

beginning to forge tools and techniques of interior work, particularly dream work, which allow us to enter into those collective unconscious dramas with increasing conscious self-awareness and to transform those dramas with our individual and collective creative actions.

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Alix Pirani

DREAMS, THE TAVISTOCK INSTITUTE, AND THE WHITE HOTEL

... a note on social dreaming and visions of redemption

In January and February 1982 I took part in a seven-week Project in Social Dreaming and Creativity at the Tavistock Institute. The last dream I reported, at the final meeting, was of a large building burning: I wanted it to burn but I didn't really want to see it destroyed. This related to my own feelings about the Project itself and my wish to transform it, and to a wider anger with men, male-made institutions and social structures, and my wish to 'inflamm' them and transform them through some sort of fire. The building in the dream resembled a roadhouse-hotel I'd visited that week near Aldershot whose pre-tentious architecture and military clientele I'd disliked.

The following week I saw in a bookshop window a display of copies of the Penguin **White Hotel**, with the burning hotel building and the 'inflamed' woman on the front. The time had clearly come for me to read the novel.

I'd left the Tavi project feeling that I might at some time attempt to write a novel to express adequately my experience there. Thomas's novel had a powerful impact on me - and it seemed to have done

a good deal of my work for me: its images and concerns were very much those of the project's: fire, flood, holocaust, men's impotence, women's sexuality, Freudian analysis, Jewish-Christian relationships. Subsequently, at the follow-up meeting of project members in June, it transpired that some had read the novel beforehand. I still find it remarkable that no one mentioned it.

I've written at length elsewhere (1) about **The White Hotel** and how it illuminates these issues. And it offers us an exceptional experience of the many dimensions of dreams and visions and our evaluations of them; the dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious, individual and collective; the projection and introjection of fantasies of group and social relationships - which relates to pre-cognition - and our connectedness and disconnectedness with natural rhythms and forces. This is eminently the realm of poetry: the poetic novel and drama, in the hands of a Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Emily Brontë, D.H. Lawrence, or D.M. Thomas, can display the relatedness between individuals, society and cosmic energies. The poet moves in the half-world between 'dream' and 'reality', 'fiction' and 'truth'.

The White Hotel reflects on the status of the dream in Freudian and post-Freudian times. Its implicit attitude to dreams is Jungian. Indeed in the first pages there is a crucial dispute between Jung and Freud about a dream of Freud's whose personal and mythical significance is central to the novel's concerns. The dreams of Lisa Erdman, the heroine, have multiple meanings within and beyond the story. And the last section of the novel, **The Camp**, is pure dream, vision, fantasy: perhaps a dream at the moment of Lisa's dying, or of a civilisation dying.

I think our attitude to this dream section of the novel is critical. Some people minimize and dismiss it. Others see it as a schizoid escape from the preceding horror. But some of our most schizoid escapists - musicians, Einsteins, analysts, T.S. Eliots - go on to make vital creative contributions to society. To me **The Camp** is essentially creative: the expansive part of the novel, the result, as it were, of Thomas's dreamwork, the culmination and distillation of the novel's psychic awareness, and a meaningful vision of redemption and reconciliation. The creative validity of dreams is in that area: to reject that is to perpetuate the sick horrors of negativity.

This kind of rejection was happening in the Tavistock project as I experienced it. It had been set up deliberately to break the usual boundaries of a Tavi group: the chairs were not in a circle but a spiral; we were called not a group but a matrix. The two consultants freely

owned their uncertainty as to their function. Yet what happened was that, along with their nervous concern about their roles, they stuck to a reductionist Freudian interpretation of our dreams; thus keeping the lid on, and keeping us behaving still like a group. They weren't getting much beyond their usual Tavi roles: creative expansion into the dreamworld wasn't encouraged, they weren't comfortable in the transpersonal or spiritual realm, were defending against it, and against non-Freudian attitudes to contact, sexuality and intuition - these being the areas where we may expand into spirituality. In effect they were defending against death, having no positive strong hold on any concept or experience of rebirth. No wonder I wanted to burn down their defence structure in order to transform it.

Their Working Note (2) on the project appeared in June. It narrowed the experience down, afraid to claim any advance beyond known territory. It described as 'idealisation' any feelings of awe we expressed for mystical or spiritual experience, but granted that ". . . what may be hidden behind this is the wish to find an authentic way of grasping truth. And to do this one has to be in exile from conventional ways of understanding. There is a real sense in which to be attempting to understand the unconscious is to be in exile from the majority in society". Here the loneliness of their position becomes clear. Yet there is a society of exiles, of dreamers, a new community possible and growing, once we come out of our old constructs/structures. And indeed, the last section of *The White Hotel*, the camp, is just that: a community of exiles, of dreamers. Those who can imagine or envision what is beyond are by definition survivors, and creators of a new order.

The idea for the Tavi project came, at first unknown to us, from Charlotte Beradt's book, *The Third Reich of Dreams* (3). Before we knew this, the first dreams and associations reported were about Israel, Jews and Christians, and concentration camp survival. Montague Ullman's insight (4) into the limitations of the Freudian position arose partly from his concern with a reported event in a Nazi camp. Undoubtedly we are all still - through dreams, works of art, group projects - trying to make meaning of the holocaust of the forties because we fear a holocaust in the eighties. Can we transform our so-called civilisation without destroying it totally? Guilty issues between Jews and Christians and their handling of the spiritual are still unresolved: can there be a reconciliation? Is martyrdom and resurrection the only way?

Dreams exist at the borders of life and death; they threaten the comfort of our everyday reality by highlighting areas within, around or beyond

us over which we have no control. Yet they are an opportunity for expansion, awe, creative imagination: the night dream and the daydream are not so very different. The last section of *The White Hotel* exists in a timeless place, but is there now, on the page. To allow ourselves to enter into the timeless while staying in time is vital. Otherwise our concepts of 'society' and of social dreams and visions will remain on a pole between the limited, depressed, pessimistic and the over-optimistic, starry-eyed, evangelistic. The true polarity is between what is within human power and control and what is beyond human power and control: the place between is the crucial place where all our work is. The dream, like other symbols, exists in that place.

REFERENCES

- (1) *Energy and Character* Vol. 13 No. 2. August 1982
 - (2) *A Venture in Social Dreaming* (Lawrence and Daniel) The Tavistock Institute June 1982
 - (3) See Robin Shoheit's article in this issue.
 - (4) In *Societal Factors in Dreaming*, in this issue.
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Robin Shoheit

THE THIRD REICH OF DREAMS

I recently came across a book entitled *The Third Reich of Dreams* by Carlotta Beradt (Quadrangle 1968 now out of print). It contains dozens of dreams collected by the author in Germany from 1933-1939. Through these dreams she highlights the sorts of internal conflicts that are thrown up in an individual in his relationship to a society he consciously disapproves of but is at the same time frightened of or maybe, at some level, even attracted to. I think some of the issues raised in this book are still relevant fifty years later.

At the end of the book there is a short essay by Bruno Bettelheim in which he adds a psychoanalytic perspective to the author's commentaries and reflections. In it he says, "A much deeper and older danger abides, a darker knowledge is still missing. If all of us abhorred the Third Reich, why did it exist? Must there not have been feelings,