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Dreams in psychoanalytic couple and family therapy

MYTH, WORD, POIESIS – WATH IS THE DREAM'S JOB

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This is John's dream:

I was swimming, very happy and relaxed, astonished, in a very beautiful sea, full of colourful plants.... and there was a very beautiful light...

Suddenly, I was distracted and got stuck in between two rocks...

I struggled, I felt suffocating, the head inside...

Then, I didn't know if it was me or my daughter... my distress was enormous.

Finally, I managed to free myself.

I think the dream was interrupted, I do not remember anything in the middle here.

Then I saw myself walking, upright, at the bottom of the sea, and watching several scenes from different periods of my life.

I went near my nursery school; I peeked at the window and saw me there, with a bib, tiny. I went peeking in several places and I was always inside there, with the same age I had when I was in that place.

Later I peeked into my church, and there I was, a youth...

I went on walking and walking, very calm, curious - I was not anguished, just curious.

I was an observer, a visitor.

Suddenly, the waters were in a great commotion - it was Poseidon arriving...

I went up and I had to fight him.

I finally swallowed Poseidon - and woke up.

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I was very embarrassed till today - it must have been a very bad thing, swallowing Poseidon - do not know why, I feel ashamed at the same time I'm glad to have won.

This is Frances' dream:

It has been a recurring dream: it has been coming back for years, perhaps since Frances' puberty.

She hears footsteps from what is, undoubtedly, a wolf coming after her.

She has no doubt that it is a wolf, although she never sees it.

The day before, they even had dinner at a friend's house and there was one of those wolf skin rugs. Even that had frightened her and had embarrassed her – she managed never to step on it.

In the dream she gets horrified, paralyzed with fear.

And when the wolf is about to jump and fall on her, she wakes up screaming. (The husband already knows that's the dream and reassures her when she wakes up.)

John and Frances - come from families in the former colonies.

He comes from a multiracial family. His father, who didn't want to study, is a sailor, but descends from economically powerful and socially respected families of settlers, who emigrated there generations ago.

The mother, imbued with local traditional culture, defends magical thinking, despite having had some studies and being a nursing assistant. She is a very competent professional.

During his the first year of analysis, John went to his homeland to expressly do multiple searches in birth registers – "I wanted to know if I had more blood of winners or losers."

Frances was born into a family of a more homogeneous culture. They are first-generation emigrants. There are many farmers and teachers in the family.

The mother doesn't work and soon began to present symptoms of what appears to be a psychotic disorder with delusional episodes at intervals.

The father tried his luck at one of the many unsuccessful businesses in Europe.

He is often absent from home on business and frequent visits to his family of origin to ask financial aid. Ends up living with his parents and leaves his wife and daughters in an environment that they don't know well. He sends them a small allowance. Frances manages everything since she is 12-13, at home or in what concerns the money matters the family.

It takes several years for her, her two sisters and her mother, to have money enough for the tickets to return to her mother's

parents. France's mother always wanted to avoid this dependence, because she didn't get along with her own mother.

John and Frances lived in different parts of the country, by the sea. They met in the metropolis's university where they both did well.

They started living together shortly after they met.

John thinks that he felt very lonely; Frances liked her independence from the family. But they were in love.

In thirteen years they never married and, during analysis, said that it was as if had always seen themselves as two students living together, despite the fact of having a daughter.

Sometimes they go out together, and most vacations are separate, each with their respective families of origin. They are seldom together.

In their relationship, there are few rites and many myths.

Frances always assumed, here too, the control of the house and the money, which seemed to be a relief for John. But, in recent years, she has been complaining that she feels the "mother of all", does not feel this man's wife and says she doesn't want that role anymore.

He describes her as a very generous person, but rejecting him as a man and very de-erotized.

Their relationship is in crisis, they do not see how to change it.

There seems to be here a break of the alliance that maintained the pathology of each of them and of the relationship itself.

The traumatic dimension of personal history invades the dreaming, the thinking in each of them and the relationship itself.

These dreams, recounted in the same session, a year and a half into the weekly work, seem a condensation of several elements touched until then, and a revelation of the unseen and the unspeakable, to themselves, in the relationship and in the analysis.

A development of a film, with its lights and its shadows.

The weekly therapy has been going on now for about three years. John takes the dream as a starting point for recollections, and continues to do so along the therapy. He remembers that, at first, and for many years, all he felt was "shame" – he didn't know what for. Some say he is not ugly, that he is funny; he knows he is intelligent, also he is well articulated...

But he imagines that the people see him in the street as a kind of Neanderthal, a brute, who doesn't know how to walk (which sharply contrasts with his figure and manners).

In a session, Frances says that he imagines that his father came to walk like that because of many years of rocking in the boat...

John says – “I don’t know who I am, it seems I have no identity”, sometimes he asks himself: “Am I a kid or a man, a son? Or, what kind of kinship do I have with the family and Frances?”

Then, in the analysis, we talk about the time when the all-invading shame began to retreat, revealing a great distress, fear and even guilt, something that he thought he had never felt.

As if he was incapable of guilt.

It is interesting to note what Cyrulnik (2010) points to the shame and the lack of sense of identity and the depersonalization are linked by a sort of “death in the soul.”

Guilt itself only appears with the strengthening of the identity.

John then remembered that, during childhood and adolescence, anguish and fear were almost permanent and he did not know where they came from.

Then he began to remember that his main fear was being smothered by his mother, even physically. Next, that she cursed him as she did when she was angry. He didn’t know what a curse was and what the consequence it would have, but he was sure it would be something very bad.

Once he said that it had crossed his mind that I could also find him «a bad boy and curse him”. But, in those transference movements, concluded that I was more of a «blesser» (or thought it was better to do some prevention, in order that I did not actually curse him).

He moves between a very strict logic and a magical thinking; he even says he doesn’t understand how that can coexist with his “relentless logic.”

After his parents separated, when he was eight, and since the day that his father visited him with gifts and he was commissioned by his mother to tell him to not return, he slept in his mother's bed.

Never again he regained his own bed until 11-12, when a religious mission for street boys found him connected to a gang of boys of different ages.

That group of church social workers and volunteers had been the «father», the “law” that set limits in his home and helped the separation from the mother, as we had seen in our sessions.

Furthermore, he recounts that the catechism taught him what a father was. If anyone would have asked him before that, he couldn’t have answered.

He grew into adulthood feeling loved by a father who, being in heaven or on earth, protected him, loved and defended him – also from his mother.

I think that this group and this doctrine gave John the assurance he needed for not getting destroyed by the climate of incestuality in his family. There, the generations were indistinguishable among many uncles and cousins who still have an organization in which a woman, an aunt, is the head of the family.

Later, around seventeen, the confrontation between this idea that kept him alive (a father who is love) and the abandonment of his real father, made him depress and isolate even from the religious group.

He made a sharp cut-off, and that was never well resolved, he says. I believe he is talking about the two cut-offs with his father figures: the real father and the church's father.

- Could the Poseidon of the dream be his own idealized father, whom he incorporates because he doesn't know how to build an identification with him?

In the dream he visits all the places of his life, peacefully, cordially...

One day he told us, Frances and me, that he thinks he dreamt of the analysis. He was revisiting all those places and looking at them now, being able to see them without suffering so much inside.

I told him that he had, rather, continued the analysis process in the dream.

John speaks of the suffering he still feels for not seeing his father, that causes a lack of self-esteem, the belief that he is such a weak man.

Do women recognize his manhood? Frances does not seem to do so. Do other men also reject him?

Frances complains that John is too socially seductive, which leaves her very insecure in her femininity.

Could the analyst also be smothering him with some analyst "trick" that he is unaware of?

He had seen his paternal grandfather only once – his grandfather also rejected John's father, mainly because of his marriage.

Frances, herself, never had a very close relationship with her grandparents – she left when she was very little. The maternal grandmother even came to visit them and Frances finds her a reassuring figure, to whom she was very attached, even much later. During sessions, she speaks of the great helplessness and loneliness she always felt, she was a mother for her mother and sisters, and still is.

Her mother never protected her: during delusions with persecutory sexual content, the mother even begged Frances to let herself be raped instead.

Men appear to Frances as weak, non-protective, even potential assaulters.

During analysis, she dares ask to her grandmother and aunts a few questions that she believes she never had the courage or "never remembered to ask".

She comes to speak the unspeakable in the family and gets to know that his father was born from a rape of a family member to her grandmother, during a time when her husband was working abroad.

The sensory of the dream

Today, I began by presenting these dreams with images and sounds corresponding to the way the analyst apprehended what was being recounted, i.e., as the analyst dreamt the dreams of her patient-couple in their "neo-group" of the analytical framework.

But, also appealing to the impact of dream's sensory language, Merleau-Ponty (2005) says that the painter is the one who "makes the perception", but, above all, he points out the "communication of the senses, the miracle of pre-linguistic expression".

In this regard, J. B. Pontalis (1999) says that the primacy of feeling is not been defended here, but rather "the relation of the seer with the visible". That makes us think of André Ruffiot (1981) and the importance of the preconscious – the place where myths, fantasies, dreams are constructed and the analysis unfolds.

This creation/sensory communication underwent a gradual transformation along the analysis by means of the inter-phantasmization, a concept created by Anzieu (1975), and mentioned by Eiguer and others; here, between the myths of the patients who form the couple, the couple-patient and the analyst, in the group matrix of the analytic setting.

Word

And from this set of words poured out for years, we get a new Word that unites and gives Sense, allowing a new construction - a joint construction, a Poiesis.

Here I distinguish the simple words – that "go with the wind", as people says – from the Word-Narrative, the Word-Sense, the Creative Word, built in and by the dream and in the inter-phantasmization.

This Word is not equal to the one that we might – in a hasty reading – consider equivalent to the interpretation made during the session. It exists also in the dream.

As a transcendence in the immanence of the dream – and I do not speak, of course, in a theological sense, rather in an epistemological one.

It is not solely related with the distinction between manifest and latent content – in which case we could perhaps call it «emmanence».

But there is all this work that transcends the "recounted» by the dreamer and the different elements that appear in the dream itself.

In his *Libro de Sueños*, Jorge Luis Borges quotes one Joseph Addison who, in 1712, would have stated that when "the human soul" dreams, "it is simultaneously theatre, actors and audience", and he adds that the soul is also the author of the drama being seen.

History and Temporality

It is as if through the history of the dreamt and the dreamer, temporality, which is what supports our mental life continuity, allows the construction of a(n)other Sense, which we thought lost or never found.

In 2010, I called *À la Recherche du Sens Perdu* to a small paper presented at the EFPP Congress in Florence, but I could have literally borrowed the opportune title of Proust's work *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*.

Sense develops in temporality, even when the story seems fragmented and improbable.

And it is based on the three dimensions present in the oneiric: the subjective, the inter-subjective and the generational.

Myth and Mystery

In what the myth is concerned, I place myself among those who place its semantic origin in ancient Greek:

Mythos – means narrative, word

and has family ties with that other Greek word,

Mysthes – that means mystery.

Some experts in such matters don't believe that the myth or the oneiric possess this nature of mystery.

As Heidegger (1927), I believe that "the mystery is mixed with the very way in which the Being gives itself to man..."

- It is not this the *poietic* dimension that reveals itself in dream, in the analysis and in life?

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RÉSUMÉ

— Quel travail, quelles procédures permettent, en partant du langage sensoriel du rêve, aboutir à dévoiler un 'sens' qui le fait devenir un processus créatif ?

La Temporalité est toujours présente, liée à la transmission psychique, à la répétition, aux mythes des origines, aux temps du rêve...- travail créatif, révélateur, réparateur- et aux de l'analyse.

Le tout est illustré avec un cas clinique d'un couple et l'analyse de leurs rêves, un couple de familles d'origine de culture différente, quoique tous les deux venus des ex-colonies : lui, venant d'une famille colonisée, elle d'une famille de colonisateurs, tous deux habitant au même territoire.

Mots-clés

Transgénérationnalité – Temporalité – Trauma – Sensoriel - Mythe – Parole – Poiesis.
