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Proposed question for independent Inquiry: What influence does the subconscious mind and dreams have on creativity and storytelling today, and can storytelling and creativity be seen to show a process of healing from traumas?

In this essay I hope to gain a greater understanding of the influence that the subconscious has had on a variety of different artists' practice, and the artworks they produce. I hope to gain a better understanding of Freud's theory of Dreams, the methods he developed to interpret dreams, exploring how artists have used dreams as a gateway to the subconscious mind and exploited this in their work. This leads me to introduce my second keyword, - Storytelling. I intend to explore whether the symbols and objects in dreams relate at all to storytelling metaphors, archetypes of both characters and journeys?

In researching Storytelling I hope to discover the functions and purposes of storytelling, looking at how we use storytelling. I'm curious to discover if analysis of storytelling has revealed common elements across storytelling traditions, histories and cultures that can inform storytelling today. This raises the question, are traditional storytelling metaphors, archetypes and structures still relevant today?

With dreams being a gateway to the subconscious, and our waking life consciousness, a similar duality exists within the realm of dreams in the form of nightmares. Freud believed that artworks can be representations of repressed emotions and innermost desires brought into the physical realm.

Gothic art can possibly be seen to be the expression of more sinister dreams on this spectrum of repressed emotions and desires. I'm curious to discover if creating gothic art can become an archetypical hero's journey; a therapeutic process, healing separation as Jung's theory of Psychological Integration suggests, or does it infer something else?

Dreams.

Visual artists have explored dreams for centuries, seeking to reveal the places we go to when we dream. Many have depicted dreams from the Bible, such as Jacob's ladder. Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450- 1516) notoriously created nightmarish visions in his paintings, but Albrecht Dürer is believed to have been the first artist in the history of Western art to have documented his own dream, producing the annotated watercolour, (Figure 1) in 1525. "The watercolour, seemingly hastily produced on waking, shows a deluge of water descending from the sky to engulf him." (Pound 2020)



Figure 1. Albrecht Dürer, *Dream Vision*, 1525, Watercolour, accessed: 22 April, 2021, [http://](http://www.godgossip.org/article/what-do-our-dreams-mean)

www.godgossip.org/article/what-do-our-dreams-mean

Much later in the nineteenth century, evolving from a literary movement a range of artists, now identified as Symbolists, developed imagery based on emotions and their inner perceptions.

Wanting to imbue their works with spiritual value, these [artists] produced imaginary dream worlds populated with mysterious figures from biblical stories and Greek mythology [and] fantastical, often monstrous, creatures. (Myers, 2007)

However, it was Sigmund Freud's seminal work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), that really opened the doors to artists to mine the creative potential of dreams. Freud believed that all dreams, even nightmares, represent unconscious desires that provide the dreamer with a form of psychological release. He introduced the Oedipus complex expressing itself through these unconscious desires, meaning that children become infatuated with their parents as their first love. An inner censor in the psyche disguises the true meanings of dreams, populating them with strange symbols and metaphors. To Freud, there were two primary psychical functions that contributed to dream-formation: "the production of the dream-thoughts, and their transformation into the content of the dream" (Freud, 1899, p.506). Some dream content symbols will be obvious, known as "manifest content", and others less-obvious. This is the "latent content", revealed through analysis of the symbols. Freud developed four methods to analyse dreams, – "dream-condensation", "dream-displacement", "regard for representability," and "secondary-revision".

In his *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), Andre Breton hails Freud's discoveries as a return to fecundity of the imagination. To him writing's realistic attitude prevailing at that time seemed, "To be hostile to any intellectual or moral

advancement...made up of mediocrity, hate and dull conceit...[giving] birth to ridiculous books [and] insulting plays." (Breton, 1924 p.6). Breton's goal for creativity was to bring together reality and dreams, "into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality." (Breton, 1924 p.14). This goal inspired not only the renowned Surrealists of the 20th century, such as Carrington, Dali, Magritte, Kahlo and Oppenheim; but cracked open the depths of the unconscious as inspiration for all creatives that followed.

One such artist who captured night-time visions in vivid detail was Zdzisław Beksiński who stated that he wished, "to paint in such a manner as if I were photographing dreams." (Gerataki, 2019, www.dailyart.com). Beksiński was born near Sanok, Southern Poland in 1929, near the site of the Zaslav Concentration camp (Sokolowska-Smyl, 2014, p.162). He grew up in the years following the war, during the Soviet occupation of Poland. Both these circumstances and environment; the liberation of the concentration camp and enforced Sovietisation of Eastern Europe; undoubtedly played an enormous role in both his photography and his paintings.



Figure 2. Zdzisław Beksiński, *Untitled*, oil on masonite, accessed 29 April, 2021, <https://morpheusgallery.com/Zdzislaw%20Beksinski/item.php?work=51&image=9>

Although Beksiński was disinclined to discuss the meanings of his work, even feeling that titles would impose limitations on his work, there are too many reoccurring images, themes and motifs that appear in his works from his series entitled, *The Fantastic period* (Sokolowska-Smyl, 2014, p.156) that suggest Beksiński is confronting something experienced in his youth that haunted him, see Figures 2-5.



Figure 3. Zdzisław Beksiński, *Untitled*, oil on masonite, accessed 29 April, 2021, <https://serpentpublishing.com/zdzislaw-beksinski-beksinski-surreal-print-70.html>

Dystopia is defined as an imaginary, undesirable, and horrific place ...Surrealism ...promoted the full liberation of the subconscious. The two of them combined create the dystopian surrealism of Beksiński.
(Gerataki, 2019)



Figure 4. Zdzisław Beksiński, *Untitled*, oil on masonite. Courtesy of The Historical Museum, Sanok, Poland, accessed 29 April 2021, <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/the-dystopian-surrealism-of-zdzislaw-beksinski/>

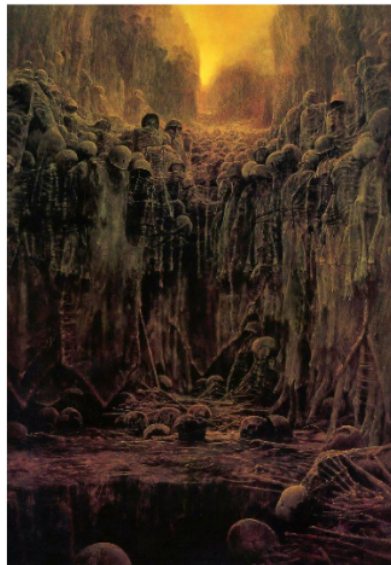


Figure 5. Zdzisław Beksiński, *Untitled*, oil on masonite, accessed 29 April, 2021, <https://spartansspeak.sau53.org/2301/arts-entertainment/the-beauty-of-beksinskis-nightmares/#modal-photo>

When viewing Beksiński's works from his Fantastic period, psycho-analyst Alice Miller's states that the:

Subconscious mind ... is a reservoir of repressed emotions, traumas, and desires, becomes an infinite arsenal of all creation, dreams, and fairy tales...knowledge stored in the subconscious is not pure fantasy, but rather an explanation referring to the reality of early childhood... based on the intensity and sincerity of profound human experience. (Miller in Sokolowska-Smyl, 2014, p.157)

This exploration raises a range of questions. Do artists today still take inspiration from dreams to develop creative outcomes? If so, how? How have dreams influenced artwork across a breadth of different disciplines, both in 'high' art and pop culture? If Beksiński was influenced by the horrors of war, death camps and enforced Sovietisation experienced as a child, what are the concerns or themes preoccupying and haunting the subconscious of creatives from the 21st century? As we gain a greater understanding of adverse childhood experiences, and their effect on development, is artistic expression a useful tool for healing individual trauma?

Storytelling.

Storytelling is one of Illustration's primary roles and functions. Illustrators describe narratives and visualise stories in the form of picture books, comics and graphic novels across a multitude of genres, and can encapsulate a narrative in a single visual. This section of my proposal will expand upon ideas introduced earlier, exploring art as a process of healing. It will look specifically at storytelling, its elements and how it functions as a cultural phenomenon, seeking a deeper understand of theories of storytelling.

Eric Miller, Phd, states that stories and the telling of stories can be viewed as types of play as they satisfy the three identifying aspects outlined by anthropologists of play. To Miller stories must contain eleven elements, – complex characters interacting in a place, occurring at a specific time. The story must have a plot, describe attributes of the character, place, events, and objects: appealing to our senses. It must evoke emotions, be told from a specific point of view, in a style or tone of voice that contributes to the narrative and understanding of the story. The elements above, work together giving the story its theme or meaning. In Miller's view, one of storytelling's roles in society is to promote psychological integration, an

idea initially developed by renowned psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Carl Jung (1875 - 1961).

Stories can give meaning to life, express values, teach the young; connect elements in one's own self, experience, and life; connect one to one's past, and to other cultures; give one a sense of wholeness, that the pieces of one's life fit together and add up to something. (Miller, 2011, p. 2)

Jung's psychological integration theory, also known as Individuation, outlines his view that an individual's personality is composed of elements, these elements initially are separate. "Individuation can be defined as the achievement of self-actualisation through a process of integrating the conscious and the unconscious." (Journal Psyche, 1994). As the individual challenges and confronts these unconscious elements they become integrated into the self – the process of individuation leads to the development of a more authentic, whole and complete expression of an individual's personality.

In his book *Myths, dreams and Religion*, Joseph Campbell outlines how stories can be seen to exemplify Jung's integration theory.

Stories portray represent and facilitate the psychological integration (in the teller and in each listener) by bringing ... elements together and into harmony with each other. (Campbell, 1970, p.5)

Whilst Miller pinpoints the very mechanics of storytelling that promote this:

Projection, identification, imitation, and imagination are important processes ... to people and stories. People project themselves into story characters. They identify [and] feel empathy with the characters. (Miller, 2011 p. 2)

By employing archetypal characters and plots, heroes, and heroines that the audience identifies with, they are engaged in their journey, and struggles. This journey is often based on the "well-made play" model, condensed by Campbell to the following four component parts of the hero's journey – "(a) exposition (situation/background), (b) conflict develops, (c) crisis develops, (d) resolution." (Campbell, 1970 p.5)

A correlation can begin to be made to aspects explored in the discussion of keywords, The Gothic, and Dreams. As The Gothic can often be seen to portray 'the other', in storytelling it can be the antagonist that causes the 'conflict' and 'crisis' in the narrative, creating a nightmarish scenario – the exposition, and therefore motivation for the journey. The Gothic psyche

also expresses the darker aspects of the individual's unconscious signifying therefore both the creatures that dwell in the darkest part of the forest, and the darkest recesses of the soul. It is the inner evil that must be confronted and conquered to bring about peace and resolution. The hero's archetypal journey in storytelling can be viewed as a process of healing, becoming a role-model for the individual, an exemplar of a route to healing. In Jung,

Archetypes are defined as images and themes that derive from the collective unconscious ... Archetypes have universal meanings across cultures and may show up in dreams, literature, art or religion. (McLeod, 2018)

This exploration illicit a further exploration of archetypes as developed by Jung, their applications to storytelling, and the arts.

Gothic.

The keyword Gothic has an interesting history. As a style it has evolved over its many resurgences. The term in relation to art was coined by Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574). He compared the style that had dominated European

Medieval Art and architecture to the Goths - a Germanic tribe from the barbarian culture that brought about the fall of Rome. To Vasari, what came to be known as Gothic art and architecture possessed a "*monstrous and barbarous disorder*", as quoted in Marinica, (2010).

Gothic became an aesthetic form in literature, seen first in Horace Walpole's gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*, published 1764, and the Gothic psyche emerges in works such as, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) by Mary Shelley, Wilde's, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and Louis Stevenson's novella, *The Strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).

Historically, it is a counter-Enlightenment impulse, emerging in response to pervasive cycles of conservatism or repression, and often following periods of consumer boom and ... moments of perceived moral, emotional or socio-political limitation...[it] came to represent the 'Other' ... associated with darkness, cruelty and death as well as opposition to classical order. (Williams, 2007, p.49)

A clash of opposites, the protagonist that we identify with and the antagonist that represents the 'Other', forms the core of hero's journey narratives in storytelling. As seen in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and *Dr*

Jekyll and Mr Hyde, the Gothic psyche alludes to an internal inner conflict, a duality within the self:

Gothic works invite the audience to acquaint themselves with, and to fear, the shadow that dwells within. (Freud ... called his version of the shadow the 'id'; all of us have an 'it', a hungering, formless, ungended thing, living within us.) The premise of Gothic's double psychology is that we ought to be very afraid – and of nothing so much as ourselves.

(Williams, 2007, p.30)

A broader more open understanding of the Gothic as an aesthetic style, rather than a set manifesto, or specific group must be applied when viewing artworks today. As the Gothic style re-emerges periodically it has evolved due to trends and a cross-fertilisation of themes, influences, ideas and fashions. In my own experience I associate the Gothic with the Goth music genre and fashions of the late 80's, and gothic typography on heavy metal album covers. With reference to the Gothic in illustration, Alan Male discusses artworks created with the intention to 'shock' or, "of inciting disagreeable reactions in the audience." (Male, 2007)

He makes a strong link to literature: storytelling and introduces the notion that this style can emanate from the realm of dreams.

Stylisation can be varied from hyperrealism to extreme forms of surrealism. [Due to]... the message ... the theme or subject, ... [images] may be subjected to grotesque and deliberate ugly distortions. These images can be rendered with a raw and irate energy, pushing far beyond ... traditional and accepted [aesthetic] norms. (Male, 2007, p.81)

One artist whose work has inspired a plethora of Gothic works is William Blake, despite for the most part, being ignored in investigations of the Gothic. This Gothic afterlife can be seen in Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon* novel (1981), its film (2002) and TV adaptations (2015), as well as Ridley Scott's *Alien* prequel film, *Prometheus* (2012).



Figure 6. William Blake *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun*. c. 1803 - 1805, pen and grey ink with watercolour over graphite, accessed: 29 April, 2021, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/highlights/blake-great-red-dragon-woman-clothed-with-sun.html>

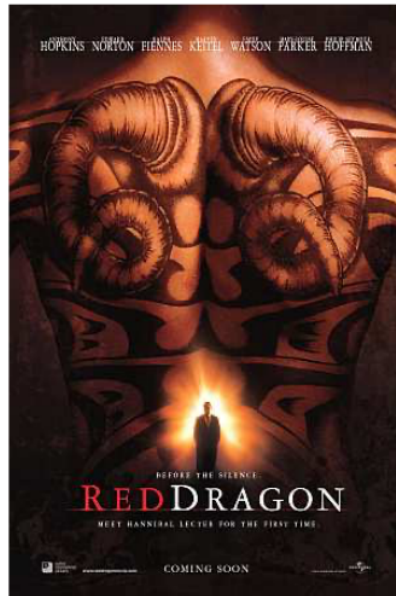


Figure 7. Universal Pictures, *Red Dragon* poster, 2002, printed poster, accessed: 6 May, 2021, <http://zoamorphosis.com/2010/02/cannibalising-blake/>

Francis Dolarhyde, the serial killer ... obsesses over this painting, hears the dragon speak to him and has the dragon tattooed on his back. In *Red Dragon*, Harris explicitly and repeatedly establishes a link ... between Harris's and Blake's concept of Good and Evil. (Gompf, 2007, p. 179)



Figure 8. William Blake, *Newton*, 1795, colour print, ink and watercolour on paper. Courtesy of Tate Gallery, accessed: 29 April, 2021, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/blake-newton-n05058>

In *Prometheus* (2012), the visualisation of the prehuman Engineer characters (Figure 9) bear a strong resemblance to Blake's highly anatomised figures, as seen in his portrait of Newton (1795), figure 8.



Figure 9. 20th Century Studios, *Prometheus* film still, 2012, accessed 5 May, 2021, <https://literaryvisuality.wordpress.com/2012/06/15/prometheus-the-modern-frankenstein/>

In the idealised, even universalised, treatment of physique there are striking aesthetic similarities between the film's angular proto-human 'Engineers' and the visionary male nudes of William Blake. (Waldron, 2012). The Gothic clearly still thrives in storytelling, illustration and media today and merits further study, especially in light of the contexts leading to its previous resurgences, our current crises, re-emerging from the enforced

restrictions reacting to the pandemic into a time of global climate uncertainty.

The Gothic sublime today reflects a hesitant and apprehensive mind obscured by a deep fear of the unfamiliar future...In a final ecstatic *danse macabre*, we are slowly waltzing ... verging upon the edge of an eternal abyss. (Williams, 2007, p 43).

Even this initial exploration into these keywords has revealed that there's a correlation and an overlap between these keywords, as well as a rich body of practitioners from various disciplines whose work embodies these keywords.

Aspects explored in the discussion of the keywords The Gothic and Storytelling revealed several corresponding areas, such as The Gothic signifying 'the other'. In storytelling it can be said that the role of an antagonist, embodies 'the other': the dark, disruptive element that propels the narrative forwards. In stories of inner conflict or duality, the darker aspects of the unconscious is the Gothic psyche. It is the impulsive id. These types of stories exemplify Jung's theory of integration, speaking to healing traumas on a personal and societal level.

In his book, *Illustration: a Theoretical and Contextual Perspective*, Alan Male cites the influence of Surrealism, and therefore dreams on illustration which can be a vehicle of storytelling. He also acknowledges that illustrations of this type inevitably venture into visual metaphors and aesthetic treatment of subject matter as seen in Gothic art.

Stylisation can be varied from hyperrealism to extreme forms of surrealism ... [images] may be subjected to grotesque and deliberate ugly distortions ... rendered with a raw and irate energy, pushing far beyond the boundaries of traditional ... norms regarding composition and pure aesthetics. (Male, 2007, p.82)

This leads me to propose the following question for my Independent Inquiry: What influence does the subconscious mind and dreams have on creativity and storytelling today, and can storytelling and creativity be seen to show a process of healing from traumas?

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