A Hermeneutic and Rhetoric of Dreams

Cyd C. Ropp
University of Memphis

> *If a philosopher should prove to me on solid logical grounds that dreams are not experiences, or that we only think we dream, or dream we dream, and that therefore the thing we refer to as a dream is a delusion, I would still want to write about dreams as I do. If it was a delusion that woke me last night in a cold sweat, it was a convincing one, and I can depend on being deluded again tonight. We are such stuff as these delusions are made of.*
> Bert O. States
> The Rhetoric of Dreams

Perusing today's academic journals, one comes away with the mistaken impression that Freud freshly minted the hermeneutic key to dreams in 1900 with *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and that for the past century his adherents have retained the exclusive license to have duplicate keys made. In reality, psychoanalysis is but one hermeneutic system of many, able to lay authoritative claim to no intrinsic interpretive superiority. As Gabbey and Hall state in their analysis of the dreams of Descartes,

> The interpretation of dreams is rarely answerable to either evidential or settled theoretical control. When the phantasms of the dreaming mind seem unaccountable, as they often do, they seem to belong to a mental world beyond the reach of historical, philosophical, or scientific analysis, a world for which the rules of methodological engagement seem inappropriate, rather than merely impossible to observe. (651)

No single interpretive system, whether Freudian, Jungian, Greek, or aboriginal, can prove its dreamwork methodology comprehensive and unassailable. The very subjectivity of the dreaming experience centers dreams in the human, rhetorical realm, and out of the objective and scientific. This paper examines some of the key hermeneutical and rhetorical principles involved in this most mysterious realm of human inventio, and presents a variety of historical approaches to interpreting dreams. We will see how the ancient Hebrews and Greeks thought of dreams as originating outside the dreamer; because dreams came from God or the gods, their messages were considered authoritative and they were honored and enacted. We will then turn to modern approaches to dreamwork and see how the agency of dreams and the responsibility for interpreting dreams has shifted to the dreamer. Finally, this paper suggests that dreams may be seen as a kind of proto-rhetoric, which is to say that the hermeneutic step of interpreting dreams comes before their rhetorical articulation, making dreamwork a process that questions the usual assumption that rhetoric precedes interpretation.

Since the dawn of our Western literary tradition, dreams have been recorded. From authoritative sources dating back to at least 1800 B.C.E., from Genesis to Revelations, both the Old and the New Testaments provide numerous examples of visions and dreams along with their interpretations (Kelsey). In the ancient Greek culture, we find examples of dreams recorded by Homer, Herodotus, Aeschylus, Pindar, Aristophanes, Petronius, Plato, and Aristotle, to name but a few (Pratt; Pelling; Kelsey; Kragelund; Holowchak). Significantly, these dreams are seldom preserved as stand-alone events requiring no further explanation, but are usually paired with both a hermeneutic inquiry into their meaning and a concomitant rhetorical interpretation.

Dreams inarguably inspire hermeneutics. Who among us has never pondered either the meaning or origin of a dream? Jost and Hyde state that rhetoric and hermeneutics must be considered together, "for each not only presupposes but extends and corrects the other" (xii). In what sense, then, can dreams be considered rhetorical?

I would suggest that dreams are not yet a rhetoric in themselves but arouse in us the impression of symbolic meaning, and it is this impression of meaning that stimulates hermeneutic inquiry and subsequent rhetoric. By rhetoric I refer to discourse that persuasively entreats the listener to undertake a certain course of action. The imagery and impressions of the dream are not themselves rhetorical, but constitute a preverbal exigence which can be completely or partially removed by discourse. what Bitzer refers to as a rhetorical situation. The three components of the rhetorical situation identified by Bitzer are an exigency, an audience, and the constraints which "limit or enhance opportunities for making appropriate rhetorical responses" (Prelli 22). According to Hans Blumenberg, "Lacking definitive evidence and being compelled to act are the prerequisites of the rhetorical situation" (441), which aptly describes the kinds of dreams that seem to demand a response. In these dreams, the exigency can be considered the emotionally compelling imagery of the dream. The audience is the dreamer, who is the sole witness to the actual dream event. The constraints, defined by Prelli as "those orientations [that] prescribe how to state the problem, how to proceed toward its analysis and resolution, and what will be the criteria for evaluating proposed solutions" (23), aptly describe the dreamer's initial hermeneutic challenge when seeking meaning.

States, in his book, *The Rhetoric of Dreams*, advances the theory that "dreams are a kind of proto-rhetoric, *not yet* a language" (6). By proto-rhetoric, States asserts that although the dream, being preverbal, does not speak, it manifests strategies of thought that eventuate in the four master tropes of metonymy, synecdoche, metaphor, and irony. States' identification of tropes with dreams is a significant finding, for the tropological nature of dreams is a linchpin of every system of dream interpretation with which I am familiar. As will be shown, a central hermeneutic task of dream

interpretation is to translate the tropological imagery of dreams into words so that the meaning can be "heard" and understood.

States' proto-rhetoric resembles Heidegger's *proto-discourse* -- the call of conscience arising from a world already meaningful, but not yet language (Scult). Classifying dreams as proto-rhetoric does not imply that dreams have no intrinsic meaning; borrowing from Heidegger's concept of proto-discourse, the dream acts as a "call of conscience," promising a meaning that awaits hermeneutical discovery. This reclassification of dreams out of the realm of language into proto-rhetoric frees up the question of agency, for if the dream were already rhetorical, we would be required to posit an agent behind the dream as, indeed, most systems of dream interpretation do. The most common agency nominees are the "self to itself, the god to his prophet, the dead to the living, or even (in premonitory dreams) the future to the present" (States 15). Freud's agency system was the most complicated of all, with its reliance upon a very active unconscious mind struggling against the conscious mind both to reveal and conceal desires from the dreamer; since obfuscation and denial are assumed on the part of the original agent (the dreamer), an officially licensed, second-party hermeneut (the psychoanalyst) must be retained to provide the "true" rhetorical translation of the dream.

If, rather than considering the dream rhetorical in itself, we consider the dream a proto-rhetoric, then the hermeneutic activity stimulated by the dream becomes the first truly rhetorical event, and agency necessarily vests in the dreamer as translator of the dream. Walter Jost and Michael Hyde call us "rhetorical beings, creatures who are capable of dealing symbolically with particular matters that we recognize as pressing and that require careful deliberation and judgment, but whose meaning and significance are presently ambiguous, uncertain, and contestable" (2). Sorting out the meaning and significance of pressing matters defines the hermeneutical challenge. In the normal course of events, rhetoric precedes hermeneutics. But in the case of dreams, hermeneutics comes before the possibility of enactment, for the dream's proto-rhetoric is felt before it is understood. The dreamer's hermeneutical task begins with translating the tropological imagery of the dream's proto-rhetoric into language. The challenge for the dreamer is similar to the challenge Heidegger raises when responding to the primordial call of *Ur-discourse*. As Scult explains:

> . . . in the very act of bringing it close, that is, in shedding her own rhetorical light on the shadows of the original, the interpreter may reduce the originary hermeneutical experience to something less than it is. She might 'tame it,' to borrow a phrase from Antoine St. Exupery, and so dilute its endogenous, primordial rhetorical force. (295)

Irrespective of any impugned Freudian intent to conceal, the very act of translation "tames" the originary proto-rhetoric of the dream in the same manner that hermeneutic

activity tames Heidegger's proto-discourse. When the dreamer articulates a dream, she runs the risk of reducing the richness of the originary dream imagery in many ways--by forgetting large portions of the dream, by applying overly strict rhetorical constraints, by misidentifying or mistranslating the tropological imagery, to name a few. The initial hermeneutic task of articulating a dream employs what Farrell calls the figurative aspect of rhetorical cognition, relying upon "a kind of slippage among literal sense and reference so as to capture -- through indirection -- some aspect of meaning that eludes exact definition" (87). This figurative slippage may allow for some creative hermeneutic enhancement of the dream's originary images. Such a deviation from the text is not limited to dream articulation. As Mailloux observes, "Any rhetoric, spoken or written, is open to interpretive risk" (381), for the translators of any symbolic event bring their own perspective to the situation.

A second-level hermeneutical challenge arises when an outside agent is solicited by the dreamer to assist in interpreting the dream, for now a person who did not experience the dream first-hand is called upon to interpret the already-translated, already filtered, rhetorical address of the dreamer. By the time the second party is called upon to interpret, the hermeneutical text under study is not the dream itself, which the interpreter never experiences and the dreamer has often, by now, forgotten, but the processed narrative iteration of the dream. It matters not whether the text under consideration is the originary proto-rhetoric of the dream (first level), or the dreamer's rhetorical iteration (second level), for "interpretation involves the translation of one text into another, a Hermes-like mediation that is also a transformation of one linguistic event into another, later one" (Mailloux, 379). Whether the second-party interpreter takes the form of family member or friend, shaman or psychoanalyst, priest or magi, the hermeneutical challenge is distinct from the dreamer's original hermeneutical task of faithfully iterating an otherwise ineffable dream experience: the second-level hermeneutical challenge is that of discovering a meaningful message *for the dreamer* embedded in the dreamer's narrative. The articulated dream is a figurative text that uniquely reflects the rhetorical exigencies of the dreamer; therefore, the second-level interpreter must be especially wary of projecting his own personal rhetorical agenda onto the dreamer.

We will now turn our attention to three distinct approaches to dreams in order to demonstrate how each handles the hermeneutical and rhetorical issues involved with interpretation. We will begin with the Old Testament, since it provides "one of the oldest and historically most continuous examples" we have of dream interpretation (Kelsey 17). We will then turn our attention to the ancient Greeks, since so much of our rhetorical and hermeneutical tradition derives from them. Lastly, we will look at some of the more popular approaches to dream interpretation in our contemporary

world, an active site of hermeneutic and rhetorical activity that has been largely ignored in the professional literature of rhetorical analysis.

The Ancient Hebrew Theory of Dreams

According to Kelsey in *God, Dreams, and Revelation*, there is no clear-cut distinction in the Hebrew language between dreams and visions. The dream experience is often referred to as a vision of the night, as in Job 20:8: "He will fly away like a dream, and not be found; Yes, he will be chased away like a vision of the night." Most of the Old Testament authors believed that people were in contact with both a physical reality and a non-physical reality referred to as the spiritual or visionary reality. Dreams and visions were the gateway to perceiving this second, spiritual reality. The "see-er" or prophet is one who perceives non-physical reality (20). The main task of the seer was, according to Kelsey, "to see and understand the visionary realities-- to know angels and hear God's voice and see visions" (22). As expressed in Numbers 12:6: "If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision, And I speak to him in a dream." God declares Himself the agent creating dreams.

The first dream description in the Old Testament occurs in Genesis 15:1, when Yahweh reveals to Abram the future inheritance of his descendants and performs a contractual ceremony known thereafter as the Covenant between God and man. The meaning and agency of the dream were clear to Abram: he recognized the dream as a promise by God, and it served as the verification of his call from Ur (Kelsey 23).

The next notable dream is found in Genesis 28:11-17, where Jacob dreams of a ladder reaching between heaven and earth, upon which angels were ascending and descending. God appears above the ladder, identifies himself as the LORD of Abraham and the God of Isaac, and gives the land Jacob is resting upon to him and his descendants, promising to restore them to this land after scattering them abroad to the four compass points. When Jacob awakens he does not doubt that God has spoken to him in his dream:

> "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Gen. 28:16-17)

Jacob thus acknowledges that in his waking state he did not recognize God's presence, but while he was sleeping the awesomeness of his surroundings was made clear. Jacob honors the message of his dream by erecting a stone pillar at the place where he had lain his head, and by making a vow to follow God and to give a tenth of his income to God henceforth. Jacob regarded this dream as a profound religious experience. This

dream and the others that followed established the unique relationship between God and Israel.

But it was Jacob's favorite son, Joseph, whose ability to dream and interpret dreams stands out among all the Hebrew patriarchs. In Genesis 37:5, Joseph dreams that the sheaf of wheat he is binding stands upright and the sheaves of his brothers bow down before it. Joseph tells his brothers his dream, and they interpret the dream as Joseph reigning over them. The brothers react to their interpretation as if it were a fact: "So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words" (Gen. 37:8). Soon thereafter, Joseph dreams another dream. He tells his father and brothers and they interpret the dream:

> "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me." So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" (Gen. 37:9-10)

As a result of this dream and its interpretation, Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt, where he becomes well-positioned to serve as Pharaoh's dream interpreter after Pharaoh's magicians prove unable to satisfactorily interpret his dreams.

> And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it." So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace." (Gen. 41:15-16)

By his reply to Pharaoh, Joseph makes it clear that he does not consider the authority of his hermeneutical judgments as originating with him, but rather with God who works through him. Pharaoh tells Joseph a pair of disturbing dreams, ending with, "So I told this to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me" (Gen. 41:24). Thus Pharaoh reveals his belief in the rhetorical value of the dreams as well as his advisors' heuristic ineffectualness in discerning the dreams. Once again, Joseph affirms the Hebrew belief that God provides both the dream and the heuristic divination of the dream, when he says: "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do. . ." (Gen. 41:25). Joseph provides Pharaoh with a satisfactory interpretation of the dream, and then goes beyond the interpretation to formulate an elaborate plan of action for the nation to undertake based upon the revelation of the dream.

> So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as

> God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you." (Gen. 42:37-39)

Through these accounts of dreams, and numerous others throughout the Old Testament, we learn that the ancient Hebrews (and the Egyptian Pharaoh as well) believed dreams were visions sent by God through which God revealed his plans. The agent of the dream's proto-rhetoric is God, and God provides not only the pre-discursive symbolism of the dream, but the hermeneutic ability to decipher the dream correctly. Additionally, these dreams were never given as an end in themselves, merely as an entertaining or even awe-inspiring narrative to be passively received, but the dreams were rhetorical, requiring some kind of response on the part of the dreamer. The hermeneutic agency of these prophetic dreams seems to be fully vested in God, for there is no intimation that the dreamer has forgotten, mistranslated, or misunderstood any part of the Ur-discourse of God's rhetorical message.

After about 1300 years of prophetic dreams and visions, several of the Old Testament prophets, beginning with Isaiah, claimed that not all dreams were visions sent by Yahweh, for there were false prophets to be reckoned with:

> "Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," says the LORD, "and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all," says the LORD." (Jer. 23:32)

Both Ezekiel (Chapter 13) and Jeremiah (Chapters 14, 23, 27, 29) struggled with developing a heuristic method that would distinguish between true dreams. those sent by God. and false dreams. the deceits of false prophets' hearts (Jer. 23:16). They were unable to do more than formulate a pragmatic wait-and-see strategy. those dreams that led the people astray were false, those that brought them closer to God were true. Isaiah placed the responsibility for false dreams on the rebellion against truth by the people: "Who say to the seers, 'Do not see,' And to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy to us right things'" (Is. 30:9). According to Isaiah, those whose hearts are not aligned with God's truth can neither hear nor recognize God's call. Since Judaism is a dogmatic system, the definition of "false" is, ipso facto, that which does not agree with the edicts of Yahweh.

One is reminded of a similar explanation in Heidegger's philosophical hermeneutics. Speaking of prior understanding as a prerequisite to Dasein's hermeneutical task, Scult writes, "Before Dasein is able to understand anything about Being, it must first be made capable of undergoing the sort of experience in which Being makes its

appearance. . . Only then can the transcendent be 'heard'; only then can hermeneutical experience proceed" (292). "Willingness," defined as attentiveness to the primordial call, is a necessary prerequisite which makes Yahweh's speaking operative and meaningful. The correct iteration of the visionary proto-rhetoric of Yahweh by the true prophets of the Old Testament seems not unlike Heidegger's description of Dasein's receptivity to the primordial call of Being.

Dreams of the Ancient Greeks

Unlike the relative uniformity of thought regarding dreams in ancient Hebrew culture, Greek literature presents a variety of opinions concerning the nature and function of dreams, which changes over time and from one school of thought to another. For the most part, "dreams were generally considered to be an objective vision, someone or something actually seen in sleep" (Holowchak, 418). The poets of the Homeric age, circa 850 B.C.E., treat dreams as supernatural revelations given by the gods (Kelsey, 52). According to the oft-cited work, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, by E. R. Dodds, dreams took

> . . . the form of a visit paid to a sleeping man or woman by a single dream-figure. This dream-figure can be a god, or a ghost, or a pre-existing dream-messenger, or an 'image' created specially for the occasion; but whichever it is, it exists objectively in space and is independent of the dreamer. It effects an entry by the keyhole; it plants itself at the head of the bed to deliver its message; and when that is done, it withdraws by the same route. The dreamer, meanwhile, is almost completely passive. . . (104f)

These "objective" dreams were experienced as arising from an agent outside the dreamer, and the message of the dream was clearly rendered by the agent, with little room for hermeneutic confusion. The evidence recorded in Greek literature indicates that people took these "god-sent" dreams seriously, and were persuaded to action based upon the rhetoric of the dream. Many dreams inspired dedications in the form of plaques, statues, or chapels, leaving behind archeological evidence such as inscriptions which read "in accordance with a dream" or "having seen a dream" (Kelsey, 53).

Plato, in the 4th century B.C.E., tells of Socrates' enactment of action taken because of a recurring dream. Socrates was so persuaded by the rhetoric of his dreams that he spent the final days before his death putting Aesop's fables into verse. He had for years ignored his dreams' exhortation to "make music," but decided in the end, "it would be safer for me to satisfy the scruple, and, in obedience to the dream, to compose a few verses before I departed" (Phaedo 60f).

> The same dream came to me sometimes in one form, and sometimes in another, but always saying the same or nearly the same words: 'Set to work and make music,' said the dream. And hitherto I had imagined that this was only intended to exhort and encourage me in the study of philosophy. . . But I was not certain of this; for the dream might have meant music in the popular sense of the word. (Phaedo 60f)

Socrates does not speak of the dreams as god-sent, but Plato, elsewhere, does.[1] Socrates clearly places the agency for the dream-rhetoric outside himself, and he describes his own years of hermeneutic struggle with understanding the meaning of the dream's rhetorical exhortation; for even though Socrates was able to translate the dream-rhetoric into the words "make music," he was unable to interpret what was meant by "music." His working translation of the meaning of music as "philosophy" proved unsatisfactory in the end, and in the last days before his death, he felt compelled to undertake a more literal enactment of the dream's rhetoric by picking up the poet's pen and writing verse.

By the 4th century B.C.E., when Aristotle wrote *On Divination During Sleep*, the belief in the divinity of dreams was beginning to waver. Aristotle chalked prophetic dreams up to coincidence (463b18-23) and reasoned that if animals other than humans can dream, then dreams cannot be "sent by god" (462b12-23). On the other hand, in the *Eudemian Ethics,* Aristotle suggests that divinatory dreams do occur (1248a38-40), so he was apparently not of one mind on this issue (Holowchak). About this same time, the Epicureans also dismissed as mere coincidence the notion that dreams sometimes predicted the future, and sought "to liberate their fellow men from the superstitious fear to which dreams could give rise" (Kragelund 450).

Other important beliefs about dreaming included the Pythagoreans and followers of Orphism who, beginning in the 6th century B.C.E., maintained that during sleep the soul actually left the body, took trips, visited gods, and communed with other spirits, implying quite an active agency on the part of the dreamer (Kelsey). And no survey of ancient Greek dreams would be complete without mentioning that, from around 430 B.C.E. and flourishing for hundreds of years, sick people would sleep (incubate) at the many temples of Asclepius, in order to receive healing dreams "either directly from Asclepius or in the form of instructions interpreted by his priest" (Nutton 56). The priests would often prepare herbal potions and effect other cures based upon their hermeneutic divination of the god of medicine's proto-rhetoric, which often came in the form of a dog or a snake touching the dreamer in the part of the body needing healing (Edelstein & Edelstein).

Despite the varied approaches to dreams, Greek scholars generally agree that "the modern notion of dreams as a repository of unconscious desires that are encoded symbolically is entirely foreign to ancient thought about dreams" (Pratt 148-9). Dreams were conceived as rhetorical messages arriving fully-formed from an outside source. We will now turn our attention to dream accounts by Herodotus and Homer, and examine the hermeneutic and rhetorical mechanisms at work.

Herodotus, the "Father of History," in the 5th century B.C.E., records a pair of dreams of King Astyages, son of Cyaxares. Astyages was "alarmed" by the magi's interpretation of a dream concerning his baby daughter, which caused him, years later, to marry her off to a less powerful husband than he otherwise would have. Later,

> In the first year of Mandane's marriage to Cambyses, Astyages had another dream: he dreamed that a vine grew from the genitalia of this daughter, and spread over the whole of Asia. He again consulted the dream-experts on what he had seen, then sent for his daughter to come to him from the land of the Persians. By now she was pregnant. When she arrived he kept her under guard, planning to kill the product of her womb: for the dream-experts among the magi interpreted his dream as indicating that his daughter's offspring would take his place upon the throne. (Pelling 68)

From this example, we can see that Astyages believed the original agent of the dream was divine, and that the dreams predicted the future. We also learn that the king did not trust in his own ability to interpret the proto-rhetoric of the dreams, but turned to second-party hermeneutic agents -- the magi -- for interpretation. Because he believed the interpretations of the dreams, the king was moved to send his daughter away to marry a Persian years after the first dream and to call her back to destroy her offspring after the second dream. Even though Astyages took action because of the interpreted dream rhetoric, he remained hermeneutically passive by giving the interpretation over to the professional hermeneuts of the ancient East, the magi.

On the other hand, Penelope's dream, presented by Homer 300 years before, in the nineteenth book of the *Odyssey*, seems to belie the foregoing depiction of the dreamer's passive agency. At this point in the narration of the *Odyssey*, Penelope is struggling with whether she should continue to wait for Odysseus' return or whether she should marry one of the suitors. Penelope has a dream wherein an eagle swoops down and slaughters her twenty pet geese as they eat their grain in the courtyard. In the dream, Penelope weeps and wails, mourning inconsolably, with the Achaian women gathered close around her. The eagle, from within the dream, tells her to "take heart," that the geese represent her suitors and the eagle is her husband "come back to you."

Rather than finding comfort in the dream's prophesy that her husband will soon return, Penelope remains confused and upset by the dream. The next day, Penelope tells a passing beggar, who is actually the disguised Odysseus, of her dilemma and asks him to interpret her dream. Odysseus states that it is impossible to interpret the dream by bending it aside in some other direction. the meaning of the dream is clear. Yet, if the dream's message were as unambiguous as Odysseus believes it to be, why does Penelope feel the need for further hermeneutic inquiry? Instead of accepting his second-party interpretation, Penelope answers,

> Stranger, dreams are very curious and unaccountable things, and they do not by any means invariably come true. There are two gates through which these unsubstantial fancies proceed; the one is of horn, and the other ivory. Those that come through the gate of ivory are fatuous, but those from the gate of horn mean something to those that see them. I do not think, however, that my own dream came through the gate of horn, though I and my son would be most thankful if it proves to have done so. (Od. 19.535-50)

Pratt observes, "The dream offers the key to its own interpretation, an interpretation that subsequent events reveal to be the correct one. Indeed, given how explicitly the dream enunciates its own message, Penelope's request that the beggar interpret it seems overly cautious" (148).

What seems to be unique about this account of Penelope's dream is that Penelope does not accept the received prophesy as personally meaningful. In the dream, she mourns pitiably for her slaughtered geese and the eagle's words do not comfort her. After awakening, Penelope remains unconvinced of the positive meaning of the dream, despite the fact that within the dream the eagle explicitly articulated words of comfort and promise. All of the elements of received prophesy were satisfied: the eagle was a portent from Zeus; therefore, the dream was divine. The articulated rhetoric within the dream made the message clear; future events will prove the prophecy true. And yet Penelope remains unconvinced. This is no passive dreamer!

Pratt suggests that there is a further interpretation of the dream beyond the more obvious destruction of the suitors by Odysseus, one that deals with Penelope's feelings of grief and mourning in her dream. Pratt points out that bird-signs were well known to the Homeric audience, and that numbers associated with bird-signs carried symbolic significance. The fact that there were twenty geese, but not twenty suitors, would seem to point to a period of twenty years as opposed to twenty dead. Moreover, for Penelope and the Homeric audience, geese carried the familiar connotation of prudent guardianship of the house, as well as marital fidelity. "Thus, the geese can be taken to represent Penelope's faithful guardianship of the house, violently destroyed

after a twenty-year period" (152). Penelope's mourning in the dream and the action of the Achaian women in gathering around her bespeak Penelope's belief that her husband is dead, an interpretation at odds with the eagle's prediction of Odysseus' triumphal return.

Pratt characterizes Penelope's doubts regarding the interpretation offered by the eagle in the dream and her turning to a less positive interpretation as "typical of her skeptical and cautious approach in the final books of the *Odyssey*" (152). This may be so, but I would hasten to add that her skepticism is not without basis. After all, she is married to Odysseus, identified by Hyde in *Trickster Makes This World* as one of only three characters[2] in Greek literature who are said to be polytropic, skin-shifting tricksters -- "shifty as an octopus. . . charming, disarming, and not to be trusted" (53). It is Odysseus wearing one of his polytropic disguises to whom Penelope turns for help in deciphering her dream. If she remains unconvinced following an encounter with one of the mythic embodiments of ambiguity and duplicity, who can blame her, even if he is her husband?

Penelope's rejection of the dream's manifest rhetoric in favor of an emotionally-inspired, personal interpretation seems to illustrate an understanding on the part of the ancient Greeks that dream signs can have multiple meanings, beyond those given by the agency of the gods. Penelope added her own hermeneutic agency and found another, more personal, meaning. The same bird-signs that signified to Odysseus his triumphal return, seem to signify for Penelope the death of her husband and the violent destruction of twenty years of faithful guardianship and marital fidelity. Her mourning within the dream, and her lingering doubts after the dream, indicate Penelope's personal heuristics at work. This insistence upon finding her own meaning elevates Penelope from the passive role of receiving divine rhetoric from within the dream, to an active hermeneutic role, one in which she makes meaning for herself from the proto-rhetorical bird-signs in the dream, motivated by her own emotional state.

To say that Penelope is driven to find meaning because of her emotional reaction to the dream is not to say that she is motivated by some unconscious ambivalence in the psychoanalytic sense; quite the opposite. Penelope's single-minded, lucid acknowledgement of her emotions carries over from her dreaming to her waking state, despite the eagle's and Odysseus' attempts to deny her feelings, and their encouragement to accept their positive news. The dream, as a bit of rhetorical prophesy, fails with regard to Penelope and succeeds with Odysseus, since he understands and was doubtless encouraged by its message.

Penelope said of dreams, "Those that come through the gate of ivory are fatuous, but those from the gate of horn mean something to those that see them." In the case of this

dream of the geese and the eagle, it could be said that it came through the gate of horn with regards to Odysseus, since it was meaningful to him and future events proved his interpretation to be correct. Penelope feared the dream came through ivory, and indeed, her pessimistic fears were not realized; but the dream was not fatuous, for it correctly elicited and mirrored for Penelope, and through her rhetoric made witness to Odysseus, her despair at the prospect of widowhood and the loss of her home. Rather than declaring Penelope's interpretation wrong, it seems more accurate to say that the dream came through the gate of horn for both Penelope and Odysseus and that the dream's proto-rhetoric was rich enough to allow room for both of their hermeneutic readings. Penelope's active hermeneutic engagement with this dream, coupled with her insistence on discovering a personal meaning at odds with the interpretation provided by Zeus and Odysseus, provide the earliest model exemplifying the contemporary approach to dreams.

Dreams in Contemporary America: A Site for Hermeneutics and Rhetoric

Judging by the number of self-help dream interpretation manuals on the shelves of America's bookstores, there is a growing interest in the personal hermeneutics of dreams. As an offshoot of the "pop psychology" self-help movement arising in the last quarter of the century, do-it-yourself dream analysis reflects the lay person's belief that it is not necessary to consult a professional psychologist or psychoanalyst for help in interpreting one's own dreams; all the dreamer needs is a readable guidebook and a willing attitude. Ullman and Zimmerman, in their best-selling, do-it-yourself book, *Working with Dreams*, present a history of post-Freudian dreamwork that serves to underscore the incompatibility of the field's authoritative voices, leaving the reader with the distinct impression that the dreamer's own opinion is just as valid as the experts' mutually exclusive claims. Psychoanalysts Wilhelm Stekel and Emil Gutheil, for example, criticized Freud's reliance upon free association and "emphasized the extent to which the patient's associations are not truly free, but are influenced by the theoretical predilections of the therapist" (60). Stekel and Gutheil noted that sexual symbols appear more often in the dreams of patients of Freudians, while archetypal images appear in the dreams of patients of Jungians. Erich Fromm, in *The Forgotten Language*, disagreed with both Jung and Freud, taking a mid-position on the issues of denial and transcendence, while existentialist Medard Boss, in *The Analysis of Dreams*, discounted *all* theoretical approaches to dreams and declared dreaming simply another way of being-in-the-world (Ullman & Zimmerman). The Gestalt approach to dreamwork, introduced by Frederick S. Perls, eschews rational analysis altogether, preferring to enact physically the dream's originary non-linguistic images with the dreamer dramatizing all of the characters and objects in the dream (Perls).

Ullman and Zimmerman sum up their criticism of expert-based interpretive systems by declaring:

> The existence of diverse schools of thought suggests that no one theoretical structure encompasses all that we can discover in our dream life. A therapist's ability to work with a dream hinges, in my opinion, not on his particular theoretical knowledge of symbolism (either Freudian-Sexual or Jungian-Archetypal) but, rather, on his skill in detecting the various ways in which the dreamer awake evades the message from the dreamer asleep. Some people do require professional help to get at the truth of what their dreams are saying. For most people, however, the truth of their dreams is not beyond their reach. (62)

While Ullman and Zimmerman call into question expert-based theories of dream interpretation, they never question the rhetorical nature of dreams. Dreams as a site for rhetorical activity remain largely unstudied. The contemporary reclamation of the right to interpret one's own dreams is a boon not only to the virtual self-help section of Amazon.com, it is a boon to rhetoric and hermeneutics as well, for both do their best work in an environment of textual uncertainty and thrive in the absence of interpretive authority.

Richard Palmer paraphrases Richard Rorty's "From Epistemology to Hermeneutics" in his own essay, "What Hermeneutics Can Offer Rhetoric," when he describes a nonfoundationalist, hermeneutical style of thinking that is "radically at variance with the modern Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm of conclusions whose certainty is based on clear demonstrations" (110). It is this hermeneutical style of thinking, one that allows for the figurative slippage of rhetorical cognition referred to earlier by Farrell, that liberates dream analysis from the terministic strictures of rigidly authoritarian interpretive systems. One problem with theoretically-based dream interpretation systems is that calculative thinking may be prematurely applied to a hermeneutic process in need of a continuation of the more receptive frame of mind characteristic of meditative thought. Palmer hints at another alliance between dreams and hermeneutics when he describes Rorty's conceptualization of language as the matrix of all thought. Dreaming provides a nightly opportunity for engaging in a hermeneutic activity originating prior to the conditioning matrix of language. Perhaps this is the reason so many inventors and artists find creative inspiration in dreams, for by escaping language radical new possibilities can emerge. As such, dreams provide a virtually untapped site for studies of rhetorical invention.

Dreams, as a form of proto-rhetoric that occurs largely outside our volitional control, can be thought of as constituting a kind of meditative thought largely free from calculative thinking. Viewing dreaming as a form of meditative thinking may help to explain both the unbridled creativity of dream imagery and dreaming's rhetorical appeal as a "call of conscience" leading to personal growth. Michael J. Hyde proposes

that Heidegger's "call of conscience" is rhetorical in that "we are called upon to assume the personal and ethical responsibility of affirming our freedom through resolute choice" (1994, 376). Hyde explains that Dasein's openness to hearing the call of its own potentiality-for-Being is essential to becoming what it will be, for the appeal is delivered in silence: "the discourse of the conscience never comes to utterance" (Heidegger, 1962, 342-43). In order to hear that silent appeal, calculative thinking with its willful deliberation must be overshadowed by meditative thinking's "releasement toward things" (Gelassenheit), a "letting go" of practical concerns (Heidegger, 1966, 54-56, 58f). I would like to suggest that the dream may be one such avenue through which the "discourse of the conscience" may be heard, for the dreamer's lack of control over dream content reflects this necessary "letting go." The dreams' rhetorical appeal may then be seen as Dasein's inherent responsiveness to the call to personal and ethical responsibility. But this call of conscience will go unheeded unless the dreamer takes the further step of hermeneutic analysis and authentic application.

In ancient times the agency behind dreams was thought to be God or the gods, and the ultimate hermeneutic task was translating the dream's divine proto-rhetoric into rhetorical prophesy. If the text of the dream was unclear, an interpreter adept at interpreting the sacred was called upon, and this priest or prophet became the second-level hermeneutical and rhetorical agent of the dream. In the modern, Freudian age, the dreamer's unconscious was the designated agent of the dream, and the hermeneutic task was to unmask the manifest proto-rhetoric of the dream in order to reveal the unconscious agent's latent message so that the conscious mind could own up to its repressed desires. Because it was assumed the agent's proto-rhetoric was attempting to disguise the actual text of the dream, a second-party interpretive agent was required to perform the hermeneutical task of uncovering and articulating the dream's actual text. The patient who actually dreamed the dream was a passive agent in each step of the process with the exception of the first hermeneutic task of articulating the proto-rhetoric into language.

Nowadays, the original agent of the dream's proto-rhetoric is considered the dreamer herself. There is wide consensus among today's promoters of do-it-yourself dream interpretation that dreams are the way the sleeping mind emotionally reviews the events of the waking world which take the form of metaphorical imagery (Ullman & Zimmerman; Morris). The dreamer's first hermeneutical task is articulating the dream as completely as possible; this is usually accomplished by writing or speaking the dream immediately upon awakening. The dreamer's next hermeneutical task is puzzling out the metaphors of the transcribed text in order to understand the rhetoric of the dream. The tropological nature of dreams is no longer considered a repressive mechanism, but merely the manner by which the sleeping mind "thinks" (Ullman &

Zimmerman; States). This paper further suggests that the meditative thinking of the dreaming mind allows the "call of conscience" to be heard and that the rhetorical appeal of this call motivates the dreamer's hermeneutic activity.

The level of personal agency of the dreamer has increased over time relative to the decline of religious authority and ratio-authoritative systems. But two characteristics of dreaming have remained consistent. the metaphorical aspect of the proto-rhetoric of dreams, and the rhetorical power of dreams. Dreams remain as persuasive a force in people's lives as ever, and people are just as willing to take action in the waking world based upon the message in a dream. As rhetorical situations, consisting of tropological, proto-rhetorical images that give rise to hermeneutic interpretation prior to rhetorical speech, dreams reverse the usual order of rhetoric before interpretation. This inversion suggests that to be rhetorical one must cultivate receptivity; in dreamwork this process is essential. Dreams are rich sites that have much to contribute to our understanding of the role of rhetoric in the contemporary world.

Footnotes

1. Plato writes of the divinity of dreams in Book II and Book IX of *Republic* as well as his discussions of divine mania in *Phaedrus* (Kelsey, 62-65).

2. "There are three and only three characters in Greek literature who are said to be polytropic: Hermes, Odysseus, and that deceitful Athenian general and Socratic pretty-boy, Alcibiades" (Hyde, 52).

References

Bitzer, Lloyd F. "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 1 (1968): 6.

Blumenberg, Hans. "An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric," trans. Robert M. Wallace, in *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* Eds. Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy. Cambridge: MIT Press (1987).

Dodds, E. R. *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.

Edelstein, Emma J. and Ludwig Edelstein. *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies* 1 & 2. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945.

Farrell, Thomas. "Practicing the Arts of Rhetoric: Tradition and Invention." *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory*. Eds. John Louis Lucaites, Celeste Michelle Condit, and Sally Caudill. New York: The Guilford Press (1999): 79-100.

Gabbey, Alan, and Robert E. Hall, "The Melon and the Dictionary: Reflections on Descartes' Dreams." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59 (1998): 51-668.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper, 1962.

Heidegger, Martin. *Discourse on Thinking*. Translated by John A. Anderson and E. Hans Freund. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.

Holowchak, Mark A. "Aristotle on Dreaming: What Goes On in Sleep When the 'Big Fire' Goes Out." *Ancient Philosophy* 16 (1996): 405-423.

Holy Bible. *The New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983.

Homer. *Odyssey*. Trans. Samuel Butler. http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~joelja/odyssey.html, July, 1999.

Hyde, Lewis. *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art*. New York: North Point Press, 1998.

Hyde, Michael J. "The Call of Conscience: Heidegger and the Question of Rhetoric." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 27 (1994): 374-396.

Jost, Walter, and Michael J. Hyde. "Prologue." *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time: A Reader*. Eds. Walter Jost and Michael J. Hyde. New Haven: Yale University Press (1997): xi-xxiii.

Kelsey, Morton T. *God, Dreams, and Revelation: A Christian Interpretation of Dreams.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974.

Kragelund, Patrick. "Epicurus, Priapus and the Dreams in Petronius." *Classical Quarterly* 39 (1989): 436-450.

Mailloux, Steven. "Articulation and Understanding: The Pragmatic Intimacy Between Rhetoric and Hermeneutics." *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics In Our Time*. Eds. Walter Jost and Michael J. Hyde. New Haven: Yale University Press (1997): 378-394.

Morris, Jill. *The Dream Workbook*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1985.

Nutton, Vivian. "The Rise of Medicine." *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Medicine*. Ed. Roy Porter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1996): 52-81.

Palmer, Richard E. "What Hermeneutics Can Offer Rhetoric." *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics In Our Time*. Eds. Walter Jost and Michael J. Hyde. New Haven: Yale University Press (1997): 108-131.

Pelling, Christopher. "The Urine and the Vine: Astyages' Dreams at Herodotus 1.107-8." *Classical Quarterly* 46 (1996): 68-77.

Perls, Frederick S. *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim*. Moab, Utah: Real People Press, 1969.

Pratt, Louise. "Odyssey 19.535-50: On the Interpretation of Dreams and Signs in Homer." *Classical Philology* 89 (1994): 147-152.

Prelli, Lawrence J. *A Rhetoric of Science: Inventing Scientific Discourse*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989.

Scult, Allen. "Hermes' Rhetorical Problem: The Dilemma of the Sacred in Philosophical Hermeneutics." *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics In Our Time.* Eds. Walter Jost and Michael J. Hyde. New Haven: Yale University Press (1997): 290-312.

States, Bert O. *The Rhetoric of Dreams*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Ullman, Montague, and Nan Zimmerman. *Working with Dreams.* Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc, 1979.