Realistic Fictional Dreams

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I.

In his article on epiphany Robert Langbaum has usefully distinguished two forms of visionary experience: epiphany as a modern mode and traditional vision. The lines from "The World" by the seventeenth-century poet Vaughan, "I saw eternity the other night/like a great ring of pure and endless light," are in Langbaum's opinion illustrative of vision, because therein "nothing is physically sensed."[1] On the contrary, he detects in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, Wordsworth's *Prelude*, and Joyce's various works an abundance of epiphanies working from realistic bases and through carefully arranged psychological association. In all he has come up with half a dozen criteria for epiphany. He endorses Morris Beja's contention that modern epiphany is characterized by the irrelevance or insignificance of the events or objects that trigger it. He adds that an "epiphanic leap" is necessary to derive a coherent significance from the fragmented array of the events or objects. His other criteria show an unmistakable realistic emphasis:

> The first is the Criterion of Psychological Association: the epiphany is not an incursion of God from outside; it is a psychological phenomenon arising from a real sensual experience, either present or recollected. The second is the Criterion of Momentaneousness: the epiphany lasts only a moment, but leaves an enduring effect. The third is the Criterion of Suddenness: a sudden change in external conditions causes a shift in sensuous perception that sensitizes the observer for epiphany. (Langbaum, p. 341)

What essentially guides Langbaum in making his distinction is clearly the requirements of realism. An epiphany, as distinguished from a vision, has to be in its genesis, process, and effect a sensuous experience psychologically accountable. Thus, even though epiphany and vision conceivably share many characteristics common to visionary experience, one is nevertheless "realistic" and the other "unrealistic." In other words, epiphany as a modern mode involves a secular transformation of the meaning of spiritual manifestations originally attached to visionary experience.

There is an obvious parallel between a dream and an epiphany. There also usually exists a (seeming) incongruity or irrelevance between a dream and the circumstances that give rise to it. The unraveling of the dream-text involves some form of inspired reading comparable to an epiphanic leap. The parallel, however, ends here. An epiphanic experience is taken to be in the realm of reality. It is as real as feeling cold, or thirsty, or blissful, and it is therefore a structure of experience significant in itself. By contrast, a dream is normally opposed against reality and it is significant only insofar as it is indicative of something significant in the dreamer's life. Furthermore, unlike epiphany, dreaming is a common experience. This fact has important consequences in the literary renditions of dreams. A reader may be

skeptical about the very existence of such a phenomenon as epiphany. However, once he decides to suspend his disbelief, he is also likely to accept its literary presentation as realistic. (This may explain Langbaum's laxity in making a distinction between epiphany as a real-world experience and as a literary experience.) By contrast, a writer of dreams does not have to persuade his readers to believe in dreams but he has the onerous task of making them believe in the realism of his dreams if such should be among his objectives.

In a sense a dream is a fiction "written" by the dreamer. It is by definition "fantastic," that is, unreal. In fact it is a common reading practice to naturalize a strange text (particularly a text with the obvious violations of such realistic conventions as intelligible motives, temporal-causal order of events, control of natural laws, etc.) by positing a dreamer as the narrator of the text. A realistic fictional dream, then, paradoxically needs to be fantastic enough to be realistic. Under what conditions can a literary presentation of dreams be said to have attained realism? A look into this problem promises to reveal the intricate relationships between fantasy and realism. It will also unavoidably have bearing on some old yet on-going controversies about realism such as whether "*le réal écrit*" (a transcription of life) is a meaningful statement, whether literary realism conceived as illusionistic art has its foundation in reality or is a pure convention operative in the autonomous system of literature, and whether literary realism is by nature conservative and repetitious.

II.

A dream episode from the eighteenth-century Chinese novel, *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, provides a relatively unproblematic example for the initial establishment of our formulations about realistic fictional dream. We have here in mind young nun Miao-yu's veiled erotic dream, which occurs in Chapter 87 of the novel.[2] *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is a predominantly realistic novel even though it also contains sizable portions which are unrealistic, at times even fantastic. Miao-yu's dream is realistic and it is also textually situated amidst realistic portions. It deals with the symbolism of dreams, but it does so without self-conscious attempts at dwelling on the ambiguities or symbolic complexity of dreams. As an episode it is almost self-contained. To start with the study of this dream, furthermore, is to underscore the fact that our concept of literary realism is not bound to any particular period or tradition.

Prior to Chapter 87, Miao-yu has already been established as a quite complex character. She is unusually sensitive, cool, and aloof. She entertains a general revulsion against the male sex, but then she seems to have a strong liking for Pao-yu, the book's young protagonist. At least outwardly she always appears in control, and the kind of life she leads is of exemplary placidity typical of convent life. However in Chapter 87, she is surprisingly presented as dreaming a dream of violence and eroticism.

The mode of narration throughout the episode is impersonal. The narrator has never commented on the possible sexual repression suffered by the young nun. In fact he is never even explicit about the causal link between the dream and the events that precede it. He merely puts the events and the dream in a sequential order,

trusting the reader will have the sufficient understanding of psychology (or dreams) to decipher what he "shows." He first shows us that the young nun, engaged in a chess game in the room of one of Pao-yu's young female relatives', unaccountably blushes when Pao-yu drops in and greets her. Noticing her blushes, Pao-yu thinks that he must have unwittingly committed some gaucherie and therefore blushes in embarrassment. Pao-yu's embarrassment is taken by miao-yu to mean that he has noticed and made a particular interpretation of her own blushes. Consequently she blushes even more deeply. She then decides to excuse herself and leave for her convent. Joking that nightfall has almost made her unable to find her way home, she makes Pao-yu accompany her for part of the way. Back in her room, she begins her meditation, which has lasted for some hours until she is disturbed by outside noises. Suspecting of thieves prowling around, she goes out to have a check, only to find two cats miaowing to each other. Again back in the quiet solitude of her room, she is suddenly seized by vague, tumultous thoughts. Then without her knowing it she dozes off, dreaming at one moment, of being tossed into a wedding carriage against her will, and at another, of being kidnapped at the point of the sword by a group of bandits.

The dream is realistic on many grounds. First of all a plausible context for the dream has been established. It includes the characterization of the principal character, the subtle exchanges between her and Pao-yu at their meeting, and what transpires in her convent room. Second, the content of the dream, taking into consideration its triggering context, is plausible. To put it another way, by allowing the context of the dream to interact with its content we are able to make a reasonably satisfying interpretive leap. The dream has a strong Freudian overtone of wish fulfilment. To be an unwilling bride under coercion reconciles Miao-yu's deep-down erotic desire and conscious insistence on celibacy. More immediately, her blushes, her joking request for Pao-yu's company, and her hearing, possibly, the mating calls of the cats go into the making of the erotic contents of her dream. Her fleeting idea of burglars on the prowl, in turn, accounts for the dream's elements of violence and coercion. Aside from the context and the content, we have also to consider the form of the dream. The dream proper in this episode is admittedly sketchily rendered: it takes up only one short paragraph, and it is presented in summary form rather than dramatically. Still, that the two events just happen out of the blue and that one shifts into another with illogicality and unaccountable abruptness convincingly suggest the quality of dreams.

The plausibility arising from the interactions between the context, the content, and the form of the dream, which we detect in the presentation of Miao-yu's dream, is characteristic of all realistic fictional dreams. The fact that Miao-yu's dream has a Freudian overtone and hence a "universal" import, may account for the ease with which it attains realism. It seems that when a fictional dream aims at a more localized significance, it has proportionately to intensify its rendition of the formal aspects of the dream so as to be realistic. Take, for example, Lockwood's celebrated dreams in *Wuthering Heights*.

Lockwood's dreams appear early in Chapter 3. By that time we have come to recognize him as representative of decent, average humanity. Thus, by that time, we have also in a sense shared his confusion and disgust over the wintry inhumanity

pervading the world of Wuthering Heights. The physical aspects of the place are cheerless, harsh, and cold. The inhabitants are misanthropic. Of them, specially, the master Heathcliff is diabolically sadistic, and the old servant Joseph is a spiteful, bible-quoting kill-joy.

Lockwood has paid a call of courtesy to Wuthering Heights, but found himself roughly received by its inhabitants. Snowbound, he becomes the unwilling guest of the house for the night. A house maid, not heeding the rules laid down by her master, puts him up for the night's rest in a room supposed not to be used by any one other than Heathcliff himself. The room, we later learns, used to be the maiden chamber of Catherine's (Catherine was Heathcliff's long-deceased beloved). While in bed, Lockwood comes upon a few old, moldy religious tracts. The owner of the book is variously signed as Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Heathcliff, and Catherine Linton. In the blanks of the books he notices childish jottings by Catherine, which upon closer scrutiny turn out to be disturbingly vivid accounts of abysmal anguish experienced by Catherine and Heathcliff some twenty-five years ago at the hands of a tyrannical Hindley (Catherine's older brother and the then master of the house) and Joseph. One example:

> All day had been flooding with rain; we could not go to church, so Joseph must needs get up a congregation in the garret; and, while Hindley and his wife basked downstairs before a comfortable fire—doing anything but reading their Bibles, I'll answer for it—Heathcliff, myself, and the unhappy plough-boy were commanded to take our Prayer-books, and mount. We were ranged in a row, on a sack of corn, groaning and shivering, and hoping that Joseph would shiver too, so that he might give us a short homily for his own sake. A vain idea! The service lasted precisely three hours; and yet my brother had the face to exclaim, when he saw us descending—
>
> "What, done already?"[3]

Through his unintentional voyeurism Lockwood has stumbled on a temporally distant Wuthering Heights which is nevertheless continuous with the present Wuthering Heights in its perverse forlorness. The discovery inevitably adds perspectives to Heathcliff and Joseph, who are still stalking the place. Yet Catherine, who thrusts her presence into his consciousness in all her articulated passions of anguish, hatred, and vengefulness, is in effect characterized by her physical absence (dead? banished? . . .).

So far a broad context for Lockwood's dreams has been effectively established. A more immediate one is further given:

> I began to nod drowsily over the dim page; my eye wandered from manuscript to print. I saw a red ornamented title—"Seventy Times Seven, and the First of the Seventy-First. A Pious Discourse delivered by the Reverend Jabes Branderham, in the Chapel of Gimmerden Sough." And while I was, half-consciously, worrying my brain to guess what Jabes Branderham would make of his subject, I sank back in bed, and fell asleep. (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 28)

What he has noticed and read, and the emotional import ensuing therefrom,

then form the building blocks for his two consecutive dreams. In his first dream, triggered by what he has noticed right before dozing off, he feels he is trudging home through heavy snow. He has Joseph for a companion and is reproached by Joseph for not having carried a pilgrim's staff. Then, somehow the purpose of his journey has shifted to that of attending Jabes Branderham's sermon on "Seven Times Seven."[4] By the quaint logic of dreams, he senses that "either Joseph, the preacher, or I had committed the 'First of the Seventy-First,' and were to be publicly exposed and excommunicated." Jabes's sermon is made of 490 lengthy sermons, each on one sin. Lockwood notices that his patience is wearing out. Finally when the preacher comes to "First of the Seventy-First," he springs up and unmasks him as exactly the one who commits the sin: "Seventy times seven times have I plucked up my hat and been about to to depart—Seventy times seven times have you preposterously forced me to resume my seat. The four hundred and ninety-first is too much. Fellow martyrs, have at him!" Jabes counterattacks by proclaiming, "*Thou art the Man.*" Thereafter brawls break out and the congregation turns pell-mell:

> Presently the whole chapel resounded with reppings and counter-rappings. Every man's hand was against his neighbor; and Branderham, unwilling to remain idle, poured forth his zeal in a shower of loud taps on the boards of the pulpit; which responded so smartly that, at last, to my unspeakable relief, they woke me.

A physical explanation is promptly provided for the brawls and rappings: a tree branch in the wind rattling against the window panes by the bed.

The branch scratching the window panes also serves as the immediate cause of Lockwood's next dream. He is so annoyed by the sound that he decides to do something about it (notice that for a moment there is uncertainty about whether he is awake or asleep):

> "I must stop it, nevertheless!" I muttered, knocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch: instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand!
>
> The intense horror of nightmare came over me; I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed—
>
> "Let me in—let me in!"
>
> "Who are you?" I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself.
>
> "Cathering Linton," it replied, shiveringly (why did I think of *Linton*? I had read *Earnshaw* twenty times for Linton). "I'm home, I'd lost my way on the moor." (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 30)

Terror makes Lockwood cruel. He "pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and for till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes" (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 30), but the thing persists in its grip. Finally Lockwood wakes up, yelling in panic.

Unlike Miao-yu's dream, Lockwood's dreams are thematically and structurally an integral part of the whole novel. They encapsulate and crystalize what Lockwood (and hence the reader) has until then perceived as a diffuse, indefinite atmosphere

enveloping Wuthering Heights, ranging from Joseph's puritanical fanaticism to the overall wintry inhumanity as much in Heathcliff as in the landscape. In a symbolic way they also forebode the perversion, cruelty, and diabolicalness, ever associated with the haunting presence of the long-deceased Catherine, in the rest of the book. Such retroactive readings of the dreams, which presumably lay bare their function as a link in a chain of artistic design, do not affect their status as realistic dreams simply because they have fulfilled the realistic requirements for the context, content, and form of dreams. Whatever goes into Lockwood's dreams either has its origin in his wakeful experiences (such as his overall impressions of Wuthering Heights and its people, and his reading of Catherine's writings) or has sensory explanations (the blast and the scratching). The mechanisms of the dreams then establish their own logic (that is, by violating ordinary logic), such as in the uncanny narrative flow of the two dreams, the substitution of Jabes Branderham for Joseph, and the symbolism of Catherine's tenacious grip for, presumably, her strong will and desperation.

III.

For analytical convenience we have introduced a tripartite scheme of the dream context, the dream content, and the dream form. However it is obvious from our analyses that the dream content is actually a function of the interactions between the context and the form. Lack of a realistic (that is, dream-like) form is a prima facie evidence of a fictional dream's lack of realism. The coherence of plot in, say, Dante's *Inferno* or Borges's "The Circular Ruins" is sufficient in itself, without the need of considering other factors, to dissuade one from reading either as a realistic fictional dream (in fact, of course, one is allegorical and the other a kind of metaphysical calisthenics). Equally important as a determining factor is the context. A narrative that has the formal features of dreams and is yet devoid of an authenticating realistic context of dreams can never pass for a dream with certainty, let alone for a realistic dream. It is as likely to be accepted as an allegory, a delirious expression, or a dream. A case in point is Robert Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came."[5]

As is well known, the title of the poem is derived from Edgar's mad song in *King Lear* (III, IV, 171-73):

> Child Rowland to the dark tower came,
> His word was still—Fie, foh, and fum,
> I smell the blood of a British man.

The three clauses in the short passage each carry some sense, but together they are an exercise in incoherence, exemplary of a madman's jibberish. As a title, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" is sensible, in fact adequate in summarizing the plot of the narrative poem in its most elementary form, for the poem does depict the encounter of a young knight (Childe Roland) with a dark tower after a long, wearisome quest. However, the almost insane incoherence surrounding the context in which the line originally occurs in Shakespeare has found its counterpart in the literary universe established in this nineteenth-century poem. The bare, certain fact

of a quest that culminates in the confrontation with a dark tower is presented in concert with a miasma of unclear motives, ambivalent images and uncanny happenings.

The dominant feature of the poem is that it employs just enough conventional devices and motifs to establish it as a romance of quest while jolting our conventional expectations by either withholding development normally found in the mode or adding elements normally absent from the mode. As a result, we have a perpetual sense of discontinuity, and hence a continual desire to fill up, on our own, what we perceive as deliberate lacunae. The most obvious example lies in the cryptic nature of the quest itself. We are never told explicitly what initiates the quest for a confrontation with the Dark Tower, and what the exact nature of the Tower is, literally or figuratively. We know that Childe Roland, the I-narrator, is the last of a group of knights bent on such a mission. We know that all of his comrades have failed in their confrontations with the Tower, but we are never told of the nature, especially in a physically meaningful sense, of the failure. We however learn of some typical cases of the "failure" of his comrades on a moral plane, even though, as scenes recurring in the narrator's mind, they are related in a laconic, elliptic manner, as a stanza on a Giles well illustrates:

> Giles then, the soul of honour—there he stands
> Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
> What honest man should dare (he said) he durst.
> Good—but the scene shifts—faugh! What hangman hands
> Pin to his breast a parchment? His own band
> Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst! (xvii)

Furthermore, the cliff-hanger last stanza, which depicts Roland reaching his destination with his failed friends as the spectators of his final act, enhances the ambiguity of the poem:

> There they stood, ranged along the hill-side, meet
> For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
> I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
> Dauntless the slung-horn to my lips I set,
> And blew, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came."

Parallel to such thematic ambiguity are the irrationalism and grotesquerie that characterize Roland and his journey experiences. The poem opens with an eerie happening. Roland asks the way from a "hoary cripple." Unaccountably, he knows that his advisor is a liar who would gleefully laugh a "skull-like" laugh at the expense of the victim of his malicious deception. Unaccountably, Roland follows his direction, anyway. What follows is even more unaccountable:

> . . . no sooner was I fairly found
> Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
> Than, pausing to throw backward a last view
> O'er the safe road, 'twas gone; gray plain all around:

> Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
> I might go on; naught else remained to do. (ix)

Here we sense a total defiance of physical possibility. As a whole the poem is rife with instances of uncannily abrupt spatial displacements, grotesque sights resonant with moral repugnance, and an ever-present ambivalence of threat, which, in combination, contribute to a dream-like quality.

Of the genesis of the poem, Browning said: "Childe Roland came upon me as a kind of dream. I had to write it, then and there, and I finished it the same day, I believe."[6] If, as Browning said, the poem came to him "as a kind of dream," it does manifest a dream-like quality, and as such it inevitably provokes some desire to react to it in the way one would react to a dream. Still, it remains a fact that despite its affinity to a dream, no critic as I know takes it literally as a dream, mainly because it is not surrounded by realistic environs (such as being part of a realistic novel or narrative poem), neither is it triggered, as dreams need to be, by realistic immediate events or objects. We can, of course, imagine a reader who out of naiveness or perversity decides to read it as a dream. As a matter of fact there is no way to legislate against such a way of reading or any way of reading chosen by an individual reader. However, we can at least point out that by so doing one in effect sees it as no more than a mass of incoherences which can never be brought by interpretive operation to yield some intelligible significance. To say that the poem is literally jibberish and nothing more is to deny its status as a literary work. A point we have tried to establish throughout is that a dream becomes intelligible only when it is scrutinized through the interactions of its context, content, and form. A pure transcription of the interiority of a dream unattached to a context is by definition unintelligible. In real life one can hardly imagine a report of a dream, save perhaps that occasionally made on a psychoanalyst's couch, to be a pure, untampered transcription. Typically when one reports on a dream, he self-consciously makes an effort to render it intelligibe, either by providing the context external to the dream or by subtly turning the context into constraints regulating the selection and organization of the details in the interiority of the dream (in this latter case what is probably ostensibly palmed off as a pure transcription is actually an edited version). In a sense a dreamer reporting on a dream is a writer of a realistic dream, of uncertain literary merits of course. Now when we come to think of a (hypothetically) pure, unedited transcription, a fundamental difference between a real dream and a fictional dream immediately forces itself on our attention. In a real-life dream its unattached context (Who was the dreamer? What were the circumstances for the dream?) can theoretically be retrieved. An "uncontexted" fictional dream, unfortunately, has to remain so and hence unintelligible.

IV.

Commenting on "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," Betty S. Flowers remarks:

> Browning's imagery in this poem is very similar to that of dreams. In dreams,

> imagery is precise, and the feeling surrounding the image is strong, although not always reasonable; but the meaning of the dream is not immediately clear. In dreams and in poems such as "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," there is a sense that a meaning is suggested, and that it is something other than that which arises directly from the situation or images explicitly described.[7]

Implicit in Flowers's remark is a set of beliefs about what dreams are like. Likewise, when we say that a fictional dream owes its realism to the plausibility governing the interactions between the context, content, and form of the dream, we imply a set of beliefs about dreams underpinning the concept of plausibility. But exactly what are those beliefs and how do they affect us in our response to literary presentations of dreams?

There are of course a wide range of beliefs about dreams, some being more widely shared than others. For example, it is believed that physical stimuli applied to the sleeper (cold, heat, scratching, etc.) can cause certain types of dreams. So can ailments (one thinks of Proust's description of a throbbing toothache conducive to the dream of repetitious yet futile efforts to rescue a drowning little girl), or anxiety, or excitement, or significant events, and so on. It is believed that dreams provide the key to the subconscious or unconscious. It is believed, at least in some cultures or with some people, that dreams can be prophetic or that in dreams one can have contacts with the supernatural. It is also believed that dreams tend to be incoherent and ambiguous, and that the actual time passed in dreaming is incomparably shorter than the felt passage of time in dreams. One acquires these and other beliefs about dreams through his first-hand experiences or through what he has heard said or read about dreams, and what has been said or written ranges from commonsense to highly intellectualized statements.

We tend to view some of the beliefs as reflective of natural attitudes while the others as culturally given, but as a matter of fact it is of course difficult to tell one from the other. Take our possible responses to Henri Bergson's observations on dreams for instance. About the logic of dreams, which is actually the relaxation of the rules of reasoning, Bergson remarks: "Not infrequently do we notice in dreams a particular *crescendo,* a weird effect that grows more pronounced as we proceed. The first concession extorted from reason introduces a second; and this one, another of a more serious nature; and so on till the crowning absurdity is reached."[8] He has provided illustrations for the absurdity. For example, a sleeper perceiving a gust blowing down the chimney may, depending on his state of mind at the time, choose to interpret it as the howl of a beast or melodious music, and cause it to appear as such in his dream. Similarly, he may choose to cause the sounds of people talking around him to become empty of meaning before he goes on to distort them and recombine them in a haphazard way to form surprising new meanings. Furthermore, he may feel that he is himself and also not himself: he can be simultaneously an actor and an observer, with the full awareness of the separateness of this other "he." Encountering observations such as Bergson's we may think that they add very little to what we "intuitively" know about dreams. However, we must not forget that how we describe dreams (that is pretty much the same as what we know about dreams) is often an unconscious internalization of how other people (such as Bergson) describe

them.

One clear instance of such internalization is manifested by the fact that in this post-Freudian age of ours we are so prompt, and unself-conscious, in describing dreams in Freudian terms. In "Creative Writers and Day-dreaming," Sigmund Freud observes:

> If the meaning of our dreams usually remains obscure to us it is because of the circumstance that at night there . . . arise in us wishes of which we are ashamed; these we must conceal from ourselves, and they have consequently been repressed, pushed into the unconscious. Repressed wishes of this sort and their derivatives are only allowed to come to expression in a very distorted form. When scientific work had succeeded in elucidating this factor of *dream-distortion,* it was no longer difficult to recognize that night-dreams are wish-fulfilments in just the same way as day-dreams—the fantasies which we all know so well.[9]

Mainly through the popularizers of Freud, such Freudian catch words as "wish fulfilment," "censor," "dream distortion," "repression," and "unconscious" have become part of our language, and their embodied ideas have constituted part of our views on, for example, dreams. Thus, we find it very natural to talk about Miao-yu's dream in Freudian terms despite the fact that it is from a pre-Freudian, non-Western novel. If naming is seeing, that we have Freudian terms at our disposal facilitates our grasp of the meaning of the dream, indeed.

If the fictional dreams which we have analyzed measure up in many ways to our beliefs of what dreams are like (that is, they are *realistic*), can we therefore argue that they *represent* real dreams? To make our question more tenable, let's confine our version of reality to Freudian reality and use Miao-yu's dream as a test case. Our reformulated question is: Will Miao-yu's dream be accepted by a Freudian as a probable dream? Our hypothetical Freudian would very likely find the realism in the dream no more than fictional illusionism, if only because, ironically, the meaning of the dream (that is, its Freudian import) is overly intelligible. A Freudian typically posits labrynthine detours between a "text" (a neurotic behavior, a fantasy, a dream, etc.) and its generating impetus (hidden desire, fear, guilt, etc.). A psychoanalytical operation on a dream, an odd behavior, or a literary text (it really does not make much difference) invariably produces very surprising results which often require a layman's noble effort to hold his skepticism in abeyance. Freud's analysis of the fantastic tale "The Sand-Man" by E. T. A. Hoffmann is illuminating. Here Freud is performing a double task of analyzing a literary work and a "patient" (the protagonist of the work, Nathaniel, is analyzed by Freud as if he were a flesh-and-blood person).

Freud first of all identifies the theme of the story as "something which gives its name to the story, and which is always reintroduced at the critical moment: it is the theme of the 'Sand Man' who tears out children's eyes."[10] He contends that the story's uncanniness is derived from its elaboration on Nathaniel's fear of going blind. Fear of going blind, he points out, is a fear of castration—the deepest of male fears—in disguise: "A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that a morbid anxiety connected with the eyes and with going blind is often enough a substitute for the dread of castration" ("The Uncanny," p. 137). But since going blind is just

as much, and as naturally, to be dreaded as castration, is it not unnecessarily complicated to posit such a substitution theory? Anticipating such a view Freud argues: "But this view does not account adequately for the substitutive relation between the eye and the male member which is seen to exist in dreams and myths and phantasies; nor can it dispel the impression one gains that it is the threat of being castrated in special which excites a peculiarly violent and obscure emotion, and that this emotion is what first gives the idea of losing other organs its intense colouring" ("The Uncanny," pp. 137-38).

Notably, Miao-yü's drive for wish fulfilment is, so to speak, present in the text, but Nathaniel's fear of castration has to be put into the text from outside with the aid of a kind of symbolic dictionary ("fear of going blind"="fear of castration"). Since Nathaniel is treated for all practical purposes as if he were a real-world person, Freud's analysis of "The Sand-Man" demonstrates a basic difference between a real-world fantasy and, by extension, a real-world dream and a realistic fictional dream. While both involve distortion mechanisms, in the former case the distortion mechanisms need to be brought to light through psychoanalytical expertise, but in the latter case the distortion mechanisms are part of the literary presentation. Fictional dreams are doing what literature is supposed to be doing all along, namely the imposition of order or structures of intelligibility on the chaotic flux of life at the risk of oversimplification, incompleteness, or sheer incorrectness.

In "Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth remarks:

> The remortest discoveries of the chemist, the botanist, or mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things should be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the being thus produced, as a clear and genuine inmate of the household of men.[11]

One's sense of reality is said to be the sum-total of the available propositions made about the world. New scientific or intellectual articulations can enter into this reserve of propositions, in original or edited form, to form a modified sense of reality. Literary realism (whether from the perspective of the work or the reader) is of necessity contingent upon such a fluid perception of reality. Thus in our age characterized by the inundation of popularized psychology, we may have been made more alert than their contemporary readers about the psychological realism of the dreams in those novels from an earlier age—even if such realism does not really with accuracy reflect a reality to be endorsed by, say, Freudian, or Jungian, or Skinnerian psychology. If the realism of fictional dreams does not fit comfortably into doctrinaire interpretations of reality, it need not cause too much dismay. In fact, Nelson Goodman, for one, doubts the validity of the very idea of "*the* reality":

> For there is, I maintain, no such thing as the real world, no unique, ready-made,

> absolute reality apart from and independent of all versions and visions. Rather, there are many right world-versions, some of them irreconcilable with others; and thus there are many worlds if any. A version is not so much made right by a world as a world is made by a right version. Obviously rightness has therefore to be determined otherwise than by matching a version with a world.[12]

Our concept of what dreams really are is ultimately built upon diverse belief systems about dreams. What goes into the making of those belief systems includes our first-hand experiences and what has been propounded about dreams (in literature and in intellectual speculations). The belief systems constitute the constraints for the production of realistic fictional dreams, and once fictional dreams are accepted as realistic, the belief systems further function as the interpretive framework for bringing out the meanings of the dreams. As belief systems do not form into one overall unified system, there exist latitudes for individual decisions on what realistic fictional dreams should be. This explains why fictional dreams which are equally accepted as realistic can differ so remarkably from one another in their perceived realism. The following dream episode from Dickens's *Hard Times* seems realistic insofar as it has met the general requirements for realistic fictional dreams, but the realistic effects it conveys are very different from those in Miao-yu's dream or Lockwood's dreams, if only because such effects depend more on the manipulation of the language itself.

In this episode the long-suffering Stephen Blackpool, a weaver, has been driven to despair. His estranged wife, a tramp and an alcoholic derelict, has just returned home from her habitual wanderings to torture him. He has just been told by his superior Bounderby to give up any hope of ever succeeding in securing a divorce; consequently his hope of getting united with his true love, Rachel, is dashed. His nightmare occurs shortly after his talk with Bounderby.

In the dream he finds himself in the church being married. The girl is someone he loves, "but she was not Rachel, and that surprised him"[13]—there is obvious repression even in the dream. True to a dream, he recognizes among the witnesses "some whom he knew to be living, and many he knew to be dead." What follows is something possible only in dreams (and in language) for it defies translation into a physical fact: "[A tremendous light] broke from one line in the table of commandments at the altar, and illuminated the building with the words. They were sounded through the church, too, as if there were voices in the fiery letters." Then, with dreamy abruptness, everything changes, and he finds himself alone with the clergyman. Then with scarcely any sign of transition, he is faced with a crowd "so vast, that if all the people in the world could have been brought together, they could not have looked ... more numerous"; what is more, he knows they all abhor him. All of a sudden, he finds himself standing under his loom. He then experiences a form of reverse sequentiality: "looking up at the shape the loom took, and hearing the burial service distinctly read, he knew that he was there to suffer death"; and all of a sudden "he was gone." Then unaccountably he is back to his usual life, yet condemned never to set his eye on Rachel or hear her voice. His existence has a mysterious curse on it: "Wandering to and fro, unceasingly, without hope, and in search of he knew not what (he only knew that he was doomed to seek it), he was the subject of a nameless, horrible dread, a mortal fear of one particular shape which everything took." The

only purpose of his life becomes a futile effort to hide the shape (what the shape is is deliberately kept vague within the dream proper). At this point Stephen begins to wake up. Still in a state of half-sleep, half-waking, he senses that his wife, drunken as usual, is reaching her arm out for "the shape" (it turns out to be a poison bottle he has kept). She obviously takes it to be a liquor bottle and is ready to drink from it. In his semiconsciousness Stephen is torn between a moral urge to stop her and an equally strong desire to take no action.

In many ways this dream episode is profoundly realistic. The context for the dream is plausible. The shape of the dream, including the kind of details, the way they appear and disappear, their sequentiality, the dreamer as his own observer, etc., is vividly dream-like. Furthermore, and here the manipulation of the language is most prominent, the deliberate vagueness in many of the descriptions together with indefinite references (fear, search, "the shape") effectively establishes a pervading sense of anxiety and guilt. Upon closer scrutiny, we detect a peculiarity in the realism of this dream: thematically it is very coherent and clear; the sense of discontinuity mainly resides on the rhetorical level (for instance, the identity of "the shape" is withheld from the reader throughout the dream proper and hence a sense of ambiguity and confusion is created, but such a sense is not felt by Stephen during the dream—neither by the reader looking back—since he presumably knows what it is all along). In short, despite its formally dreamy quality, the episode is made to be so centrally unified in its meaning that, albeit still a realistic dream, it shows too much of an artist's hand at work.

On *vraisemblance* (roughly, realism), Tzvetan Todorov observes: "One can speak of the *vraisemblance* of a work in so far as it attempts to make us believe that it conforms to reality and not to its own laws. In other words, the *vraisemblance* is the mask which conceals the text's own laws and which we are supposed to take for a relation with reality."[14] Thus instead of concerning ourselves with the question of whether Stephen's dream reflects something in the real world, we can say that Dickens has established his own laws (or in Jonathan Culler's terminology, network of obsessions[15]) by means of which a realisic dream has come into being. Stephen's dream and, for that matter, Lockwood's dreams or Miao-yu's dream, may appear improbable as dreams if taken out of their contexts, but in their semi-autonomous fictional universes they are convincingly realistic as dreams.

V

A fictional dream attains its desired realistic effects through the manipulation of literary conventions, including the language itself, as our analysis of Stephen's dream has tried to demonstrate. But this does not therefore imply that we can exclude reality from our consideration. To be sure, a fictional dream does not *represent* a real-world dream, if by representing we mean the creation of a simulacrum in the sense that a simulacrum of volcanic activities is created in the laboratory. However, to be realistic it has to fit the reader's beliefs about what real dreams are like.

In "The Heroics of Realism," Geoffrey Hartman deplores the prosaic tendency of modern realistic fiction: "When empathy becomes conventional, and the new or

alien loses its aureole of sacred danger, it is increasingly difficult to admit transcendent personality or real difference. But art retains its power of making room for the strange, the different, and even the divine. It is the familiar world that must now be saved—from familiarity."[16] Generally speaking, in order to be "illusionistic," realistic fiction has to adjust to the beliefs of its reader. But, perfect illusionism, that is, the complete convergence of fictional presentations and the reader's beliefs about reality, has the undesirable effect of banality: it "makes the information value of artistic representations equal zero."[17]

To cure banality or familiarity, Hartman counsels the use of impersonal narration while Menachem Brinker suggests, broadly, "deviations from consistent illusionism."[18] In a realistic fictional dream, the events come and go in accordance with the logic of dreams. They typically speak for themselves without elucidating comments from the narrator-dreamer. The narrator-dreamer may indeed express his thoughts in the process of his dreaming, but such thoughts are also the products of the mechanisms of dreams and as such they contribute to the overall pattern of absurdity. Thus a realistic fictional dream is by nature impersonal in its mode of narration, with distancing effects. Further, a realistic fictional dream invariably constitutes a deviation from regular realistic fiction. Paradoxically, the more it strives after illusionism, the greater it gains in its defamiliarizing effects, for a "real" dream is of necissity rife with distortions.

Notes

[1]"The Epiphanic Mode in Wordsworth and Modern Literature," *New Literary History*, 14, No. 2 (1983), 341.

[2]For the Chinese text of the 120-chapter novel, I have used Ts'ao Hsueh-ch'in and Kao E, *Hung lou meng* (Taipei: Li-jen, 1983), 3 vols.

[3]Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. William Sale, Jr. (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 62.

[4]All quotes throughout this paragraph are from *Wuthering Heights*, pp. 28-29.

[5]In Ian Jack, ed., *Browning: Poetical Works*, 1833-1864 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 614-21.

[6]Lilian Whiting, *The Brownings: Their Life and Art* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1911), p. 261.

[7]Betty S. Flowers, *Browning and the Modern Tradition* (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 69.

[8]"Laughter," in *Modern Continental Literary Criticism*, ed. O. B. Hardison, Jr. (New York: Appleton, 1962), p. 202.

[9]In Hardison, p. 245.

[10]"The Uncanny" in Sigmund Freud, *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, ed. Benjamin Nelson (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 133.

[11]In *English Literary Criticism: Romantic and Victorian*, ed. Daniel G. Hoffman and Samuel Hynes (New York: Appleton, 1963), p. 26.

[12]"Realism, Relativism, and Reality," *New Literary History*, 14, No. 2 (1983), 269.

[13]*Hard Times* (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 65. Subsequent quotes throughout this paragrph are from *Hard Times*, pp. 65-66.

[14]Quoted in Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), p. 139.

[15]Culler, p. 146.

[16]In *Beyond Formalism* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), p. 70.

[17]Menachem Brinker, "Verisimilitude, Conventions, and Beliefs," *New Literary History*, 14, No. 2 (1983), 265.

[18]Brinker, p. 265.