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CREATION OF A POEM

I will attempt to illustrate the psychological processes involved in creativity through the analysis of the creation of a specific poem. The poem was written by a subject of mine and presented to me during a research interview, one interview in the course of a long series. The subject is a major American poet and, for my investigation, he has proved to be cooperative and insightful to an extraordinarily high degree. At the time the poem was written, I had worked with him for more than three years and so I knew him quite well at that point. The schedule had been two-hour weekly and biweekly appointments. At the beginning of each session, the poet presented to me the manuscript material of the work he had done since the last appointment and we then discussed this material. During the course of our meetings he had written and shown me many poems, from first draft to last, but the one I will discuss is the one I believe we learned the most about. This is partly because I had begun tape-recording our sessions some months before and therefore have an unusually detailed and accurate account of our discussion of this particular poem, and partly because we had been meeting for so long and knew and trusted each other so well that this discussion became especially deep and illuminating. But, most important of all, an event occurred during the writing of this poem which I had been waiting for all along: the subject reported a dream occurring shortly after he began the poem, a dream that offered information elucidating some of the psychological processes involved in the poem's creation.

Long before this, dream analysis had become a central focus of our discussions. The subject had, on his own, decided to keep a careful record of his dreams and a large portion of our weekly or biweekly sessions was devoted to trying to understand the relationship of his dreams with his poetry. The reasons for this mutual focusing on dreams and poetry will become clear in the discussion to follow. The point I want to emphasize now is that we had both become quite used to dream analysis in the sessions and, I believe, quite skilled in the practice of analyzing his dreams. Although our discussion of dreams had all along done much to elucidate various aspects of his poetic creation in progress, never before had he been able to describe the thoughts associated with the inception of a poem in minute detail and never before had he recorded a dream occurring shortly after beginning a poem.

Here is the final version of the poem presented to me:

In Monument Valley[1]

One spring twilight, during a lull in the war,
At Shoup's farm south of Troy, I last rode horseback.
Stillnesses were swarming inward from the evening star
Or outward from the buoyant sorrel mare

Who moved as if not displeased by the weight upon her.
Meadows received us, heady with unseen lilac.
Brief, polyphonic lives abounded everywhere.
With one accord we circled the small lake.

Yet here I sit among the crazy shapes things take.
Wasp-waisted to a fault by long abrasion,
The "Three Sisters" howl, "Hell's Gate" yawns wide.
I'm eating something in the cool Hertz car

When the shadow falls. There has come to my door
As to death's this creature stunted, cinder-eyed,
Tottering still half in trust, half in fear of man—
Dear god, a horse. I offer my apple-core

But she is past hunger, she lets it roll in the sand,

And I, I raise the window and drive on.

About the ancient bond between her kind and mine

Little more to speak of can be done.

To begin, we must agree that these lines constitute a poetic creation. I shall not here engage in a lengthy and digressive literary critique or dissertation in aesthetics, nor would it be appropriate to do so. As a scientist, my purpose is to discover the nature of the psychological processes leading to creations. The attributes of both newness and value, establishing that a particular product is a creation, are designated by consensus. Though admittedly the nature of this consensus is quite complex, it must be the scientist's guide. If I studied products that I alone judged to be creations, I would likely be choosing data that fit my preconceived theories. I believe this poem to be new and to have intrinsic aesthetic value. I trust that the reader agrees.

Now, to the creation of the poem: where did it start? When all the facts are known, we may end up deciding that the poem started in the poet's childhood. Biologists might insist it began in the poet's genes and Jungians might heatedly argue for its origin in the Collective Unconscious. I would like first to make my goals more modest than those implied by such far-sweeping theoretical positions. I shall recount some of the information the poet gave me about the specific material in the poem and some other pertinent data; I shall then go further from there.

During an extended visit to the southwestern United States, the poet and a male friend made a visit to Monument Valley, Arizona. Named from the unusual natural rock formations resembling monuments or statues of humans and animals, this valley is located in the Colorado Plateau, east of the Grand Canyon and Rainbow Bridge, a bleak, arid region. Many of the rock formations have been given names, among which are Elephant Rock and Two Sisters. Although the two friends attempted to have a picnic while viewing the monuments, the wind, as is often the case in that sandstone desert site, blew stinging sand into their faces and food. It was an unpleasant experience and, as they were about to gather up and leave, a small bedraggled dark brown horse—"tiny and shrunken," he said—appeared on the scene. The horse was alone, unsaddled, and it moved toward them. The poet's friend, who had had a good deal of experience with horses and felt strongly about them, was immediately moved. He was excited by the

horse's presence and by the strange and sudden way it appeared. The poet, preoccupied and bothered by the sand, was less immediately impressed but, partly because of the dramatic qualities of the circumstance and his friend's reaction, he thought to himself that someday he might write a poem about the experience.

Although he wrote many poems after that, he actually gave little or no further thought to the horse until, one morning approximately a week prior to one of our interview sessions, the horse came to his mind and he wrote the following lines:

> Hot pumice blew Through Monument Valley.
>
> The Elephant Rock ached The Three Sisters wailed.
>
> It was not the place for a picnic
>
> We ate in the car's shade, hunched over, at top speed
>
> Looking up, there was our guest, our ghost.
>
> At death's door
>
> Slender, tottering, liquid-eyed . . . .

Strikingly, these first few lines are virtually a simple description of the scene. Except for the poetic references to the aching of Elephant Rock and the wailing of the Three Sisters, they are a dim shadow of the final poem he wrote. Do these lines represent the beginning of the poem? In retrospect, it is hard to retrace the exact temporal sequence of thought. But when I asked the poet how he got the specific idea for the poem, he said the idea of the horse linked up to a poem written by Edwin Muir—I will quote the poet subject's description—"in which civilization has been entirely destroyed and there's a little cluster of men without any tools or skills. And suddenly they look up and the horses had come, standing around waiting to be used. And it would be the lever somehow by which things would get going again. And this feeling you have about tameable animals; I feel it particularly about animals that they don't need to be tamed, really, like dogs and cats—the funny way that they've, you feel, renounced their own kind in order to live our lives." I will return to discuss the significance of this early thought later. Now, it should

be noted that his central conception relating to the horse was: *horses live human lives.* A horse, as he later said, was not a "beast," nor was it human, but it was both human and beast together.[2]

With this thought in mind, he wrote the next version of the poem:

> Hot pumice blew through Monument Valley
>
> Causing the Devil Rock and the 3 Sisters to shriek
>
> It was hardly the time or the place for a picnic
>
> Hunched over in the car's shade we gobbled bread and butter.
>
> When we looked up there at our door our guest
>
> At death's door rather, tottering stunted
>
> Liquid-eyed: a horse, between starvation and distrust
>
> By then we had only an apple-core to offer it
>
> A tradition in China as in modern verse
>
> Gives to each age its emblematic beast.

This second version still bears little resemblance to the final completed poem. The cliché "at death's door" from the first version has been enlivened by a direct comparison to the door of the car. The offering of an apple core, an idea retained in the final poem, has introduced some possible metaphysical overtones—an allusion to apples in the Garden of Eden as contrasted with the allusion to death. This version is, however, still primarily descriptive and the language structure somewhat prosaic. But the organizing idea—some would say the inspiration—is now present: the horse will be the emblematic beast for the age.

After writing these lines, the poet stopped working on the poem for that day. In his notebook, there had been one further line after the above which he had crossed out soon after writing it. This line was: "Years have passed since that day." Thus, he had begun to think about introducing a lapse of time into the descriptive sequence, but for the moment he did not develop it. As we know from the final poem, he

eventually reversed the time sequence of this latter idea—the experience at Monument Valley is the present event and his experience of riding a horse himself is antecedent—but the notion of passage of time was clearly present at this early phase.

Having the poem in this partially germinated and dynamic phase, the poet went about his various social and professional activities for the rest of the day. He knew he was not going to be able to get back to work on the poem for a while because he was expecting a visitor and had plans to spend the next several days in a large city nearby. But, during sleep that night, he had the following two dreams (I quote his own description):

> Dream 1. J.T. [pseudonym initials of the poet's male friend] and I are on a trip or a visit. We come to a soccer field and feel like playing, even though one must pay to do so. If we start at once, we shall have two hours' worth for a few dollars apiece. But the other players delay. Next, indoors, we are shown a room with two day beds. Miriam [pseudonym for a female friend] enters and begins compulsively to make up my bed—rather, to tear it apart under the guise of making it. I keep asking her not to, and finally am angry. She falls back in a swoon, dressed only in underclothes. Other people enter slowly: J.T. in a sweatshirt and a boring old couple I am stuck with throughout the party. I have made my own bed by then.
>
> Dream 2. I've taken a position in a large comfortable house. I am to be the companion of a very old woman—at least 100. After many preliminaries I am led (by my mother among others,- but we treat each other like polite strangers) through halls and upstairs to arrive at the invalid's apartments. I expect her to be bedridden but in honor of the occasion she has risen to meet me at the door—an ancient dwarf with my grandmother's face, head smiling and enlarged, in a blue dress. My mother, with a practiced movement, takes the old creature onto her shoulders. I touch her hands. They are horribly small, a baby's—no, hands made by a plastic surgeon—the last joints missing from the fingers, and little false nails attached. We sit down to supper—she in her chair, I on the end of a chaise longue. Her teeth have little secondary fangs attached, which enable her to eat. People are watching. It is clear that we are going to be delighted with each other. In an unused electric heater is mounted a bad copy of a copy of a portrait, coarsely colored and printed, of R.L. [pseudonym initials of an old family friend]. There's some question of destroying it.

Is there a relationship between these two dreams and the poem he began writing during that day? Without considering the poet's specific associations to the elements in the dreams, we cannot know for certain. But before doing that, it is important to note some interesting structural and manifest similarities between the dreams and the poetic fragment. Dream 1 begins with elements reproducing the original circumstances stimulating the writing of the poem, and J.T. is the same friend with whom the poet made the "trip or visit" to Monument Valley. Although the poet and J.T. are represented in the dream as coming to a soccer field rather than to that particular tourist site, the friends are clearly making a pleasurable stop outdoors, a circumstance resembling their plan to have a pleasurable open-air picnic on their visit.

Also, the discomfort, the sense of pressure of time, and the aborted pleasure involved in having to eat quickly at Monument Valley are retained in the elements pertaining to playing soccer in the dream: they must pay for playing, must start at once, and, disappointingly, the other players delay. Next, the female friend Miriam is represented in the dream as entering the door of the room just as the horse is represented in the poem as appearing at the door of the car. While the poet and his friend had not been indoors, nor had they retreated to the inside of their car when the horse appeared, the animal's sudden appearance at the door of their car had been the telling aspect of the experience.

In its overall outline, the manifest content[3] of the first dream and the experience described in the poetic fragments written that day had much in common. As the first fragments of the poem went no further than the horse's appearance, there is little further analogy with the remainder of the dream. Miriam in the dream goes on to behave in a servile and perhaps a beastlike fashion, and her mistrustfully tearing up an already made bed—"under the guise of making it"—along with her swoon, a swoon incorporating both a sense of weakness and a seductive or needy type of behavior, are somewhat analogous to the horse's distrustfulness along with starvation. More direct and definite analogies obtain, however, between the remainder of this first dream and the final version of the last section of the poem written several days later.

Before going into these analogies, I want to point out that dream 2 also has overt structural similarities to the poem. This dream also begins with a trip of sorts—"through halls and upstairs"—in pleasurable surroundings. Again, a figure—the grandmother—appears at a door, and this time the figure more closely resembles the horse of the poem. Much as the horse appeared surprisingly at the door —"when we looked up"—the grandmother unexpectedly rises to meet the dreamer. She is an ancient dwarf—the horse was "tiny and shrunken" —and she clearly shares the descriptive adjectives for the horse, "small," "gaunt," "tottering," "stunted," which the poet had written in the first fragments of the poem and on the margins of the manuscript.[4] Also, just as there was a picnic at Monument Valley and in the poem, there is a supper in the dream. Structure and sequence in the second dream are not quite as close to the poetic fragment as in the first one, but particular elements are definitely shared. The significance of the parallels I have just drawn for both dreams will become apparent shortly.

When I asked the poet for his thoughts and associations regarding the first dream, he indicated that

Miriam was a friend of his and a friend of his mother whom he had been expecting on a visit during the day following the dream. She lived several hundred miles away and, after a couple of days' visit, a group of friends, including Miriam and the poet, had all planned to spend time at the city together. Although he liked her, he felt she had been over-solicitous to him in the past, and in some ways reminded him of his mother. Interestingly, the last time he had seen Miriam was during his trip to the southwestern United States, the same trip occasioning the visit to Monument Valley. Both had been guests at J.T.'s house at the time and, though she then had left some time before the two friends had gone to Monument Valley, her currently expected visit was surely the immediate factor reviving that experience in the poet's mind. He insisted, however, that he was not consciously thinking about Miriam, or her intended visit, when he began the poem.

As for his associations to dream 2, he immediately referred to some conversations he and I had had about the burdens imposed on offspring by parents, a connection suggested to him by the image of his mother taking his grandmother onto her back. He elaborated this theme with remembrances and anecdotes about his mother caring for his grandmother during a good part of the latter's terminal illness.

Then, he began to talk about his own relationship to his grandmother and remembered a period in his life, after his parents divorced, when he lived alone with his mother, his grandmother, and his grandmother's sister. The grandmother's sister had not been an actual member of the household but, on occasion, she visited for long periods. It was a time of his life, he said, that was relatively happy and serene. Although he had often had the task of staying at home and amusing his grandmother by playing cards with her, or going out with her to lunch, he felt that the attention he received from one, two, and often three women during this period more than compensated for any burdens. He related such feelings directly to feelings in the dream, saying that despite his being hired to take care of the old lady in the dream, he enjoyed being made much of by the women. Spontaneously, he added that the idea of destroying the photograph of the old family friend in the dream would mean the removal of— his words —"the minimal male presence in the house," his only competition for the women. Within the dream itself, he said laughingly, the photograph was to he destroyed on "aesthetic grounds."

After giving his associations, he went on to analyze further the meanings of these dreams himself.[5] He felt that the situation in dream 2 provided the underlying reason for his rejection of Miriam in dream

l.[6] Dream 2 indicated his relationship with important women in his life. Everything was pleasant on the surface, but women often could be terrible burdens with their own little weapons (the grandmother's fangs). In dream 1, Mariam attempted, under the pretense of helpfulness, to make a bed that did not need fixing. She attacked the bed in a "feverish" way and was consequently destructive and burdensome rather than helpful. At the end of that dream, therefore, he went ahead and made his own bed. And that meant the same as the figurative expression "to make one's bed"—he would go his own way.

Dream Analysis

From his own dream analysis, therefore, there are definite substantive connections between the final poem and the dream. The poem ends with the lines "About the ancient bond between her kind and mine/Little more to speak of can be done." The relationship with the horse and her kind is renounced, much as his relationship with Miriam is renounced in the dream. He goes it alone in the poem, driving off in his car, much as he makes his own bed in the dream.

Considering the many parallels between the dream and the poetic fragment, it is hardly likely that these substantive connections between the final poem and the dream are accidental. The mental events are clearly related to one another in a less than haphazard way and, with all the information from the poet himself at our disposal, we may hope to understand some of the lawful aspects of this relationship.

For one thing, it appears that dream 1 helped to provide a solution to an aesthetic problem raised by the writing of the poetic fragment during the day. From what the poet said about his thoughts about the poem, and from what he had actually written that day, we know he did not have the final lines of the poem in mind when he went to sleep. Only much later, while fully awake in the daytime, did they occur to him. Hence, there was a psychological continuity between his dreams and his later waking thoughts. The precise nature of this continuity is, I would insist, largely unconscious for the poet himself. It is possible, of course, that the poet had been consciously influenced by his dreams and/or his interpretation of their meaning during the writing of the final lines of the poem. Many poets do try to use their dreams in such a conscious way when they create poetry. But even if this were so—the poet distinctly said that he was not thinking of Miriam or of the dream when writing the poem, but he could have forgotten by the time we talked about it—there would still be an unconscious factor or set of factors

linking the involuntary dream in a continuity to his voluntary decision to use the dream or its interpretation in the poem. No one would maintain, I am sure, that poetic decisions are dictated totally by conscious considerations.

To understand the nature of this continuity beyond merely saying that it is unconscious, let us look further at the psychological meaning of the dreams. Here, we are on surer ground than the still treacherous sands of the poem itself because psychoanalysis has established that the psychological function of dreams is the fulfillment of wishes.[7] Can we then establish a basic wish or wishes expressed in these dreams? Is the poet's insightful interpretation complete when he suggests that the psychological meaning of the dreams is the same as the statement of the final line of the poem, he will make his own bed and go his own way? It is important to ask this, because if "going his own way" were the basic wish expressed in both the dreams, the question about the nature of the continuity between dream and poem would be answered at the start. If the dreams merely functioned as a disguised expression of the poet's wish to be on his own or, more deeply, a wish to be free of bonds and encumbrances, then the poetic statement, as incorporated in the final line of the poem, would also be essentially an expression of wish fulfillment disguised in slightly different terms. Although many psychological analysts of poetry would be happy with a conclusion that art is essentially a form of wish fulfillment and directly analogous to dreams—they often assume this automatically when analyzing a finished poem or theorizing about creativity[8]—we cannot easily accept that conclusion here. Surely there is some element of wish fulfillment in the final aspect of dream 1, the poet's making his own bed, but to stop at that would ignore other important portions of the dreams and the poet's associations to them.

The poet himself, it will be remembered, sensed that the temporal sequence of the two dreams reversed an actual psychological sequence, that dream 2 represented the circumstances leading to the outcome in dream 1. Also, the poet's major association to dream 2 was that the content related to a discussion he and I had had, in our previous session together, about the burdens parents impose on children. Although he was specifically referring to the burden represented by the dream image of his grandmother upon her daughter's back, there was another burden represented for him as well, the burden of caring for the grotesque invalid old woman. But rather than experiencing distress about such an onerous burden, he was pleased, even delighted, at the prospect. What is the reason for such a paradoxical reaction? The answer—and the key to the major wish fulfillment of the dreams—lies in

another portion of the same dream and the poet's associations to it.

Quoting directly from the poet's description of his dreams, "In an unused electric heater is mounted a bad copy of a copy of a portrait, coarsely colored and printed, of R.L. There's some question of destroying it." This, the poet suggested, indicated a minimal male presence in the house—a substitute for the artificial heat of the electric heater —who was the poet's only competition. R.L. himself was an old family friend (a little older than the poet's mother) whose wife had died. The poet's own father had died some years after divorcing his mother. Since his mother had remarried a man who also had died, this eligible widower had currently become a potential competitor for the poet's mother, a possible third husband. His picture was a "bad copy of a copy of a portrait," suggesting that, as a potential husband for the poet's mother, he was both a poor replica of the poet's own father (the real painting or "a portrait") and a symbol for the father himself. The "copy of a copy" construction also suggests other interpretations in terms of three levels of relatedness. Three male generations are suggested and therefore a two-generations-removed grandfather as competition for the poet's grandmother could inferentially be included, although there were no specific associations regarding this. With respect to his grandmother and the picture, then, this much is clear: the poet enjoys taking on the burden of his invalid grandmother because he has both women to himself. He has replaced all males in these women's lives, including (symbolically) his father, his recently deceased stepfather, R.L., and perhaps his grandfather, who are all relegated to an unused electric heater and will probably be destroyed. The primary or basic wish fulfillment, therefore, is the attainment of the major role in his mother's and grandmother's lives —with all its burdens—in order to receive the deep pleasure of being the major focus of their attention.

With this in mind, we can reconstruct the primary psychological meaning of the two dreams as follows: dream 2 represents the fulfillment of the forbidden oedipal wish, replacement of the father and sole possession of the mother (as well as the grandmother who is both a love object in her own right and, in all probability, a representation of the mother herself in advanced years). As the poet suggested, the situation in dream 2 leads to the outcome in dream 1. The realization of the oedipal wish in dream 2 is associated with guilt, and in dream 1 he has to pay the piper. He and his friend come to a soccer field (the only sport he enjoyed in school, he told me) but they must pay for the enjoyment. They plan to play but are prevented from doing so by the other players. Next, Miriam, who is a friend of the poet's mother and, as he said, shares features of his mother's personality, assumes a maternal helping role by making his bed

but eventually becomes destructive and sexually seductive in a manipulative way. Then he experiences only the burden of such a relationship. The "boring old couple" he is stuck with throughout the party very likely represent the poet's own parents—unidentified old couples in dreams frequently represent the dreamer's parents—but, even without recourse to such a specific interpretation, the sense of burden he felt is surely represented by the emotional quality of this portion of the dream. Finally, more in an act of desperation than an act of wished- for independence, the poet makes his own bed.

I have developed this primary interpretation of the dreams solely on the basis of the dreams themselves, the poet's associations to them, and information about the poet's background. So far I have made no mention of the content of the poem. But now I will confess that I myself was driven to this interpretation partly on the basis of the content of the poem and partly because of some other knowledge I had about the poet's further thoughts about the poem, knowledge I have yet to reveal. I trust I will be excused for this seeming deviousness when I explain that my purposes are scientifically methodological as well as dramatic. I have separated the dreams from the poem in order to be able to specify the relationship between dreaming and creating poetry more precisely. To use the poet's thoughts about the poem or to use the content of the poem to explain the dreams would require an assumption that such thoughts or poetic lines are psychologically equivalent to direct dream associations. Since I myself did use them somewhat in that way, I would not argue strongly against such an assumption. When we analyze dreams in psychotherapy, we know that the patient's behavior in the days preceding and following a dream can contribute to an understanding of the dream. So, too, the poet's thoughts about the poem that precede and follow his dreams could, in a sense, be considered as a type of association to the dreams. Despite these points, I believe I have so far demonstrated that the dreams can be interpreted without any direct recourse to the poem itself. I will say more about the importance of this methodological matter later. As for the dramatic purpose, I withheld his thoughts about the poem in order that the reader might share the sense of surprise and discovery I have experienced in the unraveling of the dark and knotted skein of dream thought and poetic creation. So, now, without any further pause for digression or explanation, I will plunge into the thick of it.

The Dreams in Relation to the Poem

The very first lines of the poem, the first fragment, had been written in a special notebook the poet

used for initial ideas and thoughts about his poetry. Sometimes these initial ideas were simple poetic phrases or prose statements about method, and sometimes they were extensive fragments. In this notebook, the poet made a later entry the morning after writing the first fragment and having the dreams I just discussed, as follows: "His rider—he had never had a rider."

As he reflected about the poem that next morning, he later told me, he had a complex thought and image connecting the horse with a rider and he wrote that entry in his notebook in order to remember it.[9] He had decided at that point to give the horse in the poem a rider but did nothing further about that for the remainder of that day. In fact, he did not begin working on the idea of the rider until the next day, and he only developed it in a version resembling the first stanza of the final poem several days later. Though the idea of the horse and rider dominates the whole first portion of the poem (i.e., the first two stanzas), it was, as we now see, conceived well after the second portion.

What is the significance of that particular thought connecting the house with a rider on the day after starting the poem and having the dreams? Ultimately, this idea had an important influence on the entire structure of the poem. But in addition to revealing a crucial step in the development of the poem, his telling me about this thought alerted me to the importance of the second of the two dreams. When he mentioned the rider idea, I felt a flash of illumination. Suddenly I realized that, in the second dream, *the poet's mother was carrying her own mother on her back, just as a horse carries a rider.*

Could this have been an accidental connection? I hardly thought so. First, the poet thought of the rider the morning after the dream and went on to incorporate the idea in a major way into the final poem. Second, he himself felt that the dream concerning his mother and grandmother was the primary one in an emotional sense. Consequently, the wishes and concerns of that second dream—the parent-child relationship represented by the mother carrying her mother on her back—must have been the major underlying focus of his dreams and of his unconscious mental processes. The analogy between the dream image and a major idea used in the poem, the arresting image of the mother carrying her mother on her back in conjunction with the idea of a horse carrying a rider, suggested to me that these underlying concerns about the burdens and gratifications of the parent-child relationship might also be a significant underlying emotional issue relating to the overall creation of the poem.

The remaining history of the writing of the poem bore out my supposition further. Later in the day following the dreams, the poet worked on the lines he had written the day before and began to incorporate the idea of a horse with a rider. In the final version of that day, he tried the following lines after the phrase pertaining to the offering of an apple core:

A gentle broken horse

For all he knew it could have been I who first

Broke him, rode him, abandoned him

When I went off to study or to war.

When he returned the next day to his writing, he decided to shift the whole idea of himself as rider to the beginning of the poem. Starting anew, he wrote the following:

We live mostly in the past or in the future

These lines begin in one and end in the other

It was the first or second summer after the war

That I last found myself on horseback.

Then, progressing through several versions of the poem on this next day, he developed the following formulation of the first six lines, and he made an interesting change:

One spring dusk before I went to war

I found myself for the last time, as things turned out,

Riding bareback, at Shoup's farm north of Woodstock.

A stillness swarming inward from the first star

Or outward from the buoyant sorrel mare

Who moved as if not displeased by my weight on her back.

The horse, which had been clearly male from the beginning and had remained male throughout several rewritings of the poem, was at this point suddenly switched to female! And—a matter that carried a good deal of weight for this poet—the word used for the female horse is, of course, "mare," the English word that is pronounced exactly like the French word mere, meaning mother.

Poets are commonly highly sensitized to words having overtones and connections to languages other than their own. This poet was especially so: he spoke several languages fluently and intentionally included multilingual overtones in his poetry. He referred to them as "tenth-level associations."[10] In this case, however, he was not immediately aware of the connection between "mare" and *mere.* When I asked him why he had switched the horse's sex, he said that he had begun to have an erotic feeling about his relationship to the horse while writing those lines and a change of sex seemed appropriate. He added that he had not known the sex of the real horse he had seen in the desert, but had described the poetic horse as male in earlier versions without much deliberation. This alteration of a major characteristic of the horse, the primary subject of the poem, and the poet's unconscious use of a word linguistically connoting the idea of mother further emphasize a connection to the parent-child, or more specifically, the mother-child relationship. As the poet was initially unaware of the bilingual overtones of the word "mare," when ordinarily he would have been acutely so, the supposition of an underlying major concern with this relationship is considerably supported.[11]

Further events also had a bearing on this matter. One of the conscious influences on the creation of the first two stanzas of the poem, the poet told me, was a poem by Elizabeth Bishop, a poet he very much admires. Bishop's poem was about a mechanical horse with a little ballet dancer on top.[12] Always very fond of that poem, he had marveled at how lightly she had used this figure of a horse and rider; he felt there were overtones in philosophy—the relationship of the soul to the body.

Although it was difficult for the poet to ascertain exactly when the Bishop poem came into his mind, except that it was clearly after he had the conception of a horse and rider, Elizabeth Bishop herself appeared in one of his dreams during the period when he was working on the Monument Valley poem.

The dream occurred six days after he began the poem, and—an important piece of evidence connecting it to the poem's creation—the next morning he returned after a three-day hiatus to write another version of the poem in his notebook. In this version, he moved the first two stanzas closer to their final formulation:

> One spring dusk before I went to war
>
> I found myself for the last time, as things turned out,
>
> Riding bareback, at Shoup's farm west of Troy.
>
> A stillness swarmed inward from the first star
>
> Or outward from the buoyant sorrel mare
>
> Who moved as if not displeased by my weight on her back.
>
> Her gait swung onto meadows framed by unseen lilac.

The dream—more sketchily remembered than the previous ones, he said—was the following:

> I may be going to Brazil again. J.T., Elizabeth Bishop, and I are at some seaside place here in the North. Elizabeth Bishop needs a doctor, her hands are covered with scabs and scales. She tells me that Marianne Moore is getting married to a much younger man. Now we glimpse Marianne Moore gallantly descending alone into a New York subway. The map of Brazil, retraced and colored, becomes the face and shoulders of an old woman wearing a cardigan. A telephone call. The trip is off. Some old person (woman? man?) did not renew the invitation.

Despite the sketchiness of this dream, there is again a manifest structural and sequential similarity to the poem. But now the structural similarity pertains to the entire poem and includes the first two stanzas. The dreamer is *anticipating* a trip, much as the rider of the horse is *anticipating* going to war. With the same friend of the Monument Valley trip and of the first of the previous dreams, and with Elizabeth Bishop, he is making a visit prior to taking a trip. The rider of the poem is also on a visit.[13] Finally, the dream ends with the cancellation of an invitation by an old person, just as the poem ends with a nullification of an ancient bond between the rider and the horse (these final lines, close to the completed version, had actually been written by the time of the dream).

Associating to this dream, the poet immediately mentioned the similarity to the previous dreams; he suggested that the scabs and scales on Elizabeth Bishop's hands connected her with the grandmother in the previous dream because the grandmother also had unsightly hands. Also, the map of Brazil[14] that turned into a drawing of an old woman suggested his grandmother to him. Finally, he said he had thought that the question of the poet Marianne Moore's marrying a younger man was quite important and also was connected to the previous dreams. But the connection and the reason she was in the dream "eludes me," he said.

In the light of these dream associations as well as the information about the change of the horse's sex in the poem and about the associations to the previous dreams, it is now clear that the wish fulfillment of this later dream also is a forbidden oedipal one. The connection that "eludes" the poet is that the then seventy-year-old Marianne Moore's marrying a younger man in the dream represents his own desire to marry an "older" woman, his mother and/or his grandmother. Both the connection and the consummated wish "elude" him. The appearance of Elizabeth Bishop in the dream and the association linking her to the poet's grandmother indicate that his thoughts about Elizabeth Bishop's poem were therefore also related and connected to his underlying concern about his relationship to his mother and grandmother. As Elizabeth Bishop's poem directly influenced his writing of the first two stanzas of "In Monument Valley," the poet's associations to the dream provide further confirmation that his major underlying concern throughout the writing of this poem was the parent-child relationship, specifically his relationship to his mother.

The Creative Process

Establishing the role and significance of this theme of the poet's relationship to his mother in the creation of the poem will now serve well in a very complicated task. It will provide a clear, steady source of light whose shifts and permutations will illuminate some of the dark and murky corners of a poet's creating mind. Our following the shifts and permutations of this illuminating theme will, in part, provide a basis for some general formulations about the process of creation.

Retracing and summarizing the salient features of the history of this poem, we have the following: several months after an experience of seeing a lone horse in Monument Valley, Arizona, the poet began a

poem with the horse as a central image. This poem was begun on the day prior to a visit from a woman with indirect, though definite, connections with the Monument Valley trip, a woman not consciously in his mind while writing the poem that day but represented in his dreams that night. His conscious thought while first writing the poem was that horses were included in and interposed between more than one species: they lived antithetical existences. They led human lives and not-human lives, and were therefore both beasts and not-beasts at once. This concept and its attendant images were the primary germinating ideas for the entire poem, and they were later elaborated and merged with other ideas.

Following the writing of the basic outline of what ultimately became the last two stanzas of the poem, the poet had two dreams indicating unconscious concerns and feelings about his relationship with his mother. The morning after the dreams, he had a thought that was the basis for the portion of the poem that ultimately became the first two stanzas: he connected the horse with a rider. Later, he was reminded of a poem by Elizabeth Bishop, a poem presenting a figure of a horse and rider in a manner having, for him, philosophical overtones. Before writing a version of the first two stanzas of the poem, a version containing all the essentials of this portion of the completed work, he dreamed about Elizabeth Bishop herself. This latter dream also indicated an unconscious concern with his relationship with his mother. Another important feature of the period between the writing of the outline of the last two stanzas and the adding of the first two stanzas, the period during which the essential structure of the final poem was determined, was the change of the horse's sex from male to female. And the word for female horse used in the poem was the English word with sound properties identical to the French word for "mother."

Throughout the preceding description of these salient features of the writing of the poem, two major points about the psychic life of the poet stand out in bold relief: (1) there is a continuity between the psychological substance of the poet's dreams and his waking thoughts pertaining to the poem, (2) there is wish fulfillment in the poem as well as the dream. Therefore, the dreams and the poem are related and are in some ways similar. But a detailed consideration of the nature of this psychological continuity between dreams and poem and a consideration of the specific way wish fulfillment influences the poem require an underscoring of some sharp, distinct, and important dissimilarities. They are, as follows: unlike the dream, the finished poem is not structured around wish fulfillment; its purpose is not to express the fulfillment of a wish. Also, unlike dreaming, the writing of a poem is not primarily a matter

of disguising underlying wish fulfillments.

Surprising as these statements may seem to some, who may now wonder why I have just been at such pains to demonstrate the wish-fulfillment aspect of the poet's thought, they follow as initial conclusions from what has been said so far. For one thing, the poet's wish for care and nurturance from his mother is embodied in the first two stanzas of the poem rather than the concluding three. There is wish fulfillment relating to the figure of the horse and rider and the thoughts about Elizabeth Bishop; such fulfillment is conveyed in the contented, happy quality of the stanzas themselves. The point of the poem—if it is ever meaningful to make a fine poem like this one stand still long enough to talk about a single point; perhaps I should say the denouement or conclusion of the poem—is not, however, contained in these first two happy stanzas but in the final ones describing desolation and a broken bond. In simplistic terms, the poem does not have a happy wish-fulfilling ending. In fact, the ending is quite distinct from wish fulfillment; the last stanzas portray the loss of happiness, the ravages of time, and the breaking of a bond. Furthermore, there is no sense in which the poet's underlying wish could be discerned solely from his waking thoughts about the poem nor from a reading, or even an extensive analysis, of the finished poem itself. Nowhere does a parent-child relationship, nor even a relationship with another human being (except the glancing reference to Shoup—a person's name) manifest itself in the poem. I venture to say that even the most highly speculative psychoanalytic critic would be hard pressed to make a case for the horse as a clearly recognizable symbol for the poet's mother in the finished poem. To argue that from reading this poem, he would have to propose a general principle that female horses are always mother symbols, a highly doubtful assumption. The poem does not convey wish fulfillment to a reader and, as I will spell out extensively later, neither does it *primarily* express fulfillment of the creator's wish.

Probably the most important distinction between the role of wish fulfillment in this poem and its general role in dreams is that the particular manifestation of wish fulfillment in this poem contributed to coherency and aesthetic value. In dreams, wish fulfillment characteristically produces the reverse effect. As psychoanalysis has clearly demonstrated, over and over again, wish fulfillment in the dream requires disruption and incoherence in manifest content, the very disruption and incoherency characterizing the entire experience of dreaming.[15] The addition of the first two stanzas in the poem, the stanzas embodying the poet's wish fulfillment, clearly contributed to the coherency of the poem and, I think no

one would disagree, increased its aesthetic value.

Now that I have said this, however, I must return to a device I used earlier in this chapter and promised to discuss again later. Although I first discussed the dreams without referring to the content of the poem, there is now a new state of affairs. I have, in the interest of presenting evidence and facilitating identification of the poet's wish fulfillment, treated the contents of the poem as psychological material shedding light on the dreams. I begged for indulgence about the expository separating and then conjoining, but in my conclusions I have now strayed fairly far. A discerning critic may say: we've gone along with you up until now, but here you've tricked us. Didn't you yourself first come to an understanding of the early dreams by paying attention to the image of the horse and rider in the first two stanzas of the poem? Isn't the image of the female horse and rider actually a closer representation of the poet's wish for maternal care than the images in the dreams, by your own analysis? After all, as the rider of the horse, the poet puts himself on his mother's back. He is, therefore, supported, and, by extension, cared for by his mother. There is also a clear quality of emotional fulfillment in those first two stanzas. How can you now say that the purpose of the poem is not the expression of a wish? And why do you draw a contrast between poem and dreams in terms of disruption and distortion? Isn't there still distortion in the image of the poet on a horse's back? He isn't telling us or telling himself directly that he would like to be cared for by his mother, the wish is disguised by symbolization.

My reply to the critic is that he is correct on both counts: the horse and rider image is not an overt statement of the poet's wish; as in the dream, the wish is represented indirectly. The poem goes much farther than the dream, the horse and rider image embodies the content of the wish more closely and directly than any of the images in the poet's dreams. In fact, this latter point goes immediately to the heart of the matter: the image in the poem embodies the content of the wish more directly than the images of the dreams because of a major *difference* between the creative process and dreaming. This difference, a crucial one for understanding creativity, is that the creative process functions to reverse censorship, while dreams depend on it. The issues raised by the discerning critic do not invalidate our discussion of differences between the creative process and the dream, but these issues help to specify the nature of the differences further. Considering the dreams apart from both the poet's thoughts during the creation of the poem and the images in the poem itself, comparing dreams and creative process as independent psychological phenomena rather than overlapping routes of expression, reveals both striking similarity

and striking difference, reciprocity as well as complementarity. Processes bear a marked resemblance to each other but they function in reverse. The image of the grandmother on the mother's back in the dream, the parent riding on the offspring, and the rider on the horse's back in the poem, the offspring on the parent, are reflecting ones: *the creative process is the mirror image of the dream.*

The mirror-image or enantiomorphic relationship between the dreams and the creation of the poem obtains in many ways at once. The horse and rider image in the poem is a homologous, and thereby a closer and a more direct, representation of the poet's wish for nurturance and care than the images in the dreams because the creative process turned backward and reversed an aspect of the censorship operation in constructing these dreams. The dream distortion was in part unraveled and the underlying wished-for structure of the relationship adopted. Also, the poet thought of the horse and rider image following a dream depicting his grandmother on his mother's back, but in the poem he reversed positions and reversed the offspring- parent relationship. Dream thoughts led to poetic thoughts, but the representation was reversed. Dreams and the creative process were functionally reciprocal and complementary, and there was reversal and reflection of similar content and imagery between dream and poem. There was also reversal and reflection of temporal sequence. The first of the two dreams occurring prior to the creation of the horse and rider image pertained, both structurally and emotionally, to the final stanzas of the poem. The second of the two dreams bore a structural resemblance to the final stanzas but emotionally pertained to what became the earlier ones. Dreams and creation mirrored each other in this poem, and dreams and the creative process universally bear a mirror-image relationship.

In the succeeding chapters of this book, I will describe two specific thought processes operating in creativity; I will explain in detail how these particular thought processes operated in the creation of "In Monument Valley" and how they operate in various types of creative processes, ranging from poetry, art, and music to science and intellectual endeavors. I will anticipate the full discussion now simply by saying that the psychological properties of these particular thought processes help account for the mirror-image relationship between dreams and the creative process I have just described. The properties of these thought processes account for such effects as the emergence of the horse and rider image with its close approximation to the poet's underlying wish. The structural aspects of these processes demonstrate the mirror-image relationship between dreams and the creative process even more precisely than I have already suggested; the thought processes themselves are mirror images of processes operating in dreams.

That the poetic image of the horse and rider is not an explicit or overt statement of the poet's wish and is therefore similar to the symbolic element in dreams is, as I said, a correct observation. Following this aspect of the discerning critic's challenge can perhaps now make clearer what I mean by mirror image. The poetic image is not an explicit statement of the poet's wish; it is representational or symbolic. If poetry characteristically contained such explicit statements, we would hardly ever find it interesting or aesthetically valuable. One of the characteristic features of art of all types is that the artist, unlike the neurotic or the psychotic, does not impose his wishes and needs directly upon his audience. He does not simply confess, nor does he make the demands of pure and explicit confession upon us. Primarily, he gives us something emotional as well as conceptual. With respect to "In Monument Valley," I believe that the shifting of the wish-fulfillment aspect into the first two stanzas had a good deal to do with its becoming a far better poem in its totality than was suggested by the early fragments alone. Not only was the personal wish embedded into an overall symbolic statement with universal significance, but a dynamic emotional sequence was produced.

The main point about the symbolic nature of the poetic horse and rider image is that there are definite similarities between dreaming and the creative process. Indeed, mirror images bear precisely such a relationship to each other: they are similar but reversed. Similar to dreaming, the creative process molds and structures deeply unconscious material and it produces affect laden and vivid images, symbols, and new connections. But it also functions to reverse the censorship, images, and other aspects of dreams,- the results embody the creator's unconscious contents more closely and more directly than do dream constructions.[16] From this relationship of similarity and reversal between creative process and dreams has come the concept of the mirror image.

Notes

1 This poem is protected by copyright and is reprinted by permission; the author's name is withheld upon request.

2 In view of a long literary tradition relating humans and animals, this idea may not at first seem strikingly original. A fuller understanding of its implications and structure, spelled out in chap. 3, however, should demonstrate its originality.

3 The use of the term "manifest content" follows Freud's distinction between the experienced and reported, or manifest, elements in the dream and the underlying meaning, or latent content, of these elements.

4 Note also a more tacit connection: the grandmother's hands are blunted with the last joints missing from the fingers and therefore they are constructed like the single-joint ends of a horse's leg, ending in the hoofs.

5 The subject and I had worked together for some time when these dreams occurred and he had become skilled in analyzing his own dreams. Although I believe our work together contributed to his impressive self-analysis, an analysis I consider to be accurate as far as it goes, I must add that the subject himself had always shown extraordinary capacity and insight with respect to dream analysis. While such capacity seemed to be related to his poetic gift and his proficiency with symbols and images, I would not generalize about it. I would not consider—there is no evidence from my work with other poets—that this capacity for dream analysis is necessarily related to poetic creativity.

6 See S. Freud, "The first short dream is often the conclusion of a second longer dream—the first is the 'dependent clause' and the second, the 'principal clause' " ("The Interpretation of Dreams," 1900, [London, 1964], 4:315).

7 Findings in recent sleep research have suggested other psychological and biological functions of dreams as well, but the wish-fulfillment function has not been at all disproven. Recent theories of dreaming as a discharge or restorative function, in fact, support a wish-fulfillment function. See chap. 2 below for further discussion.

8 See further discussion of psychological analysis of art in the following chapter and *passim.*

9 This thought and image will be described further in chap. 3.

10 An example from the completed poem "In Monument Valley" is the phrase "Hell's Gate." He pointed out to me that it related to the German word *hell,* meaning "light." See chap. 3 for other connections with the word "hell."

11 In another work I have discussed, and presented evidence for, the emotional importance of literary revisions (see A. Rothenberg, "The Iceman Changeth: Toward an Empirical Approach to Creativity," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 17 [1969] :549—607). Further discussion and data pertaining to this issue will be presented here (see chaps. 4, 11, and 13).

12 E. Bishop, "Cirque d'Hiver," in *The Complete Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), p. 34.

13 Note the possibility that the city of Troy mentioned in the poem, which the poet specifically meant to have a double reference to both the ancient seaside site of the Trojan war and the North American, northern hemisphere city of New York State, therefore has the dual characteristics of being both on the seaside and in the north, as does the place in the dream.

14 Elizabeth Bishop was, at the time of this dream, living in Brazil. Hence, there is a further indication of a direct connection between Bishop and the grandmother.

15 That is, before Freud provided a key to the understanding of the incoherency (see chap. 2).

16 This should not be construed to apply merely to the so-called confessional poetry of poets such as Lowell, Plath, Berryman, Hughes, and Sexton. While some critics have pointed out that the work of these poets seems to be particularly concerned with unconscious material related to dreams, I am not referring to such a particular style but to a universal characteristic of the creative process. See A. Alvarez, *The Savage God* (New York: Random House, 1972), for an interesting discussion of this group of poets.