DISCUSSION OF THE CASE OF OTMAR PRESENTED BY DR. GION CONDRAU

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In his case presentation, Dr. Condrau gives a few details of what Daseins-analysis is all about. He tells us that the analyst attempts a “thorough discussion of dreams” and that interpretation is “carried out strictly phenomenologically.” Thus the analyst does not “search for an unconscious meaning of dreams” and does not “differentiate between a latent, unconscious dream content and a manifest dream altered through unconscious censorship.” Condrau adds, “We believe that the dream told by the patient is really the dream he dreamed.”

Dr. Condrau describes his patient Otmar’s personality: “he is impeccably dressed and clean and spoke with a monotonous voice . . . his mien merely showed indifference or fatalism . . . with his accounting pedantry, manifest in measuring his therapist’s delays . . . he tends to rationalize and intellectualize.” About Otmar’s father we were told that he was a brutal alcoholic, who terrorized and beat his wife, Otmar, and Otmar’s younger sister Marian; he would lock them indoors to impede their going to mass. The father was an atheist and once horrified them by tearing down a crucifix from the wall and stamping on it; he was repeatedly hospitalized in psychiatric wards. The mother was described as soft and weak and never the source of security for her children. Otmar had a puritanical upbringing and “had virtually no relationship with other children of his environment.” We were not told which parent enforced this.

Otmar’s relation to his analyst is very important. “He introduced himself with a typed card, indicating in telegraphic sentences his family background, his professional training and status . . . He showed up on the dot and expected his therapist to be equally punctual . . . After some initial difficulties, the
patient lay down on the couch but not without expressing his distrust of the therapist by suddenly jumping up and turning around to make sure that the therapist was listening attentively." His rather unrealistic communication would get lost in cranky and pseudophilosophical sentences. "His sessions were characterized by his tendency to rationalize; in doing this, he did not want the analyst to interfere with his thoughts and deliberations. . . . He felt that the analysis did not have any effect . . . and he insisted on cutting down the number of weekly sessions and reducing the fee." Later, we are told: "He seemed to have made, without acknowledging it, the so-called corrective emotional experience."

Shortly after relating the second manifest dream, Otmar became engaged to his girl, and his life changed notably; he accepted love and warmth. Sexualities no longer seemed sinful. Otmar withdrew from the church. He then visited his former schoolteacher to accuse him of being responsible for his problems, and he quit his job, not without insulting his boss before leaving.

I wish to emphasize the fact that at no time has Otmar been submissive to the masculine authority of his analyst. In fact, from their very first encounter, Otmar has shown himself distrustful, rebellious, aggressive, challenging, and it seems, with a hint of paranoid trends. His psychoanalyst has accepted him at all times, without protest or rejection.

**DREAM ANALYSIS**

My point of view will be that of the humanist psychoanalysis of Erich Fromm. In this approach, we want to apprehend the unconscious, latent content of dreams, until we can experience their intimate global symbolism. It is significant that Otmar calls the first dream that Condrau reports a "disgusting memory" (emphasis added) and not a "disgusting" dream. It is of utmost importance to clarify why he has called it a "memory," for this implies a past event that really took place, or such a vivid fantasy that it came to seem real. I shall formulate only a few of the questions that the manifest dream implies, for the answers to them will allow us to reach out to that which is still unconscious to the dreamer.

Why does it take place in Africa? Is he a racist? Why must he examine black girls, impossibly small, and lift them up to see their genitals? How is a public accountant to determine if they have reached puberty? Because of their pubic hair? Because they are menstruating? What of all he sees is unpleasant to him? Who ordered such an examination? A man or a woman? The girl who smiles at him, does she really wish to arouse him? Is the authority that forbids intercourse male or female? What female genitals has he seen in reality? Did he see those of his younger sister, as the dream seems to imply? The answers to these questions, as they emerge through Otmar's communications in the course of his psychoanalysis, will allow us to overcome his resistances and to clarify his statements.

Aside from these and other possible questions, the manifest dream already reveals some of Otmar's characteristics. He is obedient, subordinate, passive, submissive, and weak, for in his dream he fulfills dutifully all that is required of him, without formulating any questions and without protest. He is easily inhibited by an anonymous authority whose gender remains unknown. We know he has voyeuristic trends. He is drawn to the genitals of little girls, and yet they are unpleasant to him, and he finds the smile of a girl seductive, not that of a woman.

All dreams dreamt after the first interview show, implicitly or explicitly, the dreamer's relationship to the therapist; so, dreams clarify the nature of the transference. The dream we have been referring to clearly reveals that Otmar will transfer submissiveness to an authority envisioned as authoritarian. There is no evidence of any submissiveness toward his analyst. How can we explain this discrepancy? The lack of gender of the authority in the dream is of significance here. Otmar is overtly rebellious, distrustful, and aggressive towards the male authority of his therapist. This implies that the submission expressed in the dream seems to be related to a female authority.

With the data presented so far, I can only understand Otmar in a frame of reference where it is important to experience the conscious and unconscious interrelationships amongst the three elements of the minimal psychological unit of mother-father-child. Knowing their behavior I can glean their unconscious dynamics. The father's behavior is authoritarian and aggressive; he is an alcoholic brute, the repressor and destroyer of any and all self-affirmative, creative, and biophilic impulses. Clinical experience shows us that such a man needs alcohol in order to hide his fears, frustrations, his psychological impotence, and that he needs alcohol to bring forth his vast unconscious resentment against his spouse and the children allied to her. Alcoholism also frequently hides a significant underlying depression.

The mother seems weak and soft, but underneath she is a very resentful woman, with a strong, rock-life passive resistance, the rigid personification of all that is negative in a bigoted Catholic and thus opposed to any love for herself or for her children. She not only does not defend them from their father's aggressions, but indeed she makes the children submit to them. Why did it not occur to this mother to jump out the window or break down the door to go to church? We all know how simple it is to bypass or ignore all prohibitions, except when, as in this case, there is such a marked overt passivity, submissiveness, and destructive rigidity of the mother.

Otmar is the weakest point of the trinity, so he was crushed between the brutality of the father and the resentful rigidity of his mother. I have no doubt that the parents, albeit unwittingly, were accomplices to one another. He
punished and stormed and she reinforced all prohibitions; neither of them stimulated biophilic trends, and neither of them searched for their freedom for. What determined the mother’s late divorce? But there is still another question pending: Who impeded his playing with other children of his environment? The alcoholic father at work? One cannot fail to perceive in this the repressive complicity of his mother who, doubtlessly, was with Otmar most of his free time.

This latter allows my understanding of why the irrational authority of Otmar’s dream has no gender and why it is ambiguous: on the one hand repressing his sexual arousal, and on the other, stimulating and permitting his voyeurism. As I mentioned above, both parents are accomplices and coparticipants; but the transference shows Otmar challenging and aggressive towards his analyst, so the dream implies that his submissiveness is towards his mother. The moral cowardliness of both parents contaminated Otmar’s life, probably reinforced by a rigid religious and social environment; so Otmar, in order to survive, could only grow up submissive, repressing all his feelings, constrained, furtive and sulking, distrustful and antagonistic. How could he possibly win over teachers, schoolmates, or anyone, for that matter? He must have been very trying for his analyst.

The dream tells us that Otmar lifts the black girls to eye level in order to see their genitals. This could relate to the hand cramp when asked to write on the blackboard in high school, for this also is usually done at eye level. Condrau describes with great clarity the phenomenological meaning of Otmar’s writer’s cramp and spells out the pertinent aspects of the diverse purposes of the hand’s functions; he shows how it all becomes inhibited by the cramp, and by generalizing Otmar’s symptom, he clarifies how his whole being, in his lack of freedom and openness to the world, became involved.

Condrau’s patience and acceptance finally merited Otmar’s trust, and he became privy to the sadistic fantasy of putting needles into female genitals. After this event, Otmar found a new dimension in human relatedness when once again he confirmed that his therapist not only did not reprimand him, but continued treating him with respect and understanding. Notwithstanding this, our subject was still neither the friend nor the brother of man, as revealed by the dream fragments presented: in them he still fights male irrational authority, or he experiences his insecurity and low self-esteem.

Unfortunately we are only told an abstract of a dream of his romping with his school pals, and in which he ends up apologizing for his rudeness. This dream fragment implies that he began to be a comrade to his peers, and his rudeness may imply a decrease in his cowardliness and a releasing of resentment... he seems to need to apologize still for this. The dream is regressive to his school years, but it is suggestive of what Loewald aptly called “reconstructive regression,” not merely repetitive.

But he is still far from being a friend of a man, even in his dreams, and though he sends his wife to his former therapist, he still ignores and challenges Condrau’s authority. It is true that he is somewhat independent of his therapist and other male authorities; and he has given up mother-church; sexuality is no longer sinful. He is somewhat free of mother, yet only allied and as a friend of man could he be able to catch more than a glimpse of his pre-genital fixation to his mother and begin to objectify her negative characteristics.

The last dream of a caged man ends with a female telling him: “We human beings are also locked in, or rather, we voluntarily lock ourselves up.” It might be suggestive to believe that Otmar is the encaged man, but what is more likely is that the male symbol is multidetermined, as usual, and that it represents all men, amongst them his father caged-in by his fears, his alcoholism, etc.; and quite probably, unconsciously, he sees his therapist also in a cage. In this dream he describes women as those who complete the encagement of men (like his mother did to his father and also to Otmar), and not as comrades, sources of love, freedom and tenderness.

Why should he not marry now, resigned as he is to his fate? The psychoanalysis of an obsessive individual with paranoid trends is quite a difficult task, and it demands all our patience. Otmar’s tendency to present as his own elements that his therapist communicated to him and which Otmar himself originally rejected disdainfully is useful for our purpose of de-repressing, confronting, and penetrating the strong defense mechanisms necessary for survival in such a heartless environment. In the therapeutic process Otmar learned to rebel against what he perceived to be the male irrational authority of his teacher and his boss; but, I repeat, he never became the friend and ally of man.

The female of the last dream does to Otmar what his mother always did. He becomes resigned to being caged in and thus adapts to his society, gets married, and procreates. He has learned to rebel against men and this bolsters his self-esteem. He continues to relate to his analyst as a man and as a father figure by sending his wife to analysis, but with the injunction that she must follow her husband’s instructions... he is still understandably distrustful. Did he send her to be tamed and hoped for a greater success than that which his father had with his mother? This is rather probable. If his wife knew how to be passionate and orgastic in bed, there is more hope for Otmar.

Doubtlessly we must remain conscious of the goals we have reached in realistic terms and we must be aware of how many questions, all too frequently, remain unanswered. In putting aside the concept of the unconscious, one loses sight of very valuable perspectives. Stating it very briefly, one could say that psychoanalysis attempts to clarify, de-repress, de-mythify, and objectify that which is unconscious so that our subject, thus fore-armed, can transcend the frame of reference he has had to live with in order to survive in his milieu, so adverse in the case on which we are commenting.
I think Otmar's reasons to believe that Dr. Condrau was keeping his distance, was impersonal and aloof, are not so far-fetched. It is most difficult to remain attentive and amiable when confronted by a reasoning described as "monotonous, boring, and soporific." This distance seems implied when the analyst says, "at that time it didn't seem opportune to me to interpret" the first dream, and he also lets by Otmar's lapsus linguis of calling this dream a "disgusting memory." The therapist also states that he "did not want to go into an argument with the patient" over the second dream, which Otmar felt showed improvement, because up to then "the male in him had always suppressed his female aspect" and now it was the other way around. How can one let this go by? Our effort is to make every attempt to shorten the distance and to disalienate the therapeutic relationship as much as possible. I do not know if we would achieve better results, but Otmar would have to face our impressions and questions implied in his dreams. We would communicate our feelings that he is "boring and soporific." We would thus be able to argue it out, and he would be able to release more of his repressed resentments and fears. Perhaps he would have come to trust his therapist—even in his dreams.