

Poetry and the language of dreams

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Poetry speaks the same language as the dream. If there is a difference between the two it becomes evident only in as much as poetry is restricted to words while the dream is multifaceted. Both the dream and the spoken word are vehicles of communication. The core of communication is sharing and enlightening. Both the dream and the poem simply say to us: "It is like this..." It may say for instance: "It is like riding a cloud." 'Riding a cloud' either in a dream or in a poem is not to be understood literally, but must be seen as an attempt to conjure up specific notions and feelings by means of a likeness, of a simile, a metaphor, a figure of speech.

When such likeness is extended to a whole dream story we speak of a parable or an allegory. Both the dream and poetry are chiefly allegorical. Of course prose and everyday language too make use of both metaphors and allegories. But there they are 'watered down', as it were. So we could say prose is watered down poetry or a watered down dream. Watered down with what? With waking logic, standardised conventions, patterns of speech and extended time.

Before considering the practicalities of poetry I want to point out once again that language, communication, is yet another facet of the '**At-one-ment Principle**'. Everything in life strives to unite, to become one. The Hindus sum this principle up by a rather ruthless image of a monster eating its own tail. When we reflect on this we soon realise that eating our daily meals, for instance, is a reflection of this monster's habit. Under the same light kissing becomes a symbolical devouring of each other – in mating between praying mantises it turns to reality: the female will chew off the male's head, which will accelerate the motions of the decapitated mate as it delivers the sperm. We understand at once that sex, kissing and eating are all different aspects of the '**At-one-ment Principle**'. But so is the study of dreams. As we deepen the pursuit of our dream life, we realise that we are really 'split personalities'; that we alternate between a dream-self and a waking-self, both of which strive to become one. The result of that striving is made apparent as we decipher the language of the dream and transmute the words of poetry. The psychic and the physical realm fuse in the interpretation of both dream and poem.

Let me exemplify this by means of Emily Dickinson's "Summer Shower":

*"A drop fell on the apple-tree,
Another on the roof;
A half a dozen kissed the eaves,
And made the gables laugh."*

The poem begins quite 'realistically'; it looks at the world with the eyes of the matter of fact observer of the waking world. But then, by the third line things change. Drops kiss the eaves. The point of view switches from external perceiving to internal conceiving. Thus the poet draws us in an instant away from natural phenomena to the realm of imagination. Drops are identified with the poet's feelings, her nature and her desires. The poet resides in the drops as it were, taking up the point of view of the drops, becoming one with them. This is personification of the impersonal - associative identification. In this way the poet manages to draw us into her own mind and at the same time into the typical realm of the dream world. There we regularly identify with the objects around us. It becomes particularly clear to us when in the light of day we realise that the house of our dream turns out to be our body of flesh and blood. It is parallel to the psyche residing in our 'bone house'.

This is transference, projection or associative identification, which is, of course, also part of our waking language. If, for instance, someone runs into our car in waking reality we accuse them of having run into *us*, as if we were our car. "You pranged into *ME!*" we scream. While such associative identification occasionally intrudes into our waking language, it is the norm within the realms of the dream and poetry. In the first verse of the poem under discussion this is exemplified by the 'raindrops kissing the eaves', which then moves over to the 'laughing gables'.

When we encounter such projection in a poem we take it 'in our stride'. We know that it is really the poet who feels like laughing due to the pleasure and relief the raindrops are bringing. We understand that the poet has merged with the gables, that she *is* the gables. Strange to say is that if we were to encounter laughing gables and kissing rain drops in our dreams we'd declare it to be absurd upon waking – "I had a weird dream!" is the usual response – It shows that to most of us the dreaming self is a total stranger and that we struggle with the unitive view of life when awake.

*"A few went out to help the brook,
That went to help the sea.
Myself conjectured, were they pearls,
What necklaces could be!"*

The same 'humanising' goes over to the second verse where the drops 'help' the brook when in reality drops per se do no such thing. After this the poet declares her presence by taking up the same 'separative' stance of waking life. Instead of totally identifying with the object viewed, she makes an analogy by conjecturing if the drops could be seen as pearls they would transmute into necklaces. As the poet surfaces from her deep absorption, we wake with her from our quasi 'nocturnal dreaming' and go over to a kind of daydreaming. In that state we are aware of our waking presence while at the same time being conscious of dwelling in the realm of fantasy. Yet this 'daydreaming' is not so far removed from nocturnal dreaming as Professor Cartwright (C 54-59) has shown with her experiments

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in the sleep laboratory. When she woke her sleepers from a dream and gave them mathematical tasks, she found that their last dream phase of the night was charged with dream rebound. In other words the sleeper had to catch up on a lot of dreaming in order to function normally during the day. When on the other hand she woke her 'guinea pigs' from a dream and asked them not only to retell it, but also to complete it by means of their own imagination, there was no dream rebound in the last dream phase before waking. The inference to be drawn from this is that 'daydreaming' is equivalent to night dreaming.

So when our poet 'conjectured, were they pearls, what necklaces could be', she was in a parallel state to nocturnal dreaming. This is, of course, not the prerogative of poets alone. We all are prone to daydreaming. From it come not only poems, but also all kinds of works of art and inventions of the scientific and technological kind. At school we all have been chastised for falling into that dreamy mode of consciousness. Yet when we look at it closely it is in fact the one time when waking and dreaming fuse, thereby welding our two 'schizoid halves' of dreaming and waking existence into a unitive state.

This is not a mode of consciousness to be condemned as happens in our schools. On the contrary; it should be encouraged and praised as a superior state of mind. This is not only evident from the fact that it is a time for creative inspiration, but also a time when the mundane is glorified and transfigured. This is clearly exemplified by the lines of this poem where the mundane raindrops are transmuted into precious and indeed otherworldly necklaces of pearls. Daydreaming then is for us ordinary folk the nearest thing to the 'mysterium coniunctionis' or the mystical marriage of the saints and sages; or quite simply put, the closest thing to a unitive way of being. From this we may confidently infer that both the interpretation of our dreams and the reading of great poetry must have an integrating effect on our personality.

*"The dust replaced in hoisted roads,
The birds jocosely sung;
The sunshine threw his hat away,
The orchards spangles hung."*

In the first line we meet again that matter-of-fact point of view we encountered in the first line of the first verse again. It simply shows what has happened to the roads in the rain. It continues into the second line where the poet passes judgment on the song of the birds. In other words here she expresses likeness as realistically as in prose or in everyday speech. But this realism is connected with the point of view of the dreamer that became evident in the first verse due to the 'laughing gables'. The connection is in the word 'jocosely', which, of course, means 'merrier' and thus echoes 'the laughing gables'. In fact it does more than echo it. It takes up the general levity and raises it in the jocosity of the birds to a higher pitch. When we remember that all this is rooted in the dream imagery of the laughing gables and then read it in that spirit, it takes on a new appearance; that of an orgasmic build up ready to burst at any point.

This finds confirmation in 'the sunshine that threw his hat away', which signals complete self-abandonment. It is classic dream language. Just as in dreams, this line projects and inverts. Here the inversion consists in the fact that the poet has the sunshine wearing a hat, when in waking reality it is we who wear a hat in order to protect ourselves from

the sunshine. Apart from the inversion we also have identification of the microcosm with the macrocosm. Once again the dream and poetry are on common ground. Such cosmic projection is as much part of ancient poetry as of Dickinson's. For the Sumerians such thinking was quite natural. With regard to the sun, for instance, they saw the same principle at work that was observed in human interaction. For them the insemination of women and the downpour of rain brought on by a sweltering sun were the same process in different spheres. To them 'the sun was the glowing tip of the divine penis, which, as it turned deep red, was thought to be plunging into the earth's vagina in order to fertilise her'. (AL page 24) This is not just 'primitive science', but classical dream language and poetry.

In the 'Summer Shower' we find the same association of sunshine and a downpour as the means of hoisting the ruts in the road. In short the two together mark a time of sexual receptivity. When viewed in a more prosaic manner, the same scene simply becomes the moment when the sun emerges from behind the clouds; when rain had brought relief and was a matter for rejoicing. This relief and joy is also reflected in the feeling that everything is beautified, that the water drops are seen as pearls fashioned into spangles glistening in the sun. Beauty engenders joy and in joy all is seen as beautiful. Phrased in this way the contrast between poetry and prose is fully exposed.

Only in dreams and poetry will we find sunshine that wears a hat to hurl it away in order to illumine the landscape, or the orchard in this case. The spangles in the apple trees are, of course, remnants of the passing shower. They glisten as diffused raindrops in the emerging sun. The image of 'spangles' heightens this moment into something precious as we have seen before. The fusion of sunshine with the life-giving water that has just drenched the trees is yet another unitive vision that is so characteristic of the dream as well as of the mystics.

When we remember that the poet saw the raindrops as pearls before, we now see them threaded together in spangles. Pearls are especially appropriate in this particular game of associations since they are water-born gems, born in fact from a living organism with which we associate the word 'mother' as in 'mother-of-pearl'. From there our associations leap to the rainbow due to the opalescence of the inside of the shell. In this way a tight circle of associative connections is fashioned which we know from the fabric of our dreams.

With the notion of 'mother' in mind we are reminded that the earth is indeed our mother who gives us life and sustains it with the fruits of the orchard as in this particular case. In light of this the rain becomes a fertilising shower imbued with the warmth and light of the sun, the eye of heaven. Since the poet sees the sunshine as male, for it was 'he' that threw the hat away, he becomes at its source the 'father above' while the earth below is 'mother' affirmed. Framed like this the shower readily turns into an ejaculation, which was the ancients' way of seeing nature's spectacle of a downpour. And suddenly we understand why the raindrops kissed the eaves and made the gables laugh. This unitive image is further enhanced by "the drops helping the brook that went to help the sea". The sea, which in Latin is 'mare', and personified becomes Mary, assumes then the position of the Mother of All. Such personifications are typical not only of poetry and the dream, but also of mythology, which is a kind of cosmic dream. All three modes of communi-

cation share this habit of identifying the individual with its environment. Every dream interpreter will be aware that certain features of the landscape often represent parts of the dreamer's body. Thus roads and streets, as Freud pointed out over a hundred years ago, are invariably a reference to the vulva, which exposes the poem's 'roads hoisted by the rain' as an unmistakable sign of the poet's aroused state.

*"The breezes brought dejected lutes,
And bathed them in the glee;
The East put out a single flag,
And signed the fete away."*

The final verse is all dream language. It is classic surrealist imagery, which the painters of the early last century consciously employed after reading Freud's 'The Interpretation of Dreams'. They would make a cup from fur, for instance, and place a spoon into it that was also covered with fur. It represented sexual intercourse, a rediscovery of an ancient symbolism that has always been present in the world of dreams. It had also always been present in the arts, yet it took Freud to make western civilisation aware of it anew.

What is particularly fascinating here is that Emily Dickinson was a recluse and from all accounts would never have had sexual intercourse with a man. Yet the 'Summer Shower' is a delightful description of just that. It not only bespeaks the joy of a downpour, but also the joy of sex. The microcosm of the poet merges with the macrocosm of her surrounding. Poet and nature become one; sex and nature unite into one grand spectacle. And speaking of the joy of sex, this poem shows that underlying all beauty is sexual sensitivity. A landscape is beautiful not just because of its breath taking design, but also because it stirs our sexual susceptibility. A poem, and any artefact, is beautiful only when it also stirs our sexual receptivity.

Well then, let's see how sexual the surrealism of the last verse is.

'The breezes'. What is sexual about this? The ancients said that a horse, a mare to be precise, would turn her buttocks to the wind to get pregnant. The Bible sees the wind as a symbol of the Spirit, and as readers of the Bible know, it was the Holy Spirit that impregnated Mary. But long before that "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." (Genesis 1: 2) In short the energy of a masculine God hovered over the feminine waters ready to fertilise them. This incidentally shows without a doubt that the creation story is a kind of macrocosmic dream of the human sexual act. Clearly this is the Sumerian tradition handed down to Babylon and from there to us.

Such identification of a microcosmic act with the macrocosmic processes becomes the more certain when we remember that God created man in his own image. It is of interest here to reflect that the story of Mary's impregnation by the Holy Spirit has been prefigured in Genesis 1: 2 where God's spirit hovered over the waters. Clearly the two episodes are in principle the same; what is different in the later version of this creative, or rather procreative scene, is the personification of the sea as a woman, Mary. This is precisely the sort of thing we find in our dreams, however inversely projected. A woman for instance will dream of a lake, of the sea, of a pool; it will always be a reference to her reproductive equipment. An internal swimming pool of her dream is unmistakably the pool of amniotic fluid in her womb. If a baby swims in that internal swimming pool of the woman's dream, she is pregnant or will become so.

'The dejected lutes'. 'Making music' in our dreams will manifest sexually. This phrase not only has dream currency but is of the same value in waking speech. After all what are pop songs about? Listen to their lyrics; they invariably are mating songs or songs of regret about not being able to mate.

Birds sing for the same reason. When, for example, we hear blackbirds sing high up on a tree or roof, we know spring has sprung and mating is underfoot. In our poem it is the gables, the highest point in the house, that are rejoicing. They take on the role of birdsong in spring; they speak for the poet's heart. Undoubtedly the poet was 'high' on the resurgence of her hormones.

Clearly the first line of the last verse is a picture of fertilising breezes that bring the music of mating and lift the general dejection. In a dream we might well see lutes, or guitars today, flying through the air. In a poem we can see the same thing happening. In both situations projection is a common feature. Indeed the poet's projection of her dejection into a lute is no stranger than the portrayal of a dream lute that might look like one of the melting watches painted by Salvador Dali.

"And bathed them in the glee" redoubles the water motif. Bathing, dipping ones feet in water, swimming, wading, paddling are all dream images that foreshadow sexual agitation and action. 'Glee', joy, rejoicing is the result of a pleasurable action or a surge of arousing feelings. Sex is the pinnacle of joyous interaction. All joy is sexual in its deepest roots, even the joy of little children. Freud was right when he said that we don't come into this world as an unwritten page. The lore of reincarnation has some most convincing examples to testify in favour of this. In other words, all of us would have been born with past memories of sexual activity, even if we only had been a flower in our previous existence. Memories that would come closer to the surface in the onslaught of puberty thus reawaken the yearning for a sexual partner.

The picture of the first two lines of the last verse is clear: The rush of sexual feelings lifts the dejection of the poet, fills her with expectant glee. The 'East that put out a single flag' is a return to the sun that rises in the East. It illumines the world; it puts its stamp on the fete of eroticism, on the celebration of sexual sensitivities; the joie de vivre.

From all this it becomes clear that poetry is susceptible to the same kind of interpretation as is the dream, and to the same degree. It becomes the more apparent when we realise that the language of poetry is structured with the same compactness as the dream. A good example of such poetic density is the line: "Myself conjectured, were they pearls, what necklaces could be!" Prose would draw this out into a longer sentence and use extra auxiliaries. Such extending is also characteristic of the waking manifestation of a dream. What takes minutes in the dream grows into hours in waking; revealing the dream as kind of 'zip program' that later takes ages to scroll along the 'desktop' of waking experience.

So if this poem were a dream, how would it manifest in the sexual sphere?

"A half a dozen kissed the eaves" expresses the longing for another. Kissing is uniting with someone other than oneself. So there is a partner in the poet-dreamer's mind. This partner is male; we gather this from the presence of the apple tree, for trees are without question a reference to the penis. This was certainly uppermost in the mind of the Sum-

erians, who so clearly expressed it in the poem called "The Sacred Marriage Rite" (K) There, at the 'King's lap, a cedar was rising surrounded by plants and grains, all of which were reaching for the sky.' (K page 59) The juxtaposition of the lap and the tree is clear; equally plain is the rising high of the plants. The poem shares the associative language with the dream. But we also use this same allusive language when we are talking about sexual matters under restrictive circumstances.

Interesting is that the Sumerians were anything but prudish when it came to sexuality. It becomes evident in this poem when we read that Inanna, the love goddess, was asking: "Who will plough my vulva?" (K 59) Yet they mostly referred to courting and mating in allusive language, the language of poetry and of the dream. For instance, in the same verse Inanna speaks of her vulva as the 'piled high hillock' and the 'watered ground'. It is the same language Emily Dickinson used, with one difference; she does not speak of her vulva openly, she refers to it in the same 'clandestine' way, as does the dream:

"The dust replaced in hoisted roads"

While in the Sumerian poem we are left in no doubt what was meant with the 'watered ground' and the 'piled high hillock', - we are given the 'interpretation'- in 'Summer Shower' we need the help of Sigmund Freud who will readily tell us that roads always refer to the vulva, which makes 'dust replaced in hoisted roads' precisely the same as the 'piled high hillock in the watered ground'.

The Sumerian poem was not written by a lonely recluse, whose work was only discovered after his death in hidden notebooks. He was a poet laureate commissioned to write for the annual festival of New Year, the time when sexual rituals ensured that the land would remain well-watered and fertile. The Sumerian poet did not write for himself in order to release his frustrations and balance his emotions, but for the welfare of all his fellow beings. Although at the bedrock of his poem there was clearly a longing for union, much as we find in 'Summer Shower', yet it was expressed on behalf of the whole of society and accordingly dramatised. Its parameter was clear and its plot followed an age-old tradition. It was written for a special occasion. It was penned for the time when Heaven and Earth were to come together, which would be acted out by the Shepherd King of the land and the High Priestess of the temple who represented the goddess of love, Inanna. The poet knew that they would embrace on the bed of greenery before the eyes of all the people.

Despite the vastly different motivations of these two writers for the creation of their work, their language was principally the same. In both poems the basic urges were projected unto the landscape. It is difficult to find a better reason for this than that their language was dream based.

Another feature their work had in common was the 'apple tree'. For the Sumerians it was the favourite icon for the King whose bride was Inanna, the goddess of love (K96) It was, of course, not possible for Emily Dickinson to have known this since 'The Sacred Marriage' was only published in 1969. It is however quite likely that she may have learnt about this imagery from the 'Song of Solomon', which, as I believe, is a Semitic adaptation of the Sumerian love poem which was more than likely known to the Babylonians who sacked the city of Jerusalem and took all of its citizens to their capital city.

Thus we read in the King James version of Solomon's Song in chapter II verse 3:

*"As the apple tree among the trees of wood,
So is my beloved among the sons.
I sat down under his shadow with great delight,
And his fruit was sweet to my taste."*

In view of the fact that there was a religious revival taking place in Dickinson's time and district, it is quite possible that her reading of the Bible might have brought her into contact with this metaphor. And if it had, it would have come into prominence after meeting the Reverend Charles Wadsworth of Philadelphia with whom she apparently had corresponded and whose transfer to San Francisco, thousands of miles away, impacted on her like a death (E, page VI and VII) Indeed, Song of Solomon is ideally suited to a relationship where the lover adores the beloved much as did the troubadours. There, as is well known, veneration was as much directed to the divinity itself as to its corporeal reflection. If Emily had written her 'Summer Shower' in that spirit, we could be sure that the beloved in her mind was no other than the Reverend Wadsworth.

But then we also know that it was not absolutely necessary for the poet to have been familiar with the Song of Solomon to produce such a likeness for the lover. It might have arisen quite spontaneously from Jung's 'Collective Unconscious', which according to him, was the storehouse for absolutely anything and everything and, remembering what Freud had said about it, was best accessed via our dreams.

Further support to the supposition that Dickinson had a male lover in mind, either real or imagined, comes from another poem she wrote. It is number 42 and entitled "The Wife". There she writes:

*"If aught she missed in her new day...
It lay unmentioned, as the sea develops pearl and
weed."*

The pearls of one poem link up with the pearls of the other. And with it the Mother of Pearl leaps back into awareness. By association the notion of Mother transmutes the sea to amniotic fluid and with it the pearl inside the shell is transformed to the ovum in the womb. This the more so since the sea *develops* pearls, which in turn alludes to the development of the pearl as the ovum, especially since Mother of Pearl is found in oysters and other bivalves that are even in popular thinking instantly understood to refer to the vulva and the rest of the female reproductive organs.

So could this mean that the poem describes sexual intercourse with a man? If it were a dream it would then also foreshadow a physical manifestation of this kind of intercourse. But since we know that Emily Dickinson was never married and seemed to have had no physical relationship with a man, it looks highly unlikely that a sexual relationship was ever consummated.

In his *Oneirocritica*, Artemidorus stated that the same dream could mean different things according to the standing and predispositions of the dreamer. In book I: 16 (A, page 25) he says, for instance, that "if a young woman dreams that she has milk in her breasts, it signifies that she will conceive, carry, and bring to birth a child. But for an old woman, if she is poor, it prophesies riches."

In line with such differentiation Emily Dickinson could well have had a sexual experience, but her male partner would have been no more than an imagined one. Yet she would

have thrown her inhibitions away just as the sunshine threw his hat away and indulged in 'helping the brook that went to help the sea', thereby 'replacing the dryness of the hoisted roads', which in Freudian terms would be vaginal fluid spilling over the ballooning vulva. If we replace the phrase 'threw his hat away' by 'tossed his hat away' this becomes clear even to those that are not familiar with the language of the dream, for 'tossing' is an often-heard vulgarism.

I have analysed the dreams of young women where gemstones of various kinds flowed from their vaginas. The wider context pointed in both cases to masturbation where the Venusian fluids were portrayed as something precious because of the beauty of the orgasmic sensations. This seems to be unique to women. Their dreams may well see an ejaculation as a rush of gems that glitter because of the homonymy of the words *glitter* and *clitor-is*. Indeed, dreams love puns and associations that are not only meaningful, but also witty. But also viewed from the standpoint of feelings that the clitoris can engender, it is worthy of comparison with precious gemstones. Its etymology has its roots in the Greek 'kleitoris', which means 'divine, famous and goddess-like'. In Greek myth 'Kleite' personified it. She was, so the legend goes, a princess whom Artemis made grow tall and strong, which is an allegory of her erection.' (W page 170)

So when Dickinson 'mythologised' the raindrops, she obviously tapped into the storeroom of myths and dreams. Here again, as in the Sumerian poem, we see that poets and mythmakers thousands of years apart invoke the same likenesses for their feelings and their sexually associative imagery. Here time accounts for nought. In the realm of the Unconscious all is one, which is reflected in the compactness of the dreams and myths that flow from it.

Coincidence is out of the question. The parallels are too numerous and too close. And speaking of similarity, it is opportune at this point to mention that Dickinson's comparison of raindrops with 'pearl necklaces' and 'spangles hung' is identical with the perspective of the ancients. We see this from the fact that our forebears believed that gemstones were 'solidified drops of divine essence that were embedded in rocks when the world was created.' (W page 232)

We might now ask just where in the wider context of Emily Dickinson's poem was that definite sign indicating that it was not sexual embrace that was in her spirit, but a solitary experience? It is to be found in the last two lines that exclaim: "The East put out a **single flag** and signed the fete away."

Here, the Sumerian poem and Dickinson's are directly opposed to one another. While the 'The Sacred Marriage Rite' was expressly written for a solemn spectacle according to divine rules (K63) and where an entire city milled around to settle down in time to watch the annual drama that celebrated the sacred union of Heaven and Earth by means of sexual embrace in public, 'Summer Shower' 'signs the fete away'. It replaces the solemn celebrations of the masses with fantasy kisses and a ghostly partner, appeasing the universal urge for union in the most private manner of gratification.

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