

Dream or Myth? The two forms and the two fates of the imaginary

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Abstract

The author distinguishes between two imaginary groups. The first is an imaginary explorer, organized by the primary processes of representation of the unconscious: the dream. The second is an imaginary explanation, featuring a ghostly background and whose goal is to create a self-representation of common and shared by the group: the myth. Dream and myth work at their own level through the same material of unconscious processes. The myth acts through tertiary processes, which create the connection between the primary and the secondary, while the dream is governed by primary processes.

The following are then developed: describe the function mythopoeic into groups (Kaës R., 1976).

The myth occurs after a disaster such as the representation of repair of group identity. The creation and expression of the myth of thought generate content from a source of anguish and of non-thought. They therefore worth re-establishment of the origin, the order of the world and its purpose.

The myth acts as a "replacement" of 'dreaming. It is designed as a meta-interpretation of the dream. The myth acts as a significant predisposition used by the preconscious. E 'in this light that we can better discern the difference between the dream-work and the work of myth, dream time and the time of myth.

Keywords: myth, dream, imaginary

As an introduction, a few notes as regards the term myth might be useful. The word, which derives from the Greek *mithos*, was originally and essentially a sequence of words having a meaning; a discourse, a public discourse; the content of those words, thought. During the Homeric epic, due to a process of secondary specialization, it assumed the value of a fiction, of an invented story, of an imaginary tale, fable or allegory. The myth is opposed to reality (reality intended as "precipice on the imaginary"). However, it is at the same time a real discourse. In the late 19th century, the myth was the expression of an idealized representation of a past condition of humanity, and its origin. In the 20th century, it was attributed a decisive role in the representations of a community (Levi Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*), or an individual (Lacan, *Le mythe individuel du névrosé*).

When considering the relationship between dream and myth, our research must be limited to the second acceptation of the term; there are two forms of the imaginary. There are, however, also two modalities of representing a sense to be deciphered; a primordial sense related to the past of the psyche and mankind's past. This equation was the basis of the theories of Freud, Abraham and Rank. The affinities between dream and myth are immediately established, and the accent placed on their similarities rather than their differences.

The theme I intend to develop here is the following; dream and myth are made up of the same basic psychic material, organized however according to different logic and function. Dream and myth are two discourses having both an essential and a mysterious sense. They are two forms of the imaginary, the exploratory imaginary of that which is unknown (the dream) and the imaginary which explains it -- the explicit imaginary (the myth). The dream is the imaginary of that which is intimate, while the myth is the imaginary of that which is public, collective, social. In this context, it would be useful to attempt to comprehend in what way dream and myth have different fates and articulate their relationships in the group, an entity methodologically organized to grasp processes of transition and transformations; between that which is intimate, that which is shared and public.

Consequently, I will demonstrate the similarities between dream and myth; however, also and above all, pointing out the oppositions between them. In order to do this, I will make a brief reference to the fundamental psychoanalytic theses (of Freud, O. Rank and K. Abraham), and subsequently avail myself of clinical experience in individual treatment and groups.

Dream and Myth

This continuity (logical connection) is illustrated by Freud's statement: "fables and myths are the dreams of the infancy of humanity".

Dreams and Myth in Freudian Thought

Although the dream, according to Freud was the main way of access to the unconscious, the myth also facilitates its exploration. This can occur in three ways:

1st. Referring back to the myth (but also to legend and fable), Freud invented the Oedipus Complex, narcissism, the concept of "troubling strangeness", the three faces of woman... and it was precisely in his inventing a myth that he revealed, in Totem and Taboo, the part he repressed of the Oedipus Complex. This mythical-poetical use of the myth illustrates the transformation of the relationships between phantasm, myth and theory by successive upsets, and serves Freud as method.

2nd. The myth, like legend and fable, is made up of psychic material; precisely the stuff of the most primitive parts of the psyche: "from the fantasies of the individual neurotic departs a broad path leading to the imaginary creations of the mad and peoples as they appear in myth, legend and popular legend" (1925, G.W., XIV, 95; tr. fr. 86).

3rd. Myths have reciprocal relationships with infantile sexuality: "the knowledge of theories of infantile sexuality, of the forms they take in the thoughts of the child, can be interesting from many points of view and in a surprising way also for the understanding of myths and fables" (1908, G.W., VII, 173; tr. fr. 16). In fact, myth and tales are "the echoes of the question-enigma: where do babies come from?". They constitute a mistaken response which children do not believe.

4th. The relationships between dream and myth are co-substantial. Freud approached this essential point at various times; for example, in *L'intérêt de la psychanalyse* (1913, G.W., VIII, 414-416, tr. fr. 207-209) (The Claims of Psychoanalysis to

Scientific Interest): "The fact of transposing the psychoanalytical concept acquired through dream to the products of the popular imagination, such as myth and legend, would seem possible. The necessity of an interpretation of these creations has existed for some time. One suspects that they have a "secret meaning", one is prepared for the modifications and transformations which conceal this meaning".

Freud ultimately considered these relationships from two points of view: the myth renders the dream -- as well as the fable, the legend and the poetic work -- objective. The poet awakens in his audience the "impulses coming from a childhood which has become prehistoric" (1900, G.W., II-III, 252; tr. fr. 215). The dream clarifies the myth. In the manifest content of dreams, often images and situations are found once more which recall certain themes common to myth, fable and legend: "the interpretation of these dreams makes it possible for us to rediscover the primitive foundation of these themes without allowing us to forget the modification which the initial meaning of this material has undergone over the centuries" (1932, G.-W., XV, 24-26 tr. fr.33-36). Thanks to the work of interpretation, the latent content reveals: "the prime material which can, often enough, be qualified as sexual" (ibid.) The myth can be utilized as a memory-screen, and the same goes for the fable, as Freud demonstrated in his analysis of Rumpelstilzchen's dream (1913) and that of the Wolfman, L'homme aux loups (1918, G.W., XII, 56-78; tr. fr. 342-358) (The Wolf Man).

Freud sustains, subsequently, that the symbolism of the dream "leads beyond the dominion of the dream, into that of the popular imagination; we can observe in it the symbol which is at the basis of the fable, the myths and legends, sense of humour and folklore. In it we will discover the close relationships between the dream and these different products (...) the symbol provides the work of the dream with the material to be condensed, shifted, dramatized" (1901, G.W., I-III, 699; tr, fr. 169). On the other hand, the symbols of the dream do not "truly belong to the dreamer, and do not characterize only the work which is done during the course of the dreams. We already know that myths and fables, proverbs and popular songs, current language and poetic imagination, all utilize the same symbolism" (1916, G. W., XI, 168; tr. fr.151). That is why fable, myth and folklore are given the meaning of dream symbols (1916, Ibid.). In addition: "...It is not the analysis which discovered symbolism, as it had been long known in other spheres (folklore, legend and myth) where it had an even greater role than in the "language of dreams" (1925, op.cit., 86).

In 1911, Freud proposed a reformulation of the theory of dreams as it had been expounded in his Traumdeutung. His project was to connect dream, on the one hand, to poetry, myth and folklore on the other. Also in 1911, in the context of important and truly innovative emulation in art, Freud founded the journal, Imago, in which numerous articles made reference to mythological themes. Included among these were those of O. Rank and K. Abraham.

O. Rank and the Myth of the Birth of the Hero

Rank provided the first attempt at a psychoanalytical interpretation of the myths, affirming that psychic reality is an organizer of the tale of the dream and the myth. In

his *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, written in 1909, at Freud's request, he provides original perspectives as regards the methodological approach and the problem of the formation and function of myths. At odds with the naturalist analysis of mythology, Rank based his study on the similarity between dream and myth and on the concept, advanced by Freud, of the family romance of neurotics.

Rank above all established the universality of the myth of the hero, after which he expounded his central hypothesis; i.e., he investigates the role of the unconscious psychosexual life in the formation of myths. After examining eighteen myths coming from various cultures, he points out the recurrent themes in order to reveal the structure of what he called the legend-type of the hero. The general scheme of his interpretation derives from the clarifying perspective provided by typical dreams, when the different elements of the myths are analyzed (...). He conducts his analysis as that of a dream; the myth is therefore the satisfying of an unconscious desire and is constructed according to the same processes as the dream: displacement, condensation, making imaginable, symbolization. Rank concludes that "the same symbolic expression dominates both the language of the dream and that of the myth" (Ibid., p. 101).

The concept of family romance in neurosis allowed Rank to specify how, in the imagination of daydreams in pre-puberty, as in mythical tales, both the desire to discard little esteemed parents and replacing them with more noble and prestigious ones are represented, as well as the requests as regards knowledge of the sexual processes, procreation, birth and the maternal body. This concordance leads Rank to make an analogy between the Ego of the child and that of the hero. He points out that, in literature, the hero represents the poet himself -- an idea which Freud would take up once more at the end of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. The work concludes with two important observations: the first concerning the genesis and function of the myth in social life, as well as for the individual and collective identifying processes; the second concerning the pathological role of the hero and the relationships between myth and filiation delirium.

Dream and Myth in K. Abraham

In 1909, the year in which Rank published *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, Abraham published *Rêve et mythe. Contribution à l'étude de la psychologie collective* (Dream and Myth. A Contribution to the Study of Community Psychology). His aim is one of an applied psychoanalysis, as he demonstrates that the theories of Freud apply broadly to the psychology of the myth, and he compares the myth to the phenomena of individual psychology -- in particular the dream, pointing out its points of convergence with myth. The main ideas are the following: general, shared unconscious desires appear also in the myths (p. 171). The contents, and in particular sexual symbolism, are common to certain dreams and certain myths (the Oedipal desire and the myth of Oedipus). The myths, like dreams, conceal a latent content behind the manifest one: the interpretation of this is necessary (p. 173) since society does not understand the latent content of its myths (p. 187).

Dream and myth spring from the unconscious repression of unacceptable thoughts, and both derive from the prehistoric times of the subject and mankind. This is the origin of the conclusion taken up once more by Freud: in the myths, as in fable and legend, the imagination of a people is expressed.

Conditions and consequences of the similarity between Dream and Myth

Considering the essential points of the analysis of Freud, Rank and Abraham, it becomes clear that they form the matrix of a single affirmation: they all interpret the myth through the dream; they all point out the similarity and the interplay between dream and myth. This affirmation is above all a matter of principle for Freud, and it remains such for Abraham and Rank as well. And yet, it would be submitted to verification by comparative analysis of the different versions of the myths, becoming progressively fertile hypothesis. G. Devereux shares this current of thought when he writes: "the myth is effective only because it was previously dreamed".

The thesis of the similarity and the inter-penetration of dream and myth is related to the identity of psychic contents and functions. However this thesis goes further, supposing common and shared oniric spaces, and a transformation device of the dream into myth. Above all, the classical positions do not take into consideration the differences in the processes of construction between the dream and the myth, and consequently the structural and functional divergences. For lack of clinical mechanism (setting), however, these differences are rarely grasped and consequently remain theoretical.

Among the rare differences noted by Abraham, the following is particularly interesting: the course dramatizes then the fact that the myth appears as epic. This last affirmation, which returns to our opening statement on the semantic statute of the myth, makes manifest the debate between dream and myth. The myth is a production staged in our interior theatre, in which the primary processes and visual representations predominate. These representations can be accompanied by sensations of kinaesthesia, sentiments, affects, and manifest desires. The myth is recounting, word, certainly a secondary elaboration of the dream: however the dream of what dreamer?

Dream or myth

At this point, I should like to propose another perspective placing the dream in opposition to the myth. This opposition will be constructed from a clinical treatment and group clinics.

The Myth in the Place of the Dream: The Story of Maddalena

We shall begin with a brief description of the treatment of Maddalena, who constructs a utopia and a myth of origins in order not to dream. Maddalena is an adolescent of sixteen when she begins a psychoanalytic psychotherapy with me. It was her father who requested the consultation, explaining his request with the fact that Maddalena had smoked marijuana and had, since childhood, not been well. Maddalena's story is painful: conceived less than a year after the sudden and

premature death of her parents' first child, she is born prematurely at seven months, in conditions particularly difficult for both her and her mother whose father had just recently died. The newborn infant remains in hospital for some time, to treat respiratory problems. An intelligent child, but sickly, she is unsociable and often in conflict with her mother. Shortly after the birth of a second, male child, when Maddalena is four, her parents separate. The father is given custody of Maddalena. Her relationship with him is reasonably good. However, Maddalena suffers from the separation from her brother and from her very tense relationship with her mother. At puberty, phases of depression alternate with periods of bulimia and anorexia.

At the time of our encounter, what worries Maddalena is her intimate functioning: every now and then her menstruation is late, and she is never sure whether to be happy about this or sorry; everything is confused. Sexuality frightens her; bodily contact, contact with flesh, all this signifies catastrophe for her. She becomes anxious at the mere idea of an encounter which could set off love or even tenderness -- which could pulverize her. She feels persecuted by small animals, especially rodents, and complains of no longer having dreams.

During one session, Maddalena asks me to lend her the blanket which was folded on the chair near the couch: I agree. The following night, Maddalena has a dream, the first one she remembered in years: she was lost in a snowstorm, on a mountain slope. Not far away, everything was calm, white and very cold; glacial. Someone was coming out of a tent and bringing her an overcoat and a cup of milk. Maddalena accepts this dream with the enthusiasm of a little girl. I tell her that it is the dream she gives me in exchange for the blanket, but the dream is hers. She has asked for-found-created a concave, white, maternal screen, which allowed her to once more dream.

Subsequently, she would not dream again for some time. However, at the following session, Maddalena brings me something else: the account of a utopia which she had imagined four years earlier, when she was twelve. It concerned a hospital situated on an island; under close surveillance, hygienic and orderly. The story which she would tell, would take up many sessions and constitute a powerful motor for her psychotherapy. I shall not go into the content of the utopia here, but only point out that the construction of a utopia, which contained the myth of origins had come in place of the dream. The utopia and myth functioned as powerful making secondary of a phantasm: their function was to conceal the deep, intimate dream, while exploiting a day dream which established itself once and for all, in the form and in the hyper-controlled content of the utopia. From this point of view, the myth (or the utopia) is a construction-screen against the dream. The myth is a secondary, defensive elaboration against the contents of the dream; a residue of the dream which fulfills all dreams. Maddalena's treatment illustrates the conditions in which the dream appears in place of the myth, allowing us to understand, at least partially, what is codified by the myth and what is imagined by the dream.

Dreams and Myths in group

What are the relationships between dream and myth in group clinics? Whatever the relationships between dream and myth, it is a question of the same psychic material:

the substance of the group imaginary. The notion of the group imaginary was introduced by D. Anzieu (1964) apropos of the thesis of the group/dream analogy. This notion was taken up once more in the research he and I conducted together, in which it took different forms and many meanings.

1. The point of departure was provided by Pontalis, when he stated that the group is the object of imaginary representations (images, fantasies, daydreams).

2. Successively, Anzieu sustained that the group is, as the dream, the imaginary satisfaction of desires and unconscious threats: from the point of view of psychic dynamic, the group is a dream; that is, a debate with a subjected phantasy. The group is a way of realizing shared desires (including the illusion of the shared desire). If a group is "like a dream", it is also a common oneiric space and the imaginary material of all its formations.

3. I considered the group as a device of form of psychic reality within the group in order to make of it a psychic reality of the group. A specific psychic apparatus performs this process of connection, of combination and transformation of minds: it constructs the psychic reality of the group. The group imaginary is a dimension of the group psychic apparatus; it produces the figuration-figures and the unconscious discourses of the group on its origins, on its objectives and on that which it represents for its members. I have discerned four forms of group imaginary: the common and shared oneiric space, place of the second umbilicus of the dream, the myth, utopia and ideology. The last three of these forms, apart from their specific quality, are included in the imaginary (in the real Lacanian meaning) to the extent to which they ensure a unifying function under the authority of the formations of the ideal.

4. Missenard worked on the imaginary identifications in groups, and demonstrated that the group forms as an imaginary object when its participants, identifying themselves with the ideal object of the other in order to escape the confusion of the origins, construct the group as unified so that it responds to their desire, assuring the continuity of their Ego. The abandonment of the imaginary function of the group, or rather, the unification through the narcissistic relationship of the subjects with a common ideal – gives the individual access to his own personal desires.

5. Clinical group psychoanalysis leads me to believe that the relationship of opposition between the imaginary way of the dream and the imaginary way of the myth has an equivalent in the group: either one dreams, or else one creates a myth (or a utopia). In a group which I conducted almost forty years ago with Anzieu -- an analysis of which we published --, an egalitarian ideology and the paradisiacal myth of the lost paradise developed. My interpretation is that this ideology and this myth require an adhesion based on belief to an Ideal and to the omnipotence of the Idea, to an idealized origin, capable of unifying the group. In this group, there was no recounting of the dream. Everything progressed as though dreaming represented a risk of excessive exposition of one's intimacy and a transgression of common ideals. During this phase, what prevailed were the imaginary identifications and the isomorphous, narcissistic pole of the group psychic apparatus.

Various other clinical cases led me to believe that when myths and utopias are formed in the groups, there is no recounting of dreams. This does not imply that the participants do not dream, but rather, we do not have access to the dreams. We can only presume that oneiric material corresponds to collective, social imperatives which ensure the unity of the group.

Some Notes on the Function of the Myth in Groups

1st. The myth is a secondary elaboration of the "dream of mankind". I will admit that the myth contains and elaborates the great dreams of humanity: however the statute of the dream is here that of the gratification of repressed desire and not that of an oneiric experience. The myth deals, at its own level and with its own processes, with the same material as the dream. The unconscious substance of the myth is the primal fantasy.

2nd . The myth arrives after a catastrophe, as a self-representation, a determining factor for resolving and restoring the group identity. This confirms the idea of C. Levi Strauss. The myth also establishes the inclusion-exclusion limits of the group and sustains the sentiment of belonging to a whole. The invention and recounting of the myth treat a perturbing excitation, source of anxiety and an incapacity to think -- thus, we could say the myth has a refounding value as far as the origins, the order of the world and its purposes are concerned.

3rd. The myth interprets the dream. The myth as elaboration of the dream, makes it possible for it to function as a meta-interpretative system of the dream. This system is utilized as a device of the oneiric Ego in culture. The myth functions in the sphere of the tertiary processes, intended as a link between primary and secondary processes (Green). But the myth functions also, and above all, in the sense that Dodds, in his book, *Greeks and the Irrational*, gave to this process, to describe (as in the Greeks) the myth is a principle of interpretation of dreams.

4th. The myth triggers off the oneiric activity. The recounting of the myth triggers off oneiric activity. D. Anzieu and I used this function often; as when, faced with the paralysis of the associative processes of the big group, he recounted a myth (or a fable), activating thus the associations, the dream states and nocturnal dreams which could be supported by these representations.

5th. The myth, effort of culture (Kulturarbeit), functions as a significant predisposition which can be utilized by the pre-conscious. It is from this point of view that we are best aided in recognizing the differences between the working of the dream and the working of the myth, between the time of the dream and the time of the myth. I have called this the mythopoetic function in the groups.

In conclusion, two modalities of group imaginary can be distinguished. The first is an exploratory imaginary, organized by the primary processes of the unknown representation: it is the dream, but can appear only in certain conditions. The second is an explanatory imaginary which makes the phantasms of the origins secondary, and the objective of which is to create a common, self-representation shared by the Ego of the members of the group: it is the myth.

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