THE REALM OF DREAMS, THE LAST MOVE: MECHANISMS OF DREAMING IN THE DRAMATIC UNIVERSE

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Abstract

People are different from one another not by the neckties they wear or foreign languages they speak, but by the way in which they dream, says the Portuguese poet Fernando Antonio Nogueira Pessoa; we would all be the same were it not for our ability to dream. Inside the incommensurate continent of the dream, theatre has occupied vast territories. The performance analyzed by this study, „The Last Move”, which was inspired by the works of William Saroyan, William Shakespeare, Friedrich Schiller, Eugène Ionesco and Örkény István, has two different oneiric plans, a symbolic and psychological one. Its central characters, four actors who refuse to step down from their status of sacrificers of the stage and leave the abandoned theatre destined for demolition, they revisit their pasts, summarize their desires, obsessions, choices and cipher out their destinies in their dreams. Youth’s transience, the search for refuge in dreams and nostalgia, and the reckless generational change, come across as the performance’s main themes, and the characters’ semiology has its correspondent in the dream. By using elements from the universe of Saroyan’s play, the study aims to determine and organize the mechanisms which allow dream scenes to pervade the theatre’s intimate structure. Dream situations can influence the performance’s chemistry in all its components: dramatic, directorial, interpretative, musical, lighting-wise and related to the message transmission. In the postdramatic theatre, the dream is a show with its own identity inside the performance, induced also in order to relax the audience’s perception, to make it penetrable for the intellectual weight of the message. For the understanding of these processes, the paper will submit definitions and classifications of the notion of the dream, from the standpoint of philosophy, psychoanalysis, neurosciences, theatre history. A different perspective of the study comes from the definition of the nightmare and dramatic effects of introducing it into the theatre performance. According to the main thinkers whose writings are questioned by the present study and Saroyan’s drama reflected by the performance, the man is sent to this world in order to dream, and dreams differentiate people. Because by dreaming the man gains dramaturgical ingenuity which allows him to perform simultaneously in multiple theatre plays staged by their spirit and imagination.

Keywords: theatre, dream, Saroyan, time, lonely, oneiric

1. A SURREALIST NIGHTMARE

The dream is an essential subject for the human being, a reflection of the entire humanity’s history, and it has conquered and reinvented unmeasurable theories about theatre, most often joining it as a ferment of the indescribable. In the performance analyzed in this research paper, as well as my other theatre works, the dream is a crucial element for directorial composition, invested with functions which act upon theatrality’s intimate resorts. From the perspective of the theatre creator, the Laroussese Philosophy Dictionary proposes...
one of the most relevant definitions of the dream: "Dream, a string of images and psychic elements which happen during sleep. Do dreams have meanings? Or: what is the meaning of dreams? There is meaning only for one conscience; the notion of meaning implies a comprehension effort. When such an effort is made methodically, it is called reflection and it is defined as an act of paying attention, corresponding to the wakefulness to the highest degree. On the other hand, sleep is defined precisely as the interruption of conscience. In these circumstances, how can we imagine that a part of our sleep, composed of dreams, could have meaning? The mere issue of the meaning of dreams, of the meaning of a particular moment during sleep, seems a paradox. The character’s self-consciousness, the relationship between theatre “reality” and the oneiric universe, are in-depth aspects of the universe created by W. Saroyan, author of the play “The Cave Dwellers”, and also of the analyzed performance. The same source of definitions tackles with Dream description, which is relevant from the director’s standpoint. Modern psychology has showed us that dream is not complete inactivity and that we must differentiate between profound sleep and the paradox sleep, described by doctor Michel Jouvet (born in 1925), named as such because it is marked by eye movements and brain waves as intense as in wakefulness. Dreams happen precisely in this so-called paradox sleep. This period lasts about a quarter of an hour, and the cycles profound sleep – paradox sleep repeat themselves 5-6 times every night (...). During this time, dreams appear not only as visual activity, but also dramatic, sometimes absurd, incoherent, composed of persistent images and sensory perceptions which blend chaotically. In „The Last Move“, the performance’s four central characters fall asleep simultaneously and have tangential dreams, in which obsessive themes overlap with the past and affective memory, desires and symbolic visions – failure, impossibility to communicate and indifference symbolized by the dog dream, fear of old age, the need of belonging, nostalgia for lost love and glory which, in the end, decipher the meaning of the entire performance. Dream description, comprised in the definition given by the Larousse Philosophy Dictionary, supports the dramaturgy perspective: "Modern psychology demonstrates that sleep is not a complete inactivity and that we must separate the profound sleep from the paradox sleep described by doctor Michel Jouvet (born in 1925) named as such because it is marked by eye movements and brain waves as intense as in waking. Dreams happen precisely during this paradox sleep (...). This period lasts about a quarter of an hour, and the cycles profound sleep – paradox sleep repeat themselves (...). Dreams appear not only as visual activity, but also dramatic, sometimes absurd, incoherent, composed of persistent images and sensory perceptions which blend chaotically. The events have no logic of their own: I can be flying, next I can be at home, at the theatre or abroad etc. (...) the dream acts evidently as passion, in the meaning given to this term by Descartes (A Treaty about the Passions of the Soul, 1649). On the contrary, the act of understanding implies wakefulness and self-restraint. I integrated in the construction of the performance’s dream scenes some essential elements from sleep mechanisms, starting from light modification and stage sound, to the conjugation of actors’ corporality, gesture (i)mobility to the dream phase. „The scientific study of the human sleep has a very odd onset. In the XIX century, numerous researchers in France were quite interested in the sleep process, yet they did not implement the simplest observational experiment: they did not remain awake all night in order to write down how human bodies moved during a night’s sleep. In turn, these scientist spent their time trying to influence their subjects’ dreams. They would open perfume bottles under the subjects’ noses or tickled them using a feather, then woke them up minutes later trying to find out whether they had succeeded in influencing their dreams. These efforts led to little useful information and, up to the ’50s, the standard sleep model was simple and erroneous. Sleep was considered to be a constant, unaltered period when the body movement and brain activity was reduced, which changed after waking up."  
In the early ’50 period, Nathaniel Kleitman’s laboratory at Chicago University /SUA made EEG recordings of adults’ sleep, experiments which proved that their EEG was slowly changing, from a desynchronized track of low voltage to a slow oscillating track of high voltage. In the same laboratory, in 1952, Eugene Aserinsky brought his eight-year old son Armond and watched his EEG charts recording the slow oscillations of deep sleep. This is how the deep sleep stage was detected, then named REM and associated with the rapid eye movement, a phase which is different from the non-profound sleep divided in four stages. The reporting of these discoveries by Kleitman and Aserinsky in 1953 inaugurated the modern era in sleep research, and in later years a more detailed image appeared. „The REM sleep is sometimes named paradox sleep because the EEG is similar to when the subject is awake, yet the subject is basically paralyzed. The situation is that the brain’s motor centers actively send signals to muscles, but these signals are blocked at the level of the

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2 Ibidem, p. 359  
3 Ibidem, p. 359-360  
brain stem by inhibition synapses". Directorial indications regarding the actors’ play in dream stages in the earlier mentioned performance took this information in serious consideration, up to details which refer to body attitude, muscular activity or eyelid movement, enhanced by lighting. The mechanism in which sleep triggers memories was also an important aspect in constructing „sleep” scenes for the performance’s characters in all three performances in order to justify, dramatically and scene-wise, the memory flow in respective scenes.  

Regarding the dream analysis as a scene instrument, we note that "dreams exist often in relation to sensorial excitement perceived during sleep: for instance, if we fall asleep with a tense arm or even finger, detensioning it by self-abandon at the moment you doze off will give the dream a sensation of falling into the abyss". In the performance „The Last Move”, the dream scene takes into consideration the body positions in which the main characters fall asleep simultaneously, and also the stimuli from the previous scene (actors having dinner), which will influence the imagistic sequences for every character’s dream. In the same time, the route taken by characters up to the place designated for sleeping, lead by an symbolic character who translates these two worlds, oneric and real, is closely fixed by choreography meant to justify the obsessive and reflexive themes of the common dream. In his „Interpretation of Dreams», S. Freud (1900) indicates that the imagistic language of dreams (manifested content) always carries profound meaning (latent content). Discovery of such a profound meaning, an object of psychological analysis, is realized by the free idea-associative process (which is favourable for postdramatic theatre) and it allows revealing the underlying desire. If in children’s dreams desire appears naturally, for the adults dreaming is more complicated, desire proves to be treacherous and refuses to expose itself, deceiving the conscience. With actor-characters, such as the four main characters in the performance „The Last Move”, this continuously ambivalent nature, of adult-children, gives to oneric visual images a symbolic meaning, in Freudian terms, because the object of desire is disguised. „Because Freud permits the stream of metaphors to enter the area of psychoanalysis, his intuition tells him that there is a danger of mining his apparently armo-

directed indication of psychoanalytic theories. Several Freudian theses seem to be connected precisely to these literary/theatre


6 Note: this is one of key-elements in the composition of the role The Duke in the performance „The Last Move".


11 Pintescu, Alexandru, op.cit., p. 139.
motifs: retroactive phantasms, the theory of complexes, of castration, of screen-memories, venting, compensation and so on.\textsuperscript{12} Many of these theses are programmatically exploited in the composition of the characters in „The Last Move“, in which screen-memories are played on translucent curtains, during the four central characters` dreams. The Duke is repressing a castration complex, the Girl is unveiling her inferiority complexes, the King and Queen`s dreams are populated with retroactive phantasms. While disagreeing with some interpretations, which were quite popular (Goethe, Schiller), Freud does not consider Hamlet to be a psychopath lacking energy, unable to fulfill his intentions to the end, becoming a psychopath during the duration of the play. (…) Hamlet goes insane precisely because, same as Lady Macbeth, he takes on himself the murder committed by someone else, living it as if it were his own crime. By refusing to be the author of a crime demanded by the ghost of his father, this obsessive «dream», Hamlet undergoes a distortion of the soul, he feels sympathy for the one who realized his hidden desire. In “Introduction to Psychoanalysis” (1916), Hamlet becomes the pivoting motif of its entire psychoanalytic construction (including in dream interpretation) or, according to Starobinski, a satellite-theme for the Oedipus myth. In this research work, the phantasm of desire becomes a retroactive one, while the dream is their dominant vehicle – according to Jung – Oedipus` two crimes are murder and incest (Oedipus` myth is the collective equivalent of the dream. (…) Freud claims that he can decode the mask of Shakespeare himself hidden behind the lines.\textsuperscript{13} It would be impossible to fathom an immersion in the labyrinth of understanding the dream in the theatre art without taking into consideration the nightmare as well, which is experimented by the characters in the analyzed performance as a revelation: in „The Last Move“, the dog meeting the clown in the King`s dream, as well as the defeat in the Duke`s dream about his last boxing match, both turn into nightmares. Maybe the best – and shortest – way to define and understand the nightmare is the etymology of the word itself, superbly noted by Jorge Luis Borges\textsuperscript{14}:

The Greek language has the words Efiatltes: Efiatltes is the nightmare-inspiring demon. In Latin there is Incubus, the devil pressing the asleep person, inspiring a nightmare. German has a very odd term: Alp, which could mean elf and the touch of the elf, identical to the demon who inspires nightmares. There is a painting, seen by De Quincey, one of the greatest nightmare dreamers in literature. Painted by Fusselle or Füssli (his real name), a Swiss painter from the XVIII century called The Nightmare. A girls is sleeping. She wakes up horrified because she sees that a monster is sleeping on her chest, a small, dark and malignant monster. This monster represents the nightmare. Füssli was painting it, he had in mind the word Alp, the touch of the elf. That brings us to a more scientific and ambiguous word, the English name for it: the nightmare, which literally means “the mare of the night”. This is how Shakespeare understood it. In one of his lines he says: “I met the night mare“. It is evident that he imagines the nightmare as a mare. In another poem, it is deliberately said “the nightmare and her nine foals”, where, too, it is seen as a mare. But, according to etymology, the root is different. The root would be night mare or niht maere, demon of the night. In his famous dictionary, doctor Johnson states that it corresponds to Northern mythology — the Saxon mythology we could say — which regards the nightmare as the product of a demon, which is suitable or could be a translation of the Greek efiatltes or Roman incubus. There is one more interpretation which could be useful, connecting the English term nightmare with the German Märchen, meaning fable, fairytale, fiction; therefore, nightmare could be the night’s fiction. Well, understanding the nightmare as a «mare of the night» (there is something terrible about this «mare of the night») was a sort of gift for Victor Hugo. Hugo was proficient in English and he wrote a book about Shakespeare which is, sadly, forgotten. One of his poems in Les contemplations, I think, talks about le cheval noir de la nuit “the dark horse of the night”, the nightmare. He was, of course, thinking about the English term nightmare. After looking at these diverse etymologies, let’s add that French has the term cauchemar, which is without doubt linked to the English term nightmare. All etymologies have a concept originated in the demon: the idea of a demon setting the nightmare.\textsuperscript{15} The performance „The Last Move“\textsuperscript{16} has two separate oneirc layers, a symbolic and a psychological one.

\textbf{The symbolic dream.} From the beginning of the performance, the spectators are given the role of witnesses, who gather to watch the implosion of the theatre’s building. The audience is entering through two doors into a space with strong visual and audio impact, which doesn’t resemble a theatre hall. Initially, the

\textsuperscript{12} Pintescu, Alexandru, op. cit, p. 143.

\textsuperscript{13} Pintescu, Alexandru, op.cit., p. 145.

\textsuperscript{14} Jorge Francisco Isidoro Luis Borges Acevedo, Argentinian novelist, poet and essay author, was one of the most important witters of the XX century. He is famous for his fantastic tales, in which philosophical and metaphysical ideas meet classical themes such as the double, dream parallel reality, time shifts.

\textsuperscript{15} Borges, Jorge Luis, „The Nightmare“, România literară Magazine, nr. 15/2008.

\textsuperscript{16} A performance directed by Kocsárdi Levente, inspired by the works of William Saroyan, William Shakespeare, Friedrich Schiller, Eugène Ionesco and Örkény István, produced by the „Csiky Gergely“ Hungarian State Theatre Timișoara.
audience remains standing, not having a place to sit down, in front of the opaque layer of building facades. Dreams about the demolition of the theatre are projected on the two walls, while a slow-paced implosion is suggested when the actors playing workers start tearing the wall apart. The spectators are then seated on those cuboid blocks, on one and the opposite side of the performing area, and in front of them begins the scene with four actors who decided to remain on the stage after the theatre's official closing and live their lives as a continuous performance. Placed on one side and the other of the stage, the audience is now watching everything from the side-scene, becoming a voyeur for the for actors’ last day. Until the last moment, they are fighting against the authorities to prevent the evacuation. On the evening before the implosion, as they are saying their goodbyes to each other over a final supper, they quietly decide never to leave the theatre, no matter the consequences. After the workers issue an evacuation ultimatum, they begin playing one last theatre act, ignoring the menacing warnings, dying during a scene from „Exit the King”. Their last protest is broadcasted on TV news in the form of an ordinary, random piece of news, reporting that four forgetful old people were taken by surprise during the implosion process and died under the rubble. During the final scene, the wall is rebuilt, workers ask the spectators to stand up, and, using the constructive elements on which the spectators were seated, start rebuilding the edifice which they mine with explosives. In the meantime, the actors continue performing, and it is not by chance that their last play is Eugen Ionesco’s „Exit the King”. Before the final explosion, the last piece of news is projected on the walls, reporting the demolition of the theatre and discovery of four dead bodies under the ruins. The performance is a surrealist nightmare in which time stops, so that the past, present and future exist together. The spectators have a „revelation” about this building’s tragic tale, a very actual tale about society, the artist's dramatic, precarious condition in such a society, disrespect for values in a consumerist world, where theatres are losing ground to shopping malls. In the ending of the performance we come back to present times, the only realistic action which is the theatre’s implosion.

The psychologic dream is represented by the scene played half-way through the show, when it renders the common dream of all four central characters. This dream moment is constructed in order to produce the dramaturgical shift of the story, it is a psychological turning point and changes their destinies. It is a dream of accepting that their lives up to that moment have ended.
After their last supper, during which every one of them is entertaining their stage partners with an acting scene, they fall asleep, the lights onstage have a life of their own, music starts playing without them manipulating the sound board. A worker dressed in a white costume enters wearing a gas mask, a bizarre, gracious yet nightmarish apparition, tender and menacing altogether, with slow movements, he creates a story with every actor, the video projected on transparent curtains shows the walls crumbling down, the collective fear haunts their subconscious. We see photographs from performances played at a younger age by the actor with whom the worker interacts, so that the audience can see an image from when the four actors were young, contrasting with what they have become with the passing of time. The boy with the mask, symbolizing the outside menace, leads the actors who have fallen asleep during dinner to their designated space for sleeping and develops a story with every one of them, shifting their destinies.

To the Queen he brings the photograph of her lost love, the past’s infinite nostalgia which makes her never want to leave the theatre.

The King gets metamorphosized into the dog from his monologue, that was the only paying attention to his street protests. For him this is the nightmare of humiliation, which is why he follows the boy moving like a humble dog. His dream is the premonition of his final failures as an artist, a militant and, above all, a human being. This dream fixates the idea of suicide in his mind.

The Duke, an actor and former boxing champion, is lead to his bed with the movements of a boxing match, falling to sleep like he once fell in the most important game of his champion life, the fall that made him feel like a loser for the rest of his lifetime. This moment in his life, the match ended in defeat, returns to his nightmare reminding him of losing the theatre. His dream is also the premonition of losing the woman with whom he could rebuild his life after leaving the theatre. For the Girl, the dream leads her like a prince clad in white, taking off his mask and showing his young face, they reach the bed kissing. This dream represents the intuition of inappropriate love, this dream makes her fall in love with the young man who transcends worlds and appears in dream as well as in reality, because in reality he is the head of the group of workers in charge of demolition. Therefore, for the first time in her life, the Girl is confronted with the fact that she has grown old and her love is ridiculous, it would be absurd to refuse the Duke’s love for an illusion, so that, after the theatre is demolished, she remains captive to solitude. Because of this simultaneous dream, they lose all
their hopes and choose to perform a final theatre play until they die. The final option is to blur the fluid line between acting and life, dream and reality.

REFERENCE LIST