallel systems of consciousness from the vertical to the horizontal, placing System Cs. atop System Ucs., with System Pcs. interposed between them. Later, when he formulated the structural theory, Freud (1923), conceived of the id, the ego, and superego; and the concept of the “alter ego,” or second self, as a subject in its own right was lost altogether in the swell of analytic mechanistic positivism. It is to Lacan (1966), cerebral hemisphere laterality research, and intersubjectivity that we owe the ebbing of this positivistic swell in favor of a more vitalistic, animistic, and numinous conception of the denizens of the unconscious.

One can also picture the denizens of the unconscious, as I have stated, as being archetypal in the Platonic as well as the Jungian sense. Every external object we encounter, particularly mother and father, is not merely a person who happens to be our parent. These objects are the current title-holders of the archetypal (Eternal or Ideal Forms) roles set forth before time began. Plato's inherent preconceptions and Kant's noumena, or things-in-themselves (Bion, 1962), anticipate their appearance and assign them to their phenomenal counterparts in actualized/realized experience.

Other presences or intelligences in the unconscious to which I have alluded—the “indefinable subject of the unconscious,” who is also the “dreamer who dreams the dream,” the “dreamer who understands the dream,” and the “dramaturge”—are but a few of the countless roles that this numinous entity enacts.

Part IV: “Daddy, Tell Me a Story”: Psychoanalysis as a “Dream Mender”

We are now in the age of Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings and need not wonder why these wonderfully crafted phantasmagoria are enjoying unparalleled popularity and acclaim. Those of us who are parents know well the timeless plea of children who plead, “Daddy (or Mommy), tell me a story.” Stories, legends, fairy tales, fables, parables, and myths are all different versions of dreams or phantasies. They are all narratives that give linear (left-hemisphere) meaning to the chaotic, nonlinear outpourings of the right-hemispheric unconscious. More specifically, if we employ my version of Bion's binocular model, as alluded to earlier, we can come up with the following picture: I have already mentioned the idea of the pincers or calliper-blades of Systems Ucs. and Cs. and P-S ↔ D that emotionally intercept the Absolute Truth about Ultimate Reality, that is, beta-elements (because of the operation of the truth instinct). If we can also conjecture that System Ucs. and P-S function to lay down a barricade of unconscious phantasy or myth to hold back and then mythically transform the beta elements of “O,” and the other seeks to give a more realistic version of Truth in tandem (following) the initializing phantasmalization (mythification) of Truth, we then acquire a model of the importance of stories for unconscious well-being and for the well-being of the individual. Stories, phantasies, and dreams are the first line of defense against being overwhelmed. We must first be able to falsify (alter) or attenuate Truth in order to tolerate it, following which we must personalize it as our own subjective experience that we (re-)create from within ourselves in order to vouchsafe our sense of agency (Grotstein, 2000). Then, thanks to the objectivity offered by the depressive position, we can objectify its Ownerness.

Let me restate from another angle what I have just explicated. Traditionally, when psychoanalysts interpret unconscious phantasies to analysands, the predominating point of view has always been that of external factual reality, for instance, “When you were in the waiting room and heard me on the phone, you thought that I was talking with my mistress” (in fantasy)—implying that, factually, I was not. In other words, phantasies have been understood as the prime cause of pathology, and debunking the phantasy by a safe restoration of reality has been thought to constitute the cure.
While that premise may be valid, I believe there is another, obverse way of understanding the role of phantasies. I conceive of them as the first line of defense against the evolution of the beta-elements.

10 Here I spell fantasy with an “f” rather than a “ph” because in this usage it is conscious or preconscious, not unconscious.

(unprocessed nonmental protoexperiences, “O”). Phantasies arrest the impact of beta-element by mythifying them and converting them into personal narratives that flow in the ongoing mythic stream of the unconscious. By interpreting phantasies, we are validating their importance and their inner truth—in preparation for the succeeding process of allowing the mechanisms of the depressive position to transform phantasies into statements of object reality.

Thus, a verbal interpretation about an unconscious phantasy completes and therefore validates the phantasy by allowing for a transformation from sensual image to verbal abstraction. In other words, there must be an alignment between the unconscious phantasy and its conscious descendant, the thought. When Shakespeare said, “Sleep knits up the raveled sleeve of care,” he could just as well have said “dreams or phantasies knit up the raveled sleeve of care—in preparation for an emotional processing and mental digestion that will happily culminate either in abstract thought or in hidden transformations by the silent service of the internal world.”

What I have said is probably well known to infants and children in their preoccupation with fairy tales and fables, which they need to have parents repeat over and over again. Dreams, fables, legends, myths, or phantasies are the lost primal tongue of imagery that dominates the preverbal life of infants. They wash away the tears of grief and care and preserve the innocence of the infant. They subsequently submerge and yield to words but can still be located in the nether world of our being as our “silent service,” magistically licking our wounds and being at our beck and call for all our rites of passage and our wrongs at the hands of circumstance.

Conclusion

Systems Cs. and Ucs. function not conflictually but, rather, complementarily as binary oppositions. System Ucs. has two major components, the unrepressed Ucs. and the dynamic or repressed Ucs., the former being the inherent platonic Ucs. and the latter being the domain of repressed memories of actual experiences. The latter is the storehouse for mental processing by way of dreams and phantasies that originate from the activities of the former. Systems Ucs. and Cs. function as cooperative oppositional pincers to intercept “O” (the

Absolute Truth about Ultimate Reality). Unconscious phantasy formation constitutes unconscious thinking. The “actors” who enact unconscious phantasies are variegated phantoms or demons (both positive and negative) who perform a dramatic role hoping in the hope that someone is the who can interpret their pantomime so that they can, like the sphinx in Oedipus Rex, be released and return to repertory. Psychoanalytic interpretation of unconscious phantasy confirms and completes or rehabilitates them; it does not discredit them. Dreams and unconscious phantasies are our “light militia of the lower sky.”

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