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EROTIC DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT*

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The history of erotic dreams, nightmares, and erotic nightmares offers a valuable opportunity to study how such dreams tested Western ideas about the self, desire, and self-control. Like Foucault, I find it more productive to analyse these dreams, and the struggles to introject them, as sites of self-making rather than of repression. Erotic dreams and nightmares have been inflected by various historical strategies of self-making, themselves produced by different regimes of knowledge such as Christian asceticism, medicine, or philosophy. Erotic nightmares still proliferate today in reports of alien abductions. A reason for this historical tenacity has been the ease with which the affective sensations of the erotic nightmare – terror and sexual arousal – have jumped between genres as various as monastic handbooks, medieval folk-tales, gothic fiction, and personal dreams. This study demonstrates the importance of historical perspective for the ability to identify and understand culturally elaborated ('culture-bound') syndromes.

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living (*Die Tradition aller toten Geschlechter lastet wie ein Alp auf dem Gehirne der Lebenden*).

Marx, *The eighteenth brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

Erotic dreams have raised perennial questions about the boundaries of the self and the individual's ability to control and produce this self. Do erotic dreams result from divine intercession, an immoral life, or recent memories? Are they products of the self for which the individual dreamer may be held responsible? Or are they determined by a *force majeure* such as original sin, or human physiology?

The answers that various societies supply to these questions no doubt condition the ways in which people in different cultures and historical periods react to their experiences of erotic dreams. The Hadza of northern Tanzania publicly marked a boy's first nocturnal emission by decorating him with beads in exactly the same way as they decorated a girl with beads at the time of her first menstruation. Both occasions were unequivocally positive and celebratory (Woodburn, pers. comm.; see also Woodburn 1964: 269, 303, table 19, ill. 14). By contrast, the monks addressed in the fifth-century CE writings of John Cassian were instructed that:

* Malinowski Memorial Lecture, 1998

It [an emission] is a sign of some sickness hidden inside, something hidden in the inmost fibres of the soul, something that night-time has not produced anew but rather has brought to the surface of the skin by means of sleep's restorative powers. It [night-time] exposes the hidden fibres of the agitations that we have collected by feasting on harmful thoughts all day long (Cassian, *Institutions*, 6.11, trans. in Brakke 1995).

Granted the value or danger accorded to erotic dreams in different societies, it is not surprising that vastly different practical techniques have been formulated cross-culturally to cultivate intended results. In order to fend off erotic dreams Graeco-Roman doctors variously recommended sleeping on one's side, excluding warming foods from one's diet, sleeping with a lead plate in contact with one's testicles, or having intercourse in the dark so as to avoid mentally registering lust-provoking visual images that could later recur during sleep (Foucault 1986: 137 ff.). By contrast, among the Umeda of Papua New Guinea a hunter intentionally slept on a net-bag scented with magic pig-hunting perfume (*oktesap*) in hopes of receiving the erotic dream that pre-saged a successful hunting expedition. Such erotic dreams held out the promise of real sexual consummation, which often followed after a kill was made (Gell 1977: 33).

Just how, and how successfully, such culturally prescribed bodily practices actually affect the subjective phenomenological apperception of dreams is a debated issue to which I shall return near the end of this article. I begin simply with the observation that the social construction of erotic dreams manifestly varies, cross-culturally and diachronically. In examining the historical nightmarization of the erotic dream within European history, I present a corollary to Foucault's thesis (1978; 1985; 1986) that sexuality increasingly became a site of 'subjectivation' (*assujettissement*) in the West. By this neologism he meant that sexual desire became the indicator of the truth about one's self, and thus a fundamental constituent of one's subjectivity. At the same time this sexuality was also a conduit for subjugation by social forces such as the Church or medical science that instructed how desire should be regulated. In volumes two and three of *The history of sexuality* Foucault frequently considered the evidence of dreams, particularly erotic dreams, and the challenges they posed to images of self-control in antiquity. Here, I track dreams into the Christian period and through the Middle Ages, thus proceeding into areas that Foucault would have covered more extensively had he lived to fulfil his original plan for the *The history of sexuality*.¹

Medieval conceptions of erotic dreams, nocturnal emissions, and the dangers they posed to monks, clergy, and the Christian laity have been the subject of some excellent recent studies (Brakke 1995; Elliott 1999). And scholars of ancient Greece have paid increasing attention to erotic dreams and the codes for interpreting them (Grottanelli 1999; Winkler 1990a). But there have been almost no studies of the nightmare in antiquity save for two works from the early twentieth century. The German classical scholar Wilhelm Roscher traced the nightmare from ancient Greece through the Renaissance in a work entitled *Ephialtes* (1900). The other study, Ernest Jones's *On the nightmare* (1971 [1931]), was originally published as two articles around 1910. Both Roscher and Jones took for granted an erotic dream-nightmare complex already in classical antiquity.

In my view, the erotic dream and the nightmare were not systematically conjoined until the early Christian period, when the control of inner cupidity became a salient diagnostic of spiritual progress. At this time potentially pleasurable erotic dreams were demonized and fused with a particular, pre-existing conception of the asphyxiating nightmare to give rise to a nightmare-erotic dream complex.

Since the advent of psychoanalysis, the concept of 'repression' has often been applied to account for the erotic nightmare. Take for example the following orthodox Freudian statement by Jones:

The psycho-analytical conclusion about nightmares is that the causative sexual wish – so evident in most erotic dreams – is subject to an exceptional degree of repression, the reason for this being that they always originate in an incestuous wish. The attacking animal, demon, or vague pressure really represents the parent. It is probable that the extreme classical form of nightmare occurs only in persons with a considerable masochistic element in their constitution (Jones 1974 [1932]: 113).

Terror and eros, for Jones, stood in tense complementary relationship and formed a continuum from exclusively erotic dreams at one pole, through gradations of erotic nightmares, to the other extreme where there was only terror (1971 [1931]: 42; 1974 [1932]: 111). All erotic dreams were incipient nightmares. Furthermore, since the Oedipus complex was universal, the same psychological tensions would generate erotic nightmares cross-culturally and trans-historically.

Of course Malinowski fought the battle over the universality of the Oedipus complex against the very same Ernest Jones who wrote *On the nightmare*. Many people assume that Malinowski had little sympathy for psychoanalysis, but he admired much in Freud's work (Malinowski 1962 [1923]; Stocking 1986). In *Sex and repression in savage society* (published in 1927) he certainly embraced the psychoanalytic concept of repression. But this seems to have been the psychoanalytic idea that he least understood. In *Sex and repression* he began by asserting that because the Trobrianders were unrepressed they did not have dreams at all (1965: 89). He then proceeded to argue (contradictorily) that if a dream of sex with one's sister was more disturbing than a dream of sex with one's mother, then this proved the existence of a matrilineal rather than an Oedipus complex (1965: 91).

Repression remains an area of misunderstanding between psychology and anthropology to this day. Few studies have attempted to clarify the viability of this term for anthropological research.² Below, I examine the psychoanalytic concept of repression by contrasting it with conscious and intentional acts of exclusion. Much of my historical evidence reveals people voluntarily attempting to repel unwanted thoughts. In Freud's terms they are 'suppressing' rather than 'repressing'.³ Intentional self-making thus generated the erotic nightmare in many cases, although it must be granted that overarching religious, political, scientific, or other frameworks outlined the sorts of selves that people should ideally craft and the techniques to be used. The erotic nightmare consequently developed in the West as a culturally interpreted set of symptoms, verging on what anthropologists used to call a 'culture-bound syndrome' (Low 1985). The diachronic examination of the erotic nightmare

complex offered here might usefully remind those studying other culturally elaborated syndromes such as *latah*, *nervios*, or *koro* that these complexes are not permanent cultural badges, but symptoms of/in transition.⁴ Each has its own current trajectory and velocity, which require historical contextualization. Thus, whereas for Marx history was like a nightmare, in my view the nightmare has a history worth exploring for what it might reveal about successive Western conceptualizations of terror, sexual desire, and the self.

Erotic dreams and nightmares

Clearly we need to decide on the definition of both erotic dreams and nightmares before we can proceed to identify their combination. The word 'nightmare' can be used to describe any unpleasant or terrifying dream that disturbs sleep, and by the end of this article I shall be using the term in this broad sense. I begin, however, in the ancient historical sections, with a more restricted conception of nightmare, namely, dream visions where the sleeper feels a weight on his or her chest and has accompanying sensations of dyspnoea, paralysis, and dread. Sufferers frequently stated that a person, an animal, or a demonic being caused these feelings by sitting (or jumping up and down) on their chest. The Swiss artist John Henry Fuseli's painting *The nightmare*, first exhibited in 1782 at the Royal Academy in London, gave this body of traditional ideas a compelling representation. A hairy demon perches atop a voluptuous woman laid out asleep on her bed as a wall-eyed horse pokes its head through the velvet drapes in the background.⁵ (Fig. 1.)

There are grounds for calling this the 'classic nightmare' because the image of demonic pressure informs the current vocabulary for the phenomenon in a number of languages. In my epigraph, Marx's word for the nightmare is *Alp*, meaning 'elf', and it draws on the two usual German words for nightmare: *Alptraum* (elf dream) and *Alpdruck* (elf pressure). The words for 'nightmare' in other languages also convey this image: French *cauchemar* etymologically means 'oppressive fiend'; the *mar(e)* component meant variously a water monster, vampire, or just a ghost at various stages and in different registers of French (Gamillsches 1969). According to Dr Johnson's Dictionary the *mara* was 'a spirit that, in the Northern mythology, was said to torment or suffocate sleepers' (Frayling 1996: 8). Our word 'nightmare' comes from this Scandinavian source (Tillhagen 1960).

Numerous distinctions also need to be made in respect to the concept of 'erotic dream'. The criterion of erotic requires that the dreamer feel sexually stimulated, yet this is often difficult to establish in relation to historical dreams and their dreamers. In the relationship between dream imagery and erotic response, virtually any configuration is possible. In 95 per cent of cases penile erection in males and analogous genital excitation in females accompany REM sleep (Greenhouse 1974). Almost every dream is thus built upon erotic impulses.

Greek antiquity

In ancient Greek dream books sexuality displayed in dreams was usually read as diagnostic of more important issues (for the ancients) such as wealth



FIGURE 1. J.H. Fuseli, *The nightmare* (1781). Founders Society Purchase with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Bert L. Smokler and Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence A. Fleischman. ©2000 The Detroit Institute of Art.

and social status (Foucault 1986: 33; Winkler 1990a: 27). For the second-century CE dream interpreter Artemidorus, the dream of sex with one's mother, for example, was not problematic, but rather a good dream for politicians. This was because the mother represented one's native country, and to make love is to govern the obedient and willing body of one's partner. The dreamer would thus control the affairs of the city (Artemidorus, *Interpretation of dreams*, 1.79). Hippias, a Greek traitor serving as the Persians' guide in the landing at Marathon, dreamt of sleeping with his mother and interpreted this to mean that he would return to Athens and recover power (Herodotus, *History*, 6.107).

Artemidorus divided dreams into two main categories: *enypnia* and *oneiroi*. *Enypnia* directly expressed current desires or bodily states. A hungry man dreams of eating, a lover of his/her beloved (Artemidorus, *Interpretation of dreams*, 1.1). As they predicted nothing, such dreams did not require the services of a dream interpreter. *Oneiroi*, on the other hand, were prophetic dreams produced by the soul, or possibly sent by the gods. There could thus be two kinds of sexual dream. One type merely indicated that the dreamer was 'in the mood', while the other employed sexual scenarios to convey prognostic information about entirely different matters. Artemidorus dispensed with *enypnia* in a couple of paragraphs, while devoting four chapters to sexual *oneiroi*.

As sexual *oneiroi* were not really about sex it is quite possible that they did not involve an erotic response in the dreamer. This arouses the suspicion that numerous manifestly sexual dreams from other contexts were similarly unerotic. Consider, for example, the following inscription from the healing shrine of Asclepius at Epidaurus recorded in the fourth century BCE to memorialize a dream by a female pilgrim from Messene: 'Sleeping here she saw a dream. It seemed to her the god came bringing a snake creeping beside him and she had sex with it. And from this children were born to her within a year, twin boys' (LiDonnici 1995: 115). The characteristics of the nightmare are arguably there alongside the erotic content. But perhaps the sex is nothing more than the metaphorical expression of contact with the god. In the absence of a dreamer's comment it is difficult to know which dreams were erotic or frightening, or both at the same time. We must look beyond myths and dream-books to ancient Greek conceptions of self and emotion.

In Aristotle's system of thought dreaming was situated in relation to perception. The difference was that in normal perception one submitted 'appearances' to judgement in order to decide whether something was or was not the case. The sun may appear to be the size of a penny but judgement enables one to decide that it is not really so small. During sleep, however, the capacity to judge is suspended with the result that the images presented to the sleeper's mind are automatically accepted as valid.⁶ The only exceptions to this rule were rare instances when one somehow attained consciousness during the dream and judged a given appearance false (Aristotle, *On dreams*, 462a5). In the majority of cases, however, people reacted to dream images as if they had judged them and accepted them as real. This accounts for people's full emotional response within dreams because emotions inevitably ensue upon judgements. If we decide that a situation is frightening, or erotic, then we *are* frightened, or aroused.

Aristotle's teacher, Plato, understood dreams as more closely involved with individual character. He focused on dreams as a facet of his overall study of politics, since he considered that the credentials to govern others were first developed and proved in relation to oneself.⁷ In Plato's view the soul (*psyche*) was comprised of three parts: the rational mind (*nous*), high spirits (*thymos*, for example, anger, joy, courage) and the appetitive desires for food, drink and sex (*epithymia*) (*Republic* 441a). Self-mastery involved regulating these three components and integrating them under the command of reason. One recommended technique involved forging a strategic alliance between reason and the high spirits so that the appetitive desires were double-teamed. The education of the young through dancing and verse-recitation exemplified this strategy since the chorus songs fostered the growth of reason and knowledge in the intellect, while the music and dance calmed the high spirits with harmony and rhythm (Plato, *Republic* 441e).

All humans possessed the ability to control their appetites but not all of them exercised it. In any case, sleep presented a dangerous moment. While reason slumbered the way was open for the savage part of the soul to break free and express itself, especially if the person had indulged in excessive eating and drinking.

I'm sure you're aware of how in these circumstances nothing is too outrageous: a person acts as if he were totally lacking in moral principle and unhampered by intelligence. In his dreams, he doesn't stop at trying to have sex with his mother and with anyone or anything else – man, beast, or god (Plato, *Republic* 571c).

Whereas men could overcome or at least moderate their responses to desires by internal mental effort, women were conceived to be fundamentally helpless victims of their insatiable sexual appetites (Dean-Jones 1992). According to ancient medical thought, female physiology precluded reason being exercised by women in the same way as by men. This was because the womb, the seat of her sexual appetite, was not under a woman's conscious control. It could move around in her body, even up to the head, where it could 'stifle those organs in which consciousness was thought to lie' (Dean-Jones 1992: 78). Thus women had no chance to succeed or fail in the fundamentally ethical arena of relating to their own sexual desire. They were denied the possibility of acting as moral agents (Dean-Jones 1992: 86).

The erotic nightmare in antiquity?

The ancient Greeks did not apparently expend much effort in analysing frightening dreams. Our best evidence for the ancient conception of the nightmare is the term itself, *ephialtes*. Etymologically it seems to mean 'to jump on top of' (Chantraine 1977). The first-century CE physician Themison of Laodicea reportedly coined another name for the nightmare, *pnigalion* 'strangler, throttler'.⁸ This is about all we have to go on.

Did it also have an erotic component? Roscher thought it did, on account of the identification between the god Pan and Ephialtes, but there was no clear indication that these Pan nightmares possessed an erotic dimension until Artemidorus, who wrote that:

Ephialtes is identified with Pan but he has a different meaning. If he oppresses or weighs a man down without speaking, it signifies tribulations and distress. But whatever he says upon interrogation is true. If he gives someone something or has sexual intercourse with someone, it foretells great profit, especially if he does not weigh that person down (Artemidorus, *Interpretation of dreams*, 2.37).

Here, at last, all of the components of the erotic nightmare are present, but we are well into the Roman imperial period and Christianity had already begun to spread.

This, then, is the evidence for the erotic nightmare complex in antiquity. There is no reason to suppose that such nightmares would necessarily have been systematically recorded, but this is really very little. I do not wish to argue that the ancient Greeks never experienced erotic nightmares. Clytemnestra's dream of a snake biting her breast (in Aeschylus' *Libation bearers*, 523–54), or the general imagery of Euripides' *Bacchae*, suggest the contrary. But the ancient Greeks did not apparently develop a discourse about the erotic nightmare. They did not create a nosological category for it, or any other sort of denominated cultural classification. Erotic dreams and nightmares were apparently treated as two distinct phenomena.

This situation changed with the coinage of the Latin word *incubus* (a demon that 'lies/sleeps upon' the dreamer) around the beginning of the Common Era. The first meaning of *incubus* was simply 'nightmare' and it may have been a straightforward attempt to translate the Greek *ephiates*. In rendering the idea of 'jumping upon' into Latin, however, the translators enmeshed it in a matrix of words that contained clear sexual connotations – for example, *concumbere* 'to sleep (with)' and *concubinus* 'concubine'. The erotic overtones in the word *incubus* would ramify in Christian conceptions of erotic dreams and nightmares, furnishing a good example of 'semantic contagion' (Hacking 1995a: 238). The coinage, several centuries later, of the term *succubus* to denote a demon that lay beneath the sleeper indicates how productive the erotic nightmare concept became. This proliferation of linguistic categorizations contrasts with the paucity of terms in Greek of the ancient period.

A marble relief (Fig. 2), datable only very generally to between the second century BCE and second century CE, encapsulates the uncertainties over the transition to the erotic nightmare during this same broad stretch of time.⁹ On the one hand, the relief reveals a public acceptance of erotic imagery characteristic of Greek antiquity. A sleeping shepherd, his staff and bagpipe cast down by his side, is straddled by a winged figure – the symbol of the dream or its content in ancient Greek iconography (Boardman & La Rocca 1978: 159). On the other hand, the female figure, with her wings, and webbed feet, might be interpreted as a type of demon, possibly a siren. Pleasant dream, or terrifying assault of the noonday demon? We cannot know for certain what this shepherd is experiencing.

Refinements in moderation

Before coming to Christianity I would like to consider the later life of the classical idea of moderation (*sophrosyne*) as it was developed in the medical tradition and in schools of philosophy such as Stoicism. For those practising

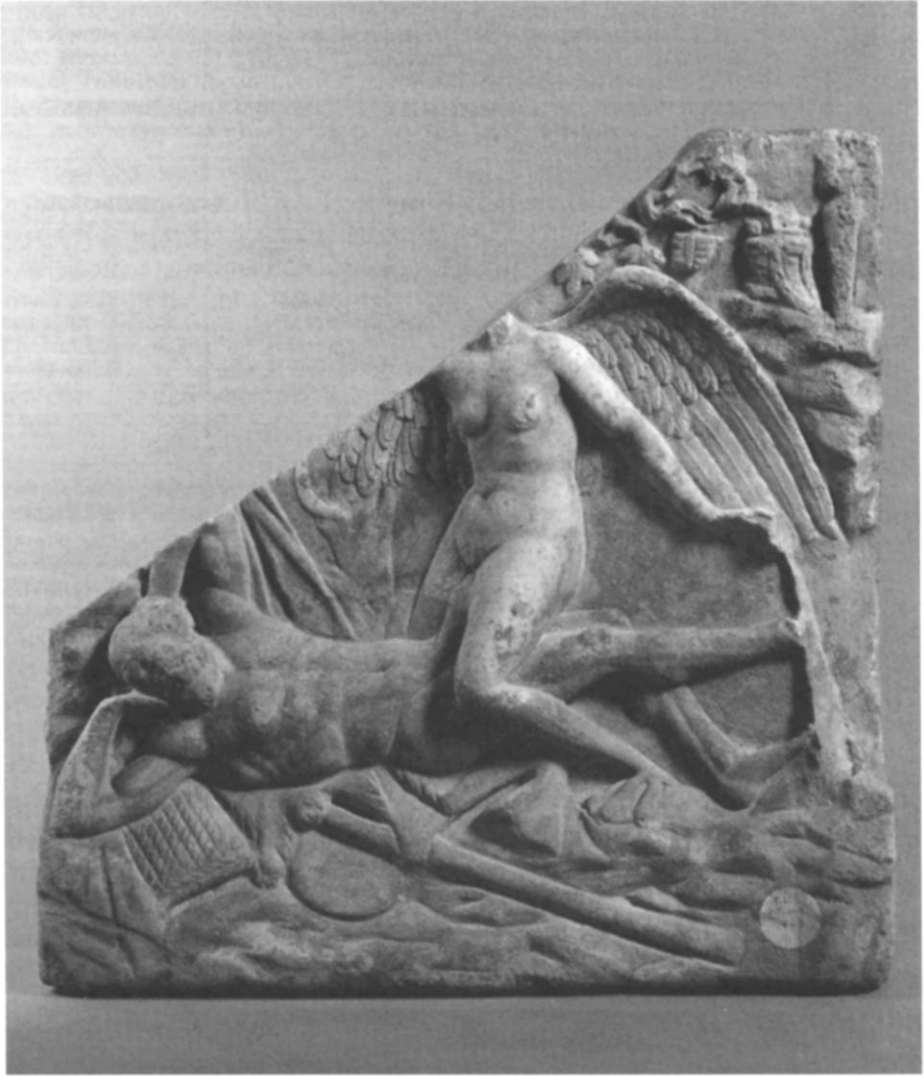


FIGURE 2. Old man and a siren. Fragment of a marble relief. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (08.34c). Reproduced with permission. ©Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. All rights reserved.

moderation sex was not problematic, so long as one kept the whole body in balance. Indulgence of the appetites was negotiable according to the age and gender of a person and the season of the year. Imbalances could be corrected by medically prescribed diet and exercise regimens. Sexual activity was only a concern if it took uncontrollable forms.

Some ancient doctors understood 'gonorrhoea' to be an involuntary emission of semen, and their term for this ailment, meaning literally 'the flow of seed', remains with us to this day. Nocturnal emissions were considered a variant of gonorrhoea, and in his survey of acute and chronic diseases Caelius Aurelianus contrasted the two.¹⁰ Gonorrhoea could occur any time, without

imagery, while nocturnal emissions occurred only during sleep and as a consequence of imagining sexual intercourse through 'unreal images' (*inanibus visis concubitum fingat*) (*On chronic diseases*, 5.71.82). Unlike gonorrhoea, nocturnal emissions did not necessarily constitute an illness. They simply resulted from desire, which could arise either through regular sexual practice or through prolonged continence.

Caelius Aurelianus devoted a separate chapter to the nightmare (*incubo*) and it is found in a completely different part of the treatise on chronic diseases, near to the sections on epilepsy and madness. Like the nocturnal emission, he considered it an illness only if it occurred chronically. He mentions the fact that '[s]ome are driven into such a state by unreal images that they imagine they see the attacker urging them to satisfy a shameful lust' (*On acute diseases*, 1.3.56 ff., my trans.). He thus described both the (erotic) nightmare and the erotic dream as physical responses to imaginings, but did not consider them necessarily to be signs of ill health.

The possibility that people might be able to respond differently to unreal figments of the imagination resonates with Stoic ideas developed during the last centuries BCE. Chrysippus emphasized the difference between impressions (*phantasiai*) resulting from the perception of real physical objects, and figments (*phantasmata*) produced by the imagination and occurring especially 'in people who are melancholic and mad' (Chrysippus, in Aëtius, *Placita*, 4.12.1–5; Long & Sedley 1987: 237). According to the Stoics, appetite, fear, distress, and pleasure comprised primary emotions – states not produced, but only suffered by the mind (Stobaeus 2.88, 8–90, 6; Long & Sedley 1987: 411). The term for emotion, '*pathos*' in Greek, could mean 'passion, affection' as well as a passive 'suffering'. Active control or passive submission to the emotions was precisely the issue. The early Stoics held that all passions were the results of judgements, and thus could be modified,¹¹ and their goal was to reach a state of *apatheia* (impassivity) in which one had eradicated uncontrolled emotional responses entirely, and thus eliminated passive suffering from one's life. If this were successfully achieved one could be happy, while those who neglected actively to confront the passions were – in latter-day terms – pathetic.

The mixed dream

Early Christian preachers such as Justin Martyr assimilated all of the pagan gods to 'demons' under the control of the Devil (Pagels 1988: 42). According to pagan cosmology, demons were not intrinsically evil, but they were biddable. The magical papyri of the last centuries BCE and first centuries CE reveal how people sought, through ritual incantations, to command demons to carry dreams to others. In one particular example, a man named Hermeias exhorts the demons to cause his unresponsive object of desire to lust for him, even when she is 'drinking, working, conversing, sleeping, dreaming, having an orgasm in her dreams, until she is scourged by you and comes desiring me'.¹²

Granted the prevailing association of demons with dreams in popular thought, Christians were counselled to distrust their sleeping visions as pos-

sibly satanic. Dreams thus came to be placed squarely on the negative side of a morally polarized universe. John Climacus, whose *Ladder of divine ascent* synthesized the ascetic tradition and became a handbook for monks, wrote: 'Devils often take on the appearance of angels of light or martyrs and they appear to us in sleep and talk to us ... And if we start to believe in the devils of our dreams, then we will be their playthings when we are also awake' (Climacus, *Ladder*, 3).

Beginning with Tertullian, the Church Fathers held that dreams could come variously from God, the Devil or the Soul (Tertullian, *On the soul*, 47). This tripartite scheme was apparently adapted from pre-Christian philosophical traditions. A look at the third-century BCE Alexandrian physician Herophilus' classification of dreams reveals that the erotic dream figured centrally in the transition from paganism to Christianity:

Herophilus says that some dreams are inspired by a god and arise by necessity, while others are natural ones and arise when the soul forms for itself an image (*eidolon*) of what is to its own advantage and of what will happen next; and still others are mixed (*synkramatikoi*) and arise spontaneously (*ek tou automatou*) according to the impact of the images, whenever we see what we wish, as happens in the case of those who in their sleep make love to the women they love.¹³

The interesting part of this scheme is the third, or mixed category. In so far as people see what they inwardly desire in these dreams, they seem identical to *enypnia* – the physical state dreams discussed earlier.¹⁴ Yet, this identification cannot be correct, since Herophilus pointedly differentiates them from the category of dreams produced exclusively by the soul. Mixed dreams have an exogenous element; they result from outside forces – the impact of images on the sleeper. These images happen to coincide with internal desires.

Herophilus' mixed dream, with its ready erotic exemplification, corresponded to the demonic dream in the Christian tripartite system (von Staden 1989: 310). Early ascetic theories of human nature and psychology reveal how monks understood demons to inspire erotic dreams. These accounts, presented by writers such as Evagrius and Cassian, possibly illuminate what Herophilus intended by the mixed dream. Certainly they take us deeper into the genesis of the erotic nightmare.

For Evagrius, who became a monk in Egypt around 382 CE, demons could manipulate an individual's previously acquired, emotionally charged memories to excite the passions, and set sinful thoughts in train. Thus evil thoughts were simultaneously exogenous and endogenous; demons activated what was already there. Evagrius conceded that disturbing thoughts would inevitably occur, even in the course of monastic life – such thoughts were part of the human condition. Sin set in only if one mentally entertained a thought for too long. As he expressed it: 'It is not up to us whether evil thoughts might trouble the soul or leave it in peace. What does depend on us is whether they linger or not, and whether they set the passions in motion or not' (*Praktikos*, 6). The goal was inner stillness, which Evagrius referred to by the familiar Stoic term, *apatheia* (Guillaumont 1971: 98 ff.).

Evagrius named eight primary demons, the model for what would become the 'seven deadly sins' in Western Christianity. Each of these demons normally

attacked only one of the two vulnerable parts of the soul, the high-spirited or the sensual. Predictably, the demon of fornication (*porneia*) attacked the sensual part of the soul. According to Evagrius it

compels one to desire 'remarkable' bodies; it violently attacks those living in abstinence in order to cause them to quit, convinced they will amount to nothing. And, soiling the soul, it inclines it to 'those acts' [obscene acts]. It causes monks to speak and hear things, as if some object were visible and present (*Praktikos*, 8).

As this passage shows, the battle with demons spilled over into the realm of dreams and (other) hallucinations where the power of the will to resist demons was weakest. Although demons could provoke erotic dreams and nightmares, these were normally two distinct types of dream (*Praktikos*, 21, 22, 54). The phenomenon of an erotic nightmare required a fusion of demonic domains that contravened the normal division. In such dreams the sensual part of the soul joined forces with the irascible to overwhelm the intellect. It was the opposite of Plato's ideal scenario of self-mastery where the intellect and the high spirits co-operated to overpower the appetitive part. In Evagrius' psychology the erotic nightmare was not excluded but rather given a powerful theorization. It was the exception that confirmed the rule.¹⁵ The erotic dream was a mixed dream then, not only because external demons aroused internal thoughts, but also because it simultaneously affected the two parts of the soul.

If dreams were, indeed, controllable, then anyone who experienced an erotic dream was potentially culpable. John Cassian excused nocturnal emissions if they occurred to someone with a full stomach (Cassian, *Conferences*, 12.2). In such cases they were a simple physical fact of the body, and he allowed that it was 'natural' for emissions to occur as often as every two months, although three times a year was a more acceptable frequency (Cassian, *Institutions*, 6.20; *Conferences*, 2.23).

The sinfulness of erotic dreams and nocturnal emissions continued to be a topic of debate in ascetic 'anthropology' – as patristic theories of human nature and psychology are sometimes known – throughout the Middle Ages in both the Eastern and Western Churches (Elliott 1999; Fögen 1998). Excusable nocturnal emissions became sinful erotic dreams if one entertained them, allowed them to linger, and, most importantly, if one consented to them (Elliott 1999: 20). The way to fight the images and sensations of the mixed dream was to sever them with the knife of the will, withholding assent so that externally instigated images did not connect with bodily passions. Nocturnal emissions unaccompanied by visual imagery indicated spiritual progress (Evagrius, *Praktikos*, 55; Angelidi forthcoming).

From the monastery to the world

The account developed to this point presents the views of learned texts representing the ideas and practices of elite, free men in antiquity and a narrow subsection of monks and high clerics in the early Christian period. Their practices of self-cultivation may not have been shared by very many of their contemporaries, but their influence on subsequent generations has been enormous. If the ancient Greek ethic of self-moderation was explicitly elitist,

the Christian ethic became increasingly unified in conception and intended for all – men and women, young and old alike. I turn now to consider how the ascetically influenced Christian ethic of self diffused to the population at large and how the Christian laity was conditioned to view the erotic dream as dangerous and nightmarish.

In popular vocabulary the word *incubus*, as we saw, gave people a ready label for the erotic nightmare.¹⁶ In the wake of Augustine's writings about concupiscence and original sin, the general term for demonic interference in a dream, '*inlusio*' (illusion), came to have automatically erotic overtones in succeeding generations (Elliott 1999: 20). Likewise, the term '*phantasma*', which Aristotle had used interchangeably with *phantasia* to mean a 'mental perception, image, or representation', came to mean a distorted – usually by demons – mental representation (Schmitt 1999: 278). If normal sensory perceptions were like water that flowed through a person, then memories could be likened to water that was stored and which remained clear. *Phantasmata*, on the other hand, were like stagnant water that had become cloudy, rank, and overgrown with algae.

How did these developments affect popular views of these matters? Certainly the laity were not expected to live up to the ascetic standards of the monks – this would have meant the extinction of Christian society – nor were they necessarily concerned by, or even able to comprehend, the high-flown arguments of theology. People in the world no doubt continued to have extra-marital sexual relations, dreams, erotic dreams, nocturnal emissions, and nightmares. But the Church did make attempts to regulate these phenomena. Early penitential books such as the Irish penitential of Cummean, composed in the seventh century after the model of Cassian's rules for monks, represented one such effort. This penitential is notable for its comprehensive distinctions among erotic deeds and thoughts.

He who merely desires in his mind to commit fornication, but is not able, shall do penance for one year ... He who is willingly polluted during sleep, shall rise and sing nine psalms in order, kneeling ... He who desires to sin during sleep, or is unintentionally polluted, fifteen psalms; he who sins but is not polluted, twenty-four (Bieler 1963: 115; Asad 1993: 101).

The dissemination of prayer formulas comprised another area for ascetic influence on the development of mainstream Christianity. The expanding practice of bedtime prayers is of particular interest here (Le Goff 1988: 225). Early in the fifth century CE, Prudentius composed a hymn before sleep that included the following lines: 'If a man's stains of guilty conduct are few and far between, him the clear and flashing light teaches secret things; but he who has polluted and befouled his heart with sins is the sport of many a fear and sees frightful visions' (*Daily round* 6.49). And it concluded with the following exorcistic entreaty: 'The cross drives out every sin; before the cross darkness flees away; consecrated with this sign, the spirit cannot be unquiet. Away, away with the monstrosities of rambling dreams! Away with the deceiver and his persistent guile!' (*Daily round* 6.133).

Between the fifth and thirteenth centuries, the Church's mode of eliciting and forgiving lay sins altered. Initially, there was the brutally demanding office

of penance in which the penitent was excluded from the worshipping community (Asad 1993: 100). This person's sins and their on-going punishment were socially apparent. The practice of individual, private confession to a cleric gradually replaced penance until the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), when it was made mandatory for all. Later, the Protestants identified compulsory confession to lascivious clerics as a practice that increased rather than decreased general sexual excitation. In the reformed Church confession would have no place. Each individual would be responsible for his or her own actions in the face of God. This was not an easy option, but rather the beginning of an in-worldly asceticism. In Weber's famous formulation, asceticism 'now ... strode into the market-place of life, slammed the door of the monastery behind it, and undertook to penetrate just that daily routine of life with its methodicalness, to fashion it into a life in the world, but neither of nor for this world' (1991 [1904-5]: 154).

Just as the new order of the Protestant and Catholic Reformations got underway in the sixteenth century, so, too, did the witch-hunts. The judicial system became a means to contravene the new space of private conscience that the reformers had begun to stake out. Officials asserted greater power than ever to interrogate individuals about their inner thoughts, convictions, and fantasies. These witch trials frequently involved accusations that men and women attended sabbaths at which they had sex with the Devil. The witch-hunting manuals developed an elaborate picture of *incubi* that attacked women and *succubi* that copulated with men. According to the *Malleus maleficarum* (Kramer & Sprenger 1970 [1486]: 41 ff.), such erotic episodes occurred more frequently to women since they were more feeble, credulous, and less self-controlled than men.

These various developments continue the story of erotic dreams and self-control begun in antiquity, a contention that emerges more clearly if we closely consider the tenth-century *Canon episcopi* (Lea 1939: 38; Russell 1972: 292). This text urged priests to eradicate demonic sorcery from their parishes. It also alerted clerics that some women, 'seduced by illusions and phantasms of demons (*daemonum illusionibus et phantasmatis seductae*), believe themselves, in the hours of night, to ride upon certain beasts with Diana, the goddess of the pagans' (Lea 1939: 178). In such cases, priests were instructed to teach that these beliefs were false delusions of the Devil. The *Canon episcopi* conceded that women did undergo demonic molestation but only 'in their spirits' (*cum solus eius spiritus*). The problem, from the Church's point of view, was the exuberant folk credulity aroused by these tales, and the laity's apparent inability to distinguish imagined from real experiences. Thus the *Canon episcopi* emphasized that

[w]hile the spirit alone endures this [demonic manipulation], the faithless mind thinks these things happen not in the spirit, but in the body. Who is there that is not led out of himself in dreams and nocturnal vision, and sees much when sleeping that he has never seen when waking? Who is so stupid and foolish as to think that all these things which are only done in spirit happen in the body ... (Lea 1939: 179).

Uncertainty over 'the imaginal'¹⁷ thus lay at the centre of European witchcraft.

Renaissance theologians had to decide whether witches' transformations, flights, and sabbaths were merely dreams, and if so, whether the individuals

involved none the less merited prosecution for believing them. The issues begin to look very much like those posed by the desert Fathers. The difference between the first ascetics and the laity during the witch craze was that earlier a (male) individual had largely been left to monitor his own spiritual failures. Later (male) clerics decided this matter on behalf of (female) individuals. Torture and capital punishment replaced internally imposed humility and renewed ascetic effort as responses to erotic dreams.

The matter of the reality of witchcraft, and the responsibility for dream visions, was never uniformly decided throughout the main period of witch-hunting, that is, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Carlo Ginzburg (1983) reveals how the authorities resolutely ignored statements by Friulian villagers that they fought demons 'in the spirit', while their bodies were at home, asleep. The accused called themselves *benandanti* (good-doers) and imagined that their practices were fundamentally Christian. Under the duress of long interrogation, however, the *benandanti* changed their stories and confessed that they had consorted with demons 'for real'.

The *benandanti* told mainly of fighting against malevolent forces in order to safeguard the community's harvest, and it is possible that many 'witches' stories' were, likewise, not particularly sexual. The inquiring authorities, however, assumed that witchcraft must involve sexual acts with the Devil and thus they pushed the stories in that direction through questioning. Judges showed a particular interest in the issue of whether the intercourse with the devil was voluntary or forced, frightening or pleasurable (Kramer & Sprenger 1970 [1486]: 114; Lancre 1982 [1613]: 200-1). Whether or not actual erotic nightmares or erotic dreams had occurred to the accused, there was a likelihood that erotic nightmare scenarios would occupy a conspicuous place in the final confession.

Freud once rhetorically asked, 'Why are [the witches'] confessions under torture so like the communications made by my patients in psychic treatment?' (Ginzburg 1990: 150; Roper 1994: 245). The answer would seem to lie in the shared conviction in the importance of an underlying libidinal impulse. This sexual *Urszene* could be uncovered through confession, although both psychoanalysts and inquisitors faced a besetting uncertainty as to whether these received confessions were truth or fantasy (Ginzburg 1990: 151).

In this section I have retrained attention on the persistent factor of dreams, particularly demonically distorted dreams (*phantasmata*), at the heart of the European witchcraft phenomenon. My contention is that dreams, erotic dreams, nightmares, and erotic nightmares all occasionally figured in witchcraft cases. The effect of the threatening manuals for prosecutors, and of the prosecutions themselves, was to funnel even innocuous dreams into an erotic nightmare formulation, thereby further defining and maximally diffusing a category of experience that first arose in the context of early Christian asceticism.

Philosophers and doctors

After a series of dream visions in 1619 convinced him to pursue philosophy as a vocation, Descartes returned to dreams to illustrate the proof of existence in his *Meditations on first philosophy* (1984 [1641]). In the first two *Meditations*

he posed the radical question: 'What if I do not exist at all, but am, rather, the figment of a dream?' He replied that, whereas in a dream he could not possess awareness that he was thinking, in a normal state of consciousness he could possess such an awareness. Meta-cognition thus established the grounds of reality as opposed to fantasy. Hobbes also assumed this distinction in contending that demons were 'but idols or Phantasmes of the brain, without real nature of their own distinct from human fancy' (Hobbes 1957 [1651]: 398; chap. 44; see also 423, 432; chap. 45). Although this view had been expressed already in the *Canon episcopi*, it increasingly became a fundamental supposition in science and philosophy.

Medical doctors also produced numerous exclusively physical explanations for dream phenomena. Beginning with Aristotle, melancholics had never ceased to be prime candidates for disturbed dreams. Now sceptical doctors like Weyer (1991 [1583]: 232) attributed *incubus* experiences to 'phlegm and melancholia', while Burton linked it to eating 'black meat' such as hare and venison in his *Anatomy of melancholy* (1927 [1620]: 190). In one case, a woman's claim to have borne the devil's baby was medically diagnosed as a case of chronic constipation and its final relief (Lea 1939: 1470).

Between 1650 and 1850 no fewer than twenty-five tracts were written about the nightmare by doctors and scholars (Jones 1971 [1931]: 14). In this period, the term '*incubus*' went from denoting an independent demonic being to denoting an objective set of physical conditions. Certainly the word 'nightmare' also began to lose vital reference to the supernatural 'mare' spirit contained in its etymology. Physical and medical explanations naturalized both the erotic dream and the nightmare, although there was still sporadic support for the idea that external spirits produced dreams.¹⁸

The amalgamation of erotic dreams and nightmares which had begun in the first centuries CE now started to come apart. Medical tracts from the post-witchcraft period considered the nightmare to be characterized primarily by dread and a feeling of suffocation. Erotic sensations might accompany this, but they were marginal. A Royal Navy doctor named Waller mentioned 'priapism' as a symptom of the nightmare in a very brief Latin passage, as if the subject were embarrassing (1816: 25). His assertion that males suffer nightmares more frequently than females indicated the appropriation of '*incubus*' as a nosological category unfettered by Church misogyny. Like Waller, MacNish (1830: 73, 124 ff.) also focused on the feature of sleep paralysis as characteristic of the nightmare and speculated on asthma, angina, and indigestion as possible causes. Erotic dreams came to be placed in a separate category centring on masturbation, the subject of two treatises in 1760 (Jaccard 1975: 11). Erotic dreams involved a form of mental masturbation, *delectatio morosa*, and became a subject for the emergent discipline of sexology (Ellis 1936 [1898]; Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin 1948).

This is not to suggest that people no longer experienced erotic nightmares. Just like the ancient Greeks in the period preceding the formulation of the erotic nightmare complex, people in the Enlightenment period did, occasionally, feel 'Desire with loathing strangely mixed'.¹⁹ Without the buttress of official belief in witchcraft, however, the complex began to disintegrate into two separate experiences. Without a background of shared cultural concepts, and lacking a concise vocabulary to express the synthetic combination, the

erotic nightmare experience entered into a phase of 'hypocognition' (Levy 1984: 227). Levy's term enables us to avoid the Whorfian assumption that lack of a lexeme indicates a corresponding lack of appreciation or perception of a given object. The basic sensations continued to be subjectively felt but could not easily be expressed.

Undoubtedly there was now an element of repression (in the psychoanalytic sense) behind the hypocognition of the erotic nightmare. Its discursive disappearance reflected an unwillingness, and ultimately an inability, to bring the phenomenon to conscious awareness. This tense, repressive silence was qualitatively different from the silence around the erotic nightmare in classical Greek antiquity. A millennium and a half of Christian teaching had rendered the erotic nightmare problematic, even though science had momentarily dissolved it.

In the Victorian period, public morality increasingly suppressed the representation of the erotic. The Obscene Publications Act of 1857 indexes this sense of public decorum, as does the coinage of the term 'pornography' from venerable ancient Greek roots.²⁰ Indeed, erotic artworks from the ancient world, particularly the recently excavated frescoes from Pompei, were among the factors provoking these public reactions. The offending penchants of the ancients were accommodated by the foundation of secret museums such as the British Museum's 'Secretum', established in 1865, or the 'Gabinetto degli osceni' created earlier at the Museo Borbonico in Naples (Kendrick 1987: 11). Erotic dreams were similarly relegated to their own secretum.

Malinowski's erotic nightmare

Malinowski's diaries, kept during his fieldwork between 1914 and 1918, and never meant for publication, afford a rare perspective on the male management of desire during the immediately post-Victorian period. By day he resisted the attractive local girls, while under the mosquito netting at night he recollected past relationships with women in Europe and Australia.²¹ The diary chronicles the near-penitential burden which he undertook in order to realize his ambitions as an anthropologist. Malinowski coped with thoughts that he variously terms 'impure', 'lecherous', 'sensual', or 'erotic' and reconciled himself to the 'metaphysical regret' that 'You'll never fuck them all' (1967: 114; Torgovnick 1990: 227). He followed a regime of Swedish gymnastics, dosed himself with arsenic and quinine, and swore off reading novels, realizing that

[p]urity in deeds depends on purity of thought, and I resolve to watch myself right down to the deepest instincts ... I can repress occasional violent whoring impulses by realizing that it would get me nowhere, that even if I possessed women under these conditions, I would merely be sloshing in the mud. The most important thing is to have a strong aversion for sloshing in the mud (onanism, whoring, etc.). And to seek out everything that builds up such an aversion (1967: 181).

Malinowski, of course, established extended fieldwork as a rite of passage on the way to achieving full status as a social anthropologist. Such fieldwork involves combating the same deadly sins such as despondency, self-regard, and

sensuality which had been identified by the early Christian ascetics. The move off the verandah might just as well have been a move into the desert.²² Anthropologists who could resist the demons of temptation emerged transfigured as professionals; they achieved an 'ultimate mastery of things' (Malinowski 1967: 175).

Malinowski had abandoned Catholicism at an early age. His asceticism did not grow out of any active religious faith on his part, although it can, perhaps, be traced back via Weber's in-worldly asceticism to early Christian monasticism. A stronger case can be made for regarding psychoanalysis as the continuation of religious confession in a deconsecrated, medical format. Psychoanalysis adapted the formalized Catholic rite and applied it to the deepened idea of inner conscience that Protestantism had fostered (Foucault 1978: 68; Webster 1995: 350). The analyst prompted the patient to search his or her memory for pathogenic secrets the disclosure of which led to cathartic healing. A secular therapy, psychoanalysis fitted the needs of a secularizing educated middle class. When Malinowski first read Freud as a teenager it is reported that 'he felt that he was a complete case of the Oedipus situation' (Wayne 1985: 532). The following dream, recorded on 8 June 1918, near the end of his last stint of fieldwork, further reveals the degree to which he had internalized Freud's categories:

This morning I woke early (I did not sleep very well and had two horrid ... dreams). In the first one, which was of a Freudian type, feeling of sinfulness, evil, something loathsome, combined with lust – repulsive and frightening. What does it come from? And this feeling of wickedness, which rises to the surface (1967: 290, ellipsis indicates 'extremely intimate observations' omitted by the editor).

This dream occurred just before the news of his mother's death reached him in the Trobriands, and just as he was deciding definitively to drop Nina Stirling (NS) and become engaged to Elsie Masson (ERM). Earlier he explicitly (1967: 245) associated his love for ERM with 'feelings of child for mother (*vide* Freud's theory)', and he had dreamt that his mother reproached him for not marrying NS (1967: 202). These two clues might support an interpretation of this dream along the orthodox psychoanalytic lines laid out by Jones – an erotic nightmare produced by the repression of incest desires. Malinowski himself accepted it as a dream of the 'Freudian type', but I think an alternative interpretation is possible.

Whereas Jones would emphasize unconscious phantasy and its repression in the production of this nightmare, I would argue that it resulted more straightforwardly from conscious fantasy and its suppression.²³ It is continuous with Malinowski's sensuous daytime thoughts, his commitment to sexual abstinence out of loyalty to his fiancée(s), and his repeated self-excoriations for having such thoughts at all. His erotic nightmare is the result of his own auto-terrorization in the cause of ambitious self-making. The power of this self-making impulsion is apparent already in his next diary entry, recorded some two weeks later. Malinowski reports that he is hard at work, 'almost indifferent in relation to grief'. Furthermore: 'external ambitions keep crawling over me like lice. *F*[ellow of the]. *R*[oyal]. *S*[ociety]. – *C*[ompanion of the]. *S*[tar of]. *I*[ndia]. – *Sir*'. He also contemplates his entry in *Who's who* (1967: 291).

Self-making or repression?

Dreams appear to be fundamentally involuntary events – they just occur. Like the death of a parent, or first orgasm, they expose the individual to powerful novelties that must somehow be accommodated in the psyche and personality. The psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok (1994) have termed this transformation of the self in the face of striking internal and external events ‘introjection’. Their usage departs from the traditional psychoanalytic sense of this term as the reinternalization of something that was initially within the psyche but subsequently projected outside it (Crapanzano 1977: 12). Abraham and Torok relativize repression as but one form of disturbance in the process of introjection. They emphasize, as I also contend, that these disturbances do not necessarily arise from childhood experiences, or from inherited instincts. They may result directly from current individual life situations (Rand 1994: 11).

Malinowski’s diaries, like the comprehensively analysed inner desires of the early monastics, reveal conscious strategies for dealing with consciously perceived desires and images. Signs of sexuality are suppressed but, unlike repression, this is a voluntary privation on the way to what is perceived as a more important undertaking – the making of the self according to a chosen ‘aesthetic’ (Foucault 1985: 253). All self-making involves selective suppression and this volition can, evidently, carry over into dreams. Just as the everyday thoughts and actions of Plato’s democrat made for calm dreams, so Malinowski’s cultivation of ‘pure thoughts’ was also a means of preventing unwanted lewd eruptions in fantasies or dreams. His strategy was entirely consistent with the teachings of the high Victorian doctor William Acton that ‘if [a] man has allowed his thoughts during the day to rest upon libidinous subjects, he finds his mind at night full of lascivious dreams’ (Marcus 1966: 24). In such cases the principles of one’s waking life personality are applied during sleep; the action of suppression carries over into dreams.

The history that I have presented above uncovers a perennial supposition that the phenomenological dream could be altered by force of will and self-preparation. Christian ascetic writers, for example, explicitly extended Stoic techniques for judging waking perceptions to the monitoring of one’s reactions to images in sleep. Bedtime prayers against demonic dreams presented another attempt to suffuse sleep with the force of will. And the penitential of Cummean, which assigned different penances to someone who ‘desires to sin during sleep’ and someone who ‘is willingly polluted during sleep’ (Bieler 1963: 7), evidently assumed that dream contents were subject to volition.

Aristotle, as we saw, considered consciousness during dreams a rarity and, until recently, most dream researchers shared this view. Standard definitions of the dream (Hadfield 1954: 17; Rycroft 1981: 7) followed Descartes in considering it to occur independently of, and uncontaminated by, conscious will. Lucid, or conscious, dreaming, where people achieve consciousness in the dream, has thus usually been explained as a phenomenon of waking (Rechtschaffen 1978: 100).

In the last twenty years, this consensus has been shaken not only by dream laboratory demonstrations of lucidity (LaBerge 1985), but also by the apparent success of manuals and workshops that teach people how to gain

consciousness in their dreams (e.g. LaBerge & Rheingold 1990). Evidently, then, dreams can be subject to intentional designs, even at the deep level of their first realization. The techniques for achieving lucidity are neither mysterious nor excessively demanding. Many report their first lucid dream experiences after merely learning about the idea (Green & McCreery 1994: 114).

The effect of lucid dreaming in the service of achieving a vision of self offers a plausible mechanism by which erotic dreams could go from non-nightmares to nightmares and back again over the last two and a half millennia. In *The interpretation of dreams*, Freud (1953 [1900]: 572) remarked that one good feature of conscious dreaming was that it allowed one to alter disturbing dreams while they were still in process. If a dream led one into a sexually stimulating situation, he suggested, the dreamer 'can think to himself, "I won't go on with this dream any further and exhaust myself with an emission; I'll hold back for a real situation instead."' A negative perception of erotic dream thoughts thus leads to their foreclosure. In the ascetic 'anthropology' of the early Church, erotic 'thoughts' (*logismoi*) were held to be demon-inspired. Excluding them thus often took the form of a dramatic battle against demons. The juxtaposition of conscious will and non-consciously controlled desires in these dreams furnishes yet another reason for considering them 'mixed' dreams.

Of course, the same initial erotic dream could take a completely different turn depending on the current self-making project of the person who has it. Patricia Garfield, the author of books entitled *Creative dreaming* and *Pathway to ecstasy* (1974; 1979), reported that about two-thirds of her lucid dreams had sexual content, and about half culminated in orgasm. Her intentional cultivation of these climactic conclusions represents a project of self-fulfilment exactly the converse of those encouraged by early ascetic practice, Victorian precepts, or the immediate post-Victorian inner worlds of Malinowski and Freud.

One further illustration of the unproblematic cultivation of erotic dreams is the manufacture and use of statues representing 'otherworld mates' by the Baule of Côte d'Ivoire (Ravenhill 1996). Both men and women can commission the carving of these small statues and a night of the week is set aside when one sleeps alone in order to have dream encounters, including erotic experiences, with these idealized otherworld beings. The bodies of the females are accentuated, while the clothing, indicating status, of the male statues is more emphasized (Figs. 3, 4). This reveals the fantasy features most appealing to male and female dreamers respectively. These dream experiences with otherworld mates apparently serve as a complement to, and at the same time a release from, one's real life partner and the normal social world. The Baule example provides one last illustration of how dreams may be continuous with, and expand upon, current waking fantasies of the self. This is a dimension that reliance on the psychoanalytic term 'repression', which emphasizes dreams as distorted products of a discontinuous unconscious, might cause one to miss.

Conclusion: viral history

From the rise of Christian asceticism until the Enlightenment, the erotic nightmare complex, the incubus to give it its salient indigenous term, lay upon

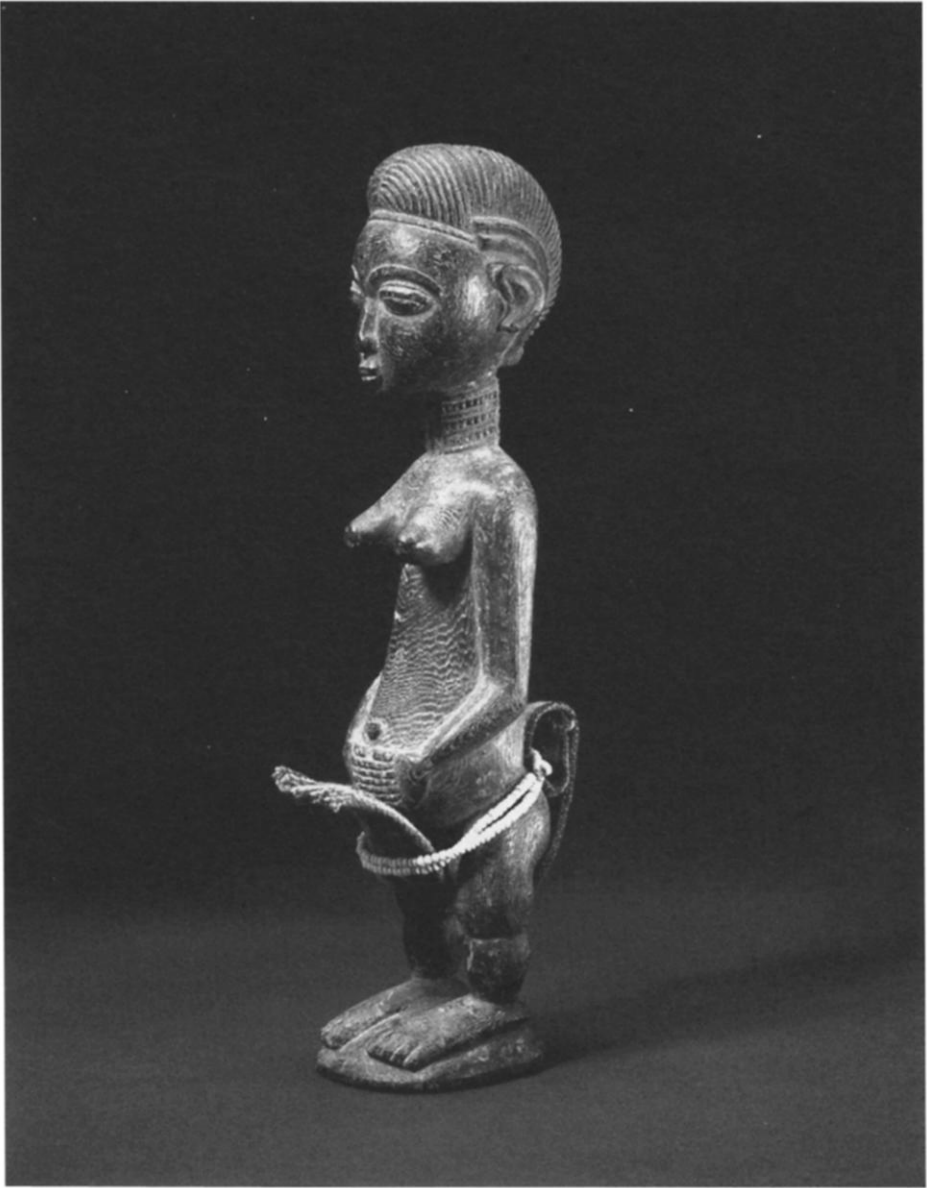


FIGURE 3. Statue of an otherworld woman (c. 1920). Courtesy of the Fowler Museum of Cultural History, UCLA (Ravenhill 1996: 49).

the brain of Western societies. Naked evidence of one's own lust posed a problem and the introjection of erotic dream experiences was consequently fraught. The popular cultivation of orgasmic dreams today would seem to suggest the end of the erotic nightmare, but the matter is not so simple. Recent developments suggest that the erotic nightmare might be headed for a more mainstream revival. In order to account for this I must take one brief step backward before going forward.

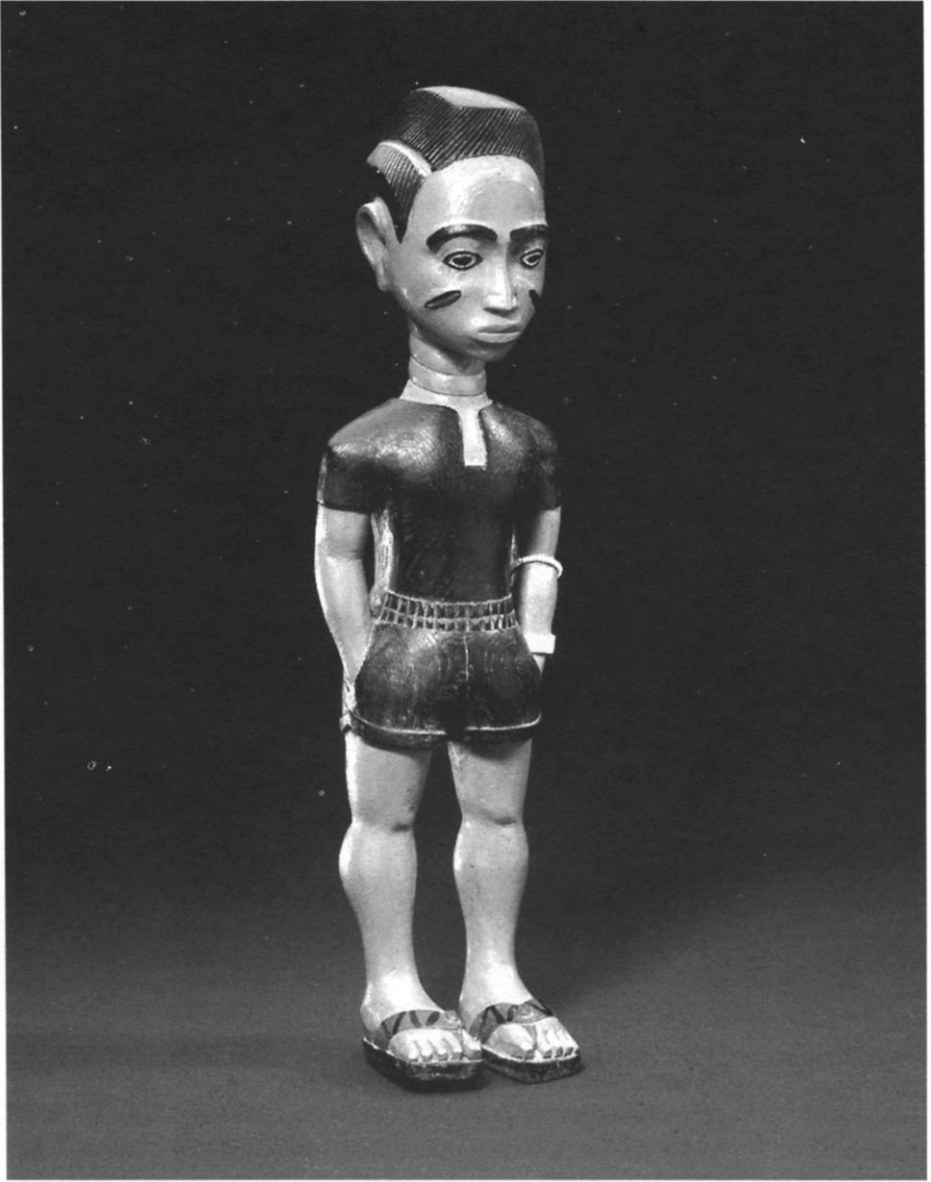


FIGURE 4. Statue of an otherworld man (c. 1965). Courtesy of the Fowler Museum of Cultural History, UCLA (Ravenhill 1996: 47).

At the moment when science and philosophy had almost completely subdued the animate, demonic nightmare, the romantics revitalized it in a sort of backlash against the tyranny of reason. On holiday in Switzerland, a select company that included Lord Byron, his personal physician John Polidori, Percy Shelley, and his soon-to-be wife Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin regularly gathered around the fireplace. Confinement by unseasonably cold weather and perpetual rainstorms brought boredom, which they countered by reading

aloud from a volume of German folktales in French translation. They then turned their energies to composing their own horror stories. Byron's tale about a vampire ('A fragment', 1816), Polidori's appropriation of it (*The vampyre*, 1819) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) all arose from this contest. Only eighteen years old at the time, Mary Shelley could not think up an idea until one night she had a waking dream, which she described in her introduction to the 1831 reissue of *Frankenstein* (Shelley 1993: 196). In this dream she saw Dr Frankenstein bringing his monster to life. Another famous horror story of the nineteenth century, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, also took form in a dream. Stoker's diaries reveal that his idea for this novel derived from an actual nightmare in which he envisioned a girl trying to kiss him, not on the lips, but on the neck (Frayling 1996: 68).

Conceptions of the erotic nightmare gained power and unity in the genre of gothic horror fiction and through Fuseli's famous painting, which also drew on his personal dream experiences.²⁴ In time these works of art and fiction were transmuted into twentieth-century films with an even wider diffusion. Horror stories and films preserve precisely the spellbinding, terrifying 'grip' often felt in the erotic nightmare (Todorov 1973: 25, 32). Gothic horror thus re-poses the problem of the imaginal from the opposite direction of the dream. In it the fictional converts into a personally felt emotional experience, while in the case of nightmares one struggles to classify a personal emotional experience as fiction ('It was *only* a dream'). The felt phenomenology of the medieval incubus thus evidently jumped from the category of personal dream into the realm of fiction just as it began to lose credence as a specific kind of dream experience in educated circles.

The process of dismembering the erotic nightmare seems to have been largely completed by the late twentieth century. The psychiatrist Mack (1970: vii, 224) doubted that nightmares had any direct relation to eroticism and he rejected Jones's repression of incest aetiology as too narrow (Hufford 1982: 130). A large sample of nightmares collected in the Boston area did not reveal any sexual content (Hartmann 1984: 61). The term incubus itself was retained by Broughton (1970) to refer to night terrors occurring in NREM deep sleep, but the broad public seems to have grown completely unfamiliar with the term (Jarcho 1980: 253). In 1996 Reebok launched a women's training-shoe named 'Incubus' and it was a full year, and over 50,000 unit sales later, before anyone pointed out that the incubus was a demon that molested women in their sleep.

It appears, however, that having migrated into fictional genres, many of the elements of the erotic nightmare have now begun to re-enter the domain of non-fictional human experiences in accounts of alien abduction. What began in the 1940s as periodic sightings of 'flying saucers' has developed into an increasing number of more detailed reports of closer encounters with aliens. The very first alien abduction incident gives an idea of this emergent category of experience. In 1957 a twenty-three-year-old Brazilian named Antonio Villas-Boas was forcibly taken aboard a UFO by five aliens. There, according to his account (Matheson 1998: 40 ff.), he was drenched in a strange viscous liquid and a blood sample was taken from his chin before he had sexual intercourse with one of the aliens. He described her as attractive but emitting grunting noises that left him with a 'disagreeable impression',

as if he had been with an 'animal' (Matheson 1998: 43). Many further abductions have since been reported and they often begin with the victims in bed, perhaps asleep, when a feeling of paralysis comes over them (Bryan 1996: 18).

Numerous abductees believe that they might be dreaming the events, or that they occur in an intermediate phase between fantasy and normal consciousness. The researchers often discount these opinions and treat the events as real, much as the inquisitors did during witch accusations. These abduction accounts are very various, but they frequently involve a feeling of dread, terror, and paralysis. Clinical invasions of one's reproductive system are frequently accompanied by mixed feelings of pleasure and horror. Women, who constitute the majority of abductees, report that the aliens perform something called 'mindscan' on them, which produces feelings of love for the aliens and the wish to submit to them. Sometimes the aliens induce rapid sexual arousal, even orgasm, although victims report this as an unpleasant experience (Jacobs 1992: 106).

The example of alien abductions carries my account up to the present, and probably some distance into the future. It dispels any urge to consider the history of erotic dreams as a progressive mastering of the frightening imagery modulating the experience of sexual desire. Although alien abduction accounts resemble the Genesis 6 story of the union of mortal women with the sons of God (also known as the 'Watchers'), or the operation of medieval *incubi* and *succubi*, this history does not document a steady continuity for the erotic nightmare. The dream, or nightmare, presents an attractive model for historical process because it conveys the idea of compulsion. One is borne along, gently in a dream, brutally in a nightmare, just as one is carried along in the stream of historical events, unable to step outside it. Yet this image does not apply in this case precisely because of the ruptures in the discursive appearance of the erotic nightmare. Nor does it seem satisfactory to label its periodic re-emergence as 'cyclical'. This image of mechanical regularity is too thin and unilluminating. What needs to be captured in the case of erotic nightmares is the manner in which a particular bundle of emotions and sensations has been preserved even through transformations of genre.

The erotic nightmare has mutated and 'wandered' because, as Hacking suggests (1995b), social classifications of human experience are bound to stimulate reactions in the people so classified. They may embrace the description of their experience, or hyper-conform to it; but even if they reject it, they often subsequently reinvent it with a new name (Hacking 1995b: 374). The migration and mutation of the erotic nightmare across genres resembles the history of a virus that passes back and forth between species, even undergoing long periods of latency, before bursting out again. Mary Shelley captured this process of infection when, awakening from her dream, she immediately realized its potential for the ghost story she had been trying to compose. "I have found it! What terrified me will terrify others; and I need only describe the spectre which had haunted my midnight pillow" (1993: 196). Precisely this sort of transmission across social contexts (for instance, from medieval folk-story to witch prosecutor's manual, to gothic novel or psychoanalytic theory) seems to have ensured the erotic nightmare's survival.

As Lévi-Strauss (1963: 217) asserted in the case of retellings of myths, subsequent narrations of the erotic nightmare (no matter how analytic) become further bearers of it.

The idea of a viral history is purely analogical; the incubus may be rhetorically and physically contagious, but it is not a pathogen like HIV. This study of the erotic nightmare complex does, however, supplement Sperber's (1985) 'epidemiology of representations' by calling attention to the role of feelings and emotions in the spread of ideas. The diachronic transmission of the erotic nightmare depended perhaps more on the transfer of a powerful bundle of affect than on the reception of cognitive ideas. Representations of the erotic nightmare have indeed transformed as they went from individual minds to collectively available media and back again, as Sperber envisaged (1985: 75). Distortions in transmission do not, however, account for the full dynamic of the erotic nightmare. Clearly the various internal rules of specific domains of thought (asceticism, medicine, philosophy, fiction, psychiatry) acted as crucibles of cultural historical change. Early Christian ascetics sought to eliminate erotic dreams as part of a quest for spiritual perfection. Renaissance inquisitors multiplied the number of erotic nightmare scenarios by flushing out, or imputing, such dreams in order to secure convictions. Post-Enlightenment doctors broke erotic dreams and nightmares into discrete constituent units in order to treat them therapeutically. And the stories of present-day abductees proliferate and gain added complexity as they meet with enormous public interest and occasional monetary reward. Transfer from one to another social context has thus subjected the erotic nightmare to radical yet highly unco-ordinated conceptual escalations or contractions. This account alerts us that the erotic nightmare may currently still exist, and also that an historical approach is necessary in order to locate it.

NOTES

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Passages from classical and patristic authors are cited by internal textual division, so that the passage may be located in any edition or translation of the work.

¹ Foucault had long planned a fourth volume in his *History of sexuality*. Provisionally titled *The confessions of the flesh*, it would have dealt centrally with early Christian asceticism.

² Johnson (1998) represents an exception.

³ Freud already distinguished conscious suppression (*Unterdrückung*) from unconscious repression (*Verdrängung*) in *The interpretation of dreams* (1953 [1900]: 606-7; Laplanche & Pontalis 1973: 438).

⁴ For an overview of these and other 'culture-bound syndromes', see Simons and Hughes (1985), who also include sleep paralysis (the classic nightmare) as one of the syndromes.

⁵ Freud had a reproduction of Fuseli's *The nightmare* hanging in his consulting room at Berggasse 19 (Frayling 1996: 10). The picture was a gift from Ernest Jones, who used it as the frontispiece for his book *On the nightmare* (1971 [1931]). For an excellent study of the classic nightmare, see Hufford (1982).

⁶ In this respect dreamers are comparable to the mentally ill, who mistake hallucinations or delusions for reality. Aristotle explicitly makes this comparison (*On dreams*, 460b15) and later philosophers also regularly contrasted dreaming with madness (Pigeaud 1983).

⁷ Erotic dreams were tests of what Foucault termed 'governmentality' – the ethical basis of the right to govern (1997). The life of Gandhi furnishes a clear illustration. In his final years Gandhi slept in the same bed as young women, claiming to be testing his ability not to become aroused. He was quoted as saying, 'If I can master this, I can still beat Jinnah' (Erikson 1970: 404; Alter 2000).

⁸ In Paulus Aeginetus page 30^b, cited in Roscher (1900: 18, 112–13).

⁹ I thank Jeremy Tanner for his discussion of this relief.

¹⁰ *On acute diseases* and *On chronic diseases* are attributed to the fifth-century CE Latin writer, Caelius Aurelianus. These texts are, however, believed to be Latin translations of Greek treatises by the second-century CE physician, Soranus.

¹¹ Seneca (first century CE) later modified the Stoic position to hold that there were certain 'first movements', such as shuddering when splashed with cold water, or experiencing sexual arousal (*On anger*, 2.1–3), that could never be subject to mental control and thus were not passions, but just a physical 'impulse of the body' (*corporis pulsus*). I thank Richard Sorabji for his observations drawn upon here (see also Sorabji 1997: 200).

¹² *Greek magical papyri* XVIIa; in Betz (1986: 253). For more on demons sending (erotic) dreams, see Eitrem (1991) and Faraone (1999).

¹³ Found in the first-century CE author, Aëtius, *Placita*, 5.2.3; text and translation in von Staden (1989: 386).

¹⁴ Galen considered erotic dreams as textbook examples of the category of dreams that reflected an individual's physical state: 'men full of sperm will imagine that they are having sexual intercourse' (*On diagnosis from dreams*, in Oberhelman 1983: 46).

¹⁵ The sin of accidie (boredom, despondency) – also known as the noonday demon – provides one example of a demonic thought that allied the irascible and sensuous parts of the soul and 'suffocated the intellect' (Evagrius, *Praktikos*, 36). Evagrius considered accidie 'the heaviest of the demons' (*Praktikos*, 12). I thank George Calofonos for his discussion of these ideas.

¹⁶ An indication of the currency of the term may be found in Augustine's *City of God*, 15.23.

¹⁷ My use of this term perhaps differs somewhat from its use in Jungian circles and elsewhere (cf. Tedlock 1987: 3). I use 'imaginal' to refer to a state of consciousness in which one has the impression that what one is witnessing is absolutely 'real' and independent of one's mind, although one is, in fact, only imagining it. The term 'imaginary', by contrast, implies an awareness, even in the moment of imagining, that what one beholds is only a product of one's imagination. Dreams, visions, hallucinations, and apparitions are, generally, experienced imaginally and then subsequently accounted for as imaginary.

¹⁸ Andrew Baxter's *Enquiry into the nature of the human soul* (1737) attributed frightening dreams to external spirits because, he reasoned, the soul would not frighten itself (Ford 1999: 178).

¹⁹ Coleridge, 'The pains of sleep' (1816). In Coleridge (1912: 390).

²⁰ 'Pornography' appears for the first time in Webster's *Dictionary* of 1864 (Kendrick 1987: 13).

²¹ Malinowski's daytime erotic thoughts often concerned the local women but, as Tedlock has pointed out (1994: 289), these women never figured in the dreams he recorded.

²² Unlike Christian ascetics, however, anthropologists receive little preparation for the psychosexual travails of fieldwork. In his *Diary* Malinowski thus inadvertently broached important issues that have only recently begun to be discussed within the profession (Kulick & Willson 1995; Markowitz & Ashkenazi 1999; Wengle 1988).

²³ Susan Isaacs distinguished 'fantasy' (conscious daydreams, fictions, etc.) from 'phantasy' (the primary content of unconscious mental processes). See Hook (1979; 1994). Laplanche and

Pontalis (1968: 11) disputed Isaacs's distinction, although elsewhere they make it clear that Freud conceived phantasy, and primal phantasy, as possibly archetypal, phylogenetic inheritances (Laplanche & Pontalis 1973: 315, 332).

²⁴ According to Fuseli: 'One of the most unexplored regions of art are dreams, and what may be called the personification of sentiment' (Tomory 1972: 181). He painted *The nightmare* fresh with the disappointment of having been turned down in his proposal for the hand of Anna Landolt. On the obverse of the original canvas Fuseli had begun to paint the portrait of a young woman, possibly Anna (Powell 1972: 60). Fuseli's obsession with Anna is made over into her erotic nightmare desire for him (as incubus).

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Rêves érotiques et cauchemars depuis l'antiquité jusqu'ici

Résumé

L'histoire des rêves érotiques, des cauchemars et des cauchemars érotiques offre une occasion précieuse d'étudier comment de tels rêves ont mis à l'épreuve les idées occidentales sur le soi, le désir et la maîtrise de soi. Comme Foucault, je considère qu'il est plus productif d'analyser ces rêves, et les difficultés de leur introjection, en tant que sites de construction de soi plutôt qu'en termes de répression. Les rêves et cauchemars érotiques ont été infléchis par plusieurs stratégies historiques de fabrication du soi, produites elles-mêmes par différents régimes de savoir tels que l'ascétisme chrétien, la médecine ou la philosophie. Les cauchemars érotiques continuent à proliférer dans les récits d'enlèvements par des extra-terrestres. Une raison pour cette ténacité historique a été l'aise avec laquelle les sensations affectives des cauchemars érotiques – terreur et excitation sexuelle – sont passées d'un genre à l'autre parmi des genres aussi divers que les manuels monacaux, les contes médiévaux, la fiction gothique et les rêves personnels. Cette étude démontre l'importance d'une perspective historique afin de pouvoir identifier et comprendre les syndromes qui sont élaborés culturellement (ou 'syndromes culturels spécifiques').

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