

Study Text from James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, 1979, Harper & Row, Publishers.
 Pages 119 to 123. First published from James Hillman's Eranos lectures, in Eranos Yearbook-42, 1973.

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NARCISSUS AND THE DREAM

By means of narcissism and Narcissus, we may try another approach to what Freud said was the most hotly disputed point of his entire dream theory: the overall explanation "that all dreams are wish-fulfilments" (*NIL*, p. 41). The Jungian critique of Freud's hypothesis has concentrated upon the wish and neglected the fulfilment. The Jungian critique has said, dreams are not wishes, for quite patently I dream all sorts of things far from what I ever might wish, but it has not inquired more deeply into the nature of dreams as fulfilments. So let us ask, "if the content of a dream is the representation of a fulfilled wish" (*OD*, p. 61), then precisely what fulfils the instinctual wish? The dream-work itself can be our only answer: *the images made in dreams fulfil the desire of instinct*. Narcissus' desire was fulfilled by the image of the body experienced in reflection. It wanted nothing else.

To take hold of the radicality of this conclusion, we need to recall Freudian theory. At night in sleep when control is relaxed, the seething cauldron of the id with its libidinal desires would boil up and scald us with polymorphous perverse sexual wishes were there not some psychic censoring mechanism that allowed us to sleep. This mechanism, which turns the sexual urges into acceptable disguises, is the dream-work. All its complicated labour is the transfiguration of latent sexual wishes into manifest imagery. This imagery partly allows the id to let off steam and partly keeps us lulled from what is truly (sexually) going on. Thus, the dream-work is so important because it gratifies both the sexual instinct and the instinct to sleep. The dream-work, in short, fulfils instinctual demands.

Here we are closer to Jung than we might at first believe. Jung took archetypal images to be representations of instincts, as their other side. An image completes instinct by guiding it to its goals or, in Freud's world, fulfils it. Thus, for both Freud and Jung the work that goes on in sleep fulfils an instinctual or archetypal need. This gratification does not occur through what the dream means, by the noetic signification of the dream, for dreams are astoundingly un-understandable. As Freud said, they are not communications. Nor are the wishes satisfied by the internal emotions and actions in dreams, as if our desires are fulfilled by instinctual dreams of fighting, copulating, eating, fleeing, and the like. Such dreams occur not that often and one awakens not that often from them with a satisfied feeling of fulfilment. No, the fulfilment that the dream brings is narcissistic, satisfactory to Narcissus. In some amazing way, instinct is satisfied in the night-world by its own images, images of itself, as if it were enough for the psyche to see its own reflection by means of images, as if it were enough to imagine in poetic form its physical body and needs, its love, and its own self.

Freud's theory seems so scientifically biological that we tend to miss its romanticism. Narcissus, as Freud himself indicates, is the giveaway. After all, blood-and-gland instinct demands fulfilment in its own kind.

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Yet Freud maintains that the entire process of satisfying instinctual wishes is internal, wholly psychic or narcissistic. No external event is needed, no fight, flight, food, foreplay, or any other "f." The instinctual craving is gratified solely by the image, and the psyche sleeps in peace. Dreaming becomes a super instinct: it satisfies both other instinctual cravings, including the need to sleep, as well as narcissistically satisfying its own demand for images.

We can put Freud's theory into the language of Plato's *Cratylus* (403{4}): "What keeps souls in the underworld?," asks Socrates. ("What keeps the psyche asleep?," asks Freud.) Answer: Desire (Wishes); the soul wishes to stay there, for it finds satisfaction there. What satisfies the desire? (What fulfils the wishes?) Answer: the benefactory intelligence of Hades (404a), "his knowledge of all noble things" from which his name itself derives (*eidēnai*). That is, Hades has a hidden connection with *eidōs* and *eidōlon*, the archetypal intelligence given in images. Hence, what fulfils our deepest wish is Hades, in whose dreams is the intelligence of archetypal ideas; and we must sleep in order to see these ideas. It is these images, these visible ideas, that fulfil the desire of the soul, feeding it with intelligence as it sinks into the night, or as the romantic von Baader put it: "Images do the soul good! They are its true food." The best food are the images of myth. This premise, that the psyche, and psychology, is best satisfied by myth, we find first of all in Freud's style of using old myths and rewriting them into new myths. We find the same premise theoretically expressed by Jung and, of course, before either of them, by the romantics. They especially recognized the analogies between myth and dream. Already von Schubert (1814) drew precise parallels between the symbolic imagery of the dream and that of the Dionysos cult and the Eleusinian mysteries. Although the dream itself is unconcerned with waking-life (*CP 5:150*), the dream-work, as a satisfaction of instinct, will have its effect upon waking-life, even if indirectly and without benefit of the connections to life made by ego-counselling based on dreams. How do such effects come about, if not by direct advice extracted from the dream? From the comparison of dreams with myth, healing cult, and religious mysteries, we can understand that changes take place in participants even without direct interpretative intervention. It is not what is said about the dream after the dream, but the experience of the dream after the dream. A dream compared with a mystery suggests that the dream is effective as long as it remains alive. The healing cults of Asclepius depended upon dreaming, but not upon dream interpretation. This implies to me that dreams can be killed by interpreters, so that the direct application of the dream as a message for the ego is probably less effective in actually changing consciousness and affecting life than is the dream still kept alive as an enigmatic image. It is better to keep the dream's black dog before your inner sense all day than to "know" its meaning (sexual impulses, mother complex, devilish aggression, guardian, or what have you). A living dog is better than one stuffed with concepts or

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substituted by an interpretation.

For a dream image to work in life it must, like a mystery, be experienced as fully real. Interpretation arises when we have lost touch with the images, when their reality is derivative, so that this reality must be recovered through conceptual translation. Then we try to replace its intelligence with ours instead of speaking to its intelligence with ours. Images, by satisfying instinct, will in themselves alter the way we live, just as will the satisfaction of any other instinctual requirement. Before an interpretation ever begins, the dream is already working upon consciousness and its day world by digesting the day residues into soul-stuff and by placing one's actions and relations into its dream fantasy, making them part of a dream narrative, weaving the day world into another story. Only such changes that are changes in soul can affect the psychic aspect of one's actions and relations. Other changes, those attempted through the conscious correction of the ego's course, are attempts of the will. They are labours of Hercules, rather than reflections of Narcissus. These direct interpretations into life only cast a new shadow in the underworld, anew move requiring compensation, a further expiatory correction.