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THE CONTRASTING EFFECTS OF NIGHTMARES, EXISTENTIAL DREAMS, AND TRANSCENDENT DREAMS

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Bert States (1997) proposed that *some* dreams have "magnitude" (p. 238). His term superficially resembles Jung's reference to "big" dreams (e.g., Jung, 1966, p. 117), which involve mythological motifs (e.g., encounters with spiritual beings), abstract geometric patterns (e.g., mandalas), and transcendent otherness (e.g., a numinous presence). But for States, magnitude more nearly resembles the "size" that Aristotle (1998) attributed to tragic predicaments, which involve the core of a person's prospects for well-being (e.g., irreconcilable moral conflicts), an acute sense of human vulnerability (e.g., exposed limitations), and cathartic pity and terror (e.g., restorative grief). States (1997, pp. 246–250) compares the magnitude of the following dream with the concluding scene from *King Lear*:

> I was running along a path toward a house where some friends were having an afternoon gathering. . . . I was joining the group with very positive expectations. Then suddenly, on a path parallel to my own, slightly below it, I saw a finch speeding along on the ground in the opposite direction, much like the Roadrunner in the cartoon. The finch was a brilliant green–yellow color, as delicate as a Christmas ornament, and it seemed mechanically propelled. Inexplicably, I found a large pebble in my hand and I tossed it back over my head, almost aimlessly, in the bird's direction. No sooner was the pebble in flight than I conceived the consequence, and I shouted, "No!" But the bird was already squeaking aloud in pain; the pebble had clearly severed one of its wings and it was vainly flapping the other wing in a pathetic effort to right itself. I now saw that the bird was made of flesh and there was no undoing the damage I had done. I began to howl. (States, 1997; pp. 238–239)

After extended reflection, including comparison with the moment of his sister's death and with Lear's plaintive words for the dead Cordelia, States concludes that his dream was "grief incarnate" (p. 245). While differentiable from the numinous rapture of Jung's big dreams, the nature of this dream's magnitude remains ambiguous. The desperate "No," the painful "squeaking," and the agonizing "howl" suggest *nightmarish* dread. And yet, the agonizing *sadness* that concludes States's dream is unlike the stark *fear* that normally enfolds nightmare imagery (Robert & Zadra, 2014). So, is the "magnitude" of States' dream merely an alternative term for nightmare "intensity"? Or is it qualitatively different? In the context of contemporary dream studies, this is not an idle question.

During the last two decades, nightmare-centred threat, fear, and defence have virtually defined theories of dream formation and function. Hartmann (1998) argued that nightmares after trauma are "prototypic" of "the same process [that] occurs in all dreams" (p. 33). Revonsuo (2000) stressed the centrality of a threat-triggered mnemonic system that regulates "fear or defensive responses" (p. 887). Domhoff (2003) placed repetitive posttraumatic nightmares at one end of a continuum that "fits with the persistence of negative memories stored in the vigilance/fear system" (p. 28). Nielsen and Levin (2007) emphasized that dreaming reflects the construction of extinction memories through which fear memories, including their emotional concomitants, become inhibited. Even without denying the importance of posttraumatic dreams and nightmares, the preceding models overemphasize traumatic distress and potentially overlook the influence of other emotion-coordinating systems on dreaming and dream function. At the very least they do not address the effects of the separate system that mediates separation distress (Panksepp, 2005)—and that may mediate dreams expressive of "grief incarnate."

Overgeneralized models of traumatic stress exacerbate the problem. Much contemporary research has characterized traumatic stress as a common response to threat and violence (e.g., physical abuse) *and* separation and loss (e.g., death of a parent; Figley, Bride, & Mazza, 1997; Green, 2000). However, it is increasingly clear that the traumatic stress model assimilates loss to trauma at the expense of research and clinical understandings of bereavement (Raphael & Martinek, 1997; Stroebe & Schut, 2005–2006). Although both involve intrusive thoughts in *some* form (e.g., repetitive thoughts about the trauma or loss) and avoidance in *some* form (e.g., staying away from reminders of the trauma or loss), the role of hyperarousal within traumatic distress is distinctively associated with amygdala-mediated vigilance. The role of hyperarousal in dreams involving traumatic distress is differentiable from the role of separation distress (e.g., the sense of a foreshortened future) in the generation of very differently expressive dream patterns (Kuiken, Chudleigh, & Racher, 2010).

Similar conceptual tension is evident in the definition of nightmares in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)* (APA, 2013), especially in the symptom descriptions for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

(PTSD) and Separation Anxiety Disorder. First, nightmares are generically defined as "story-like sequences of dream imagery that . . . incite anxiety, fear, or *other dysphoric emotions*" (italics mine, p. 404). Then, symptoms of PTSD are said to include nightmares "*thematically related to the major threats* involved in the traumatic event" (italics mine, p. 282), while symptoms of Separation Anxiety Disorder purportedly include nightmares involving "the *theme of separation*" and "*separation anxiety*" (italics mine, pp. 191–192). Reference to "other dysphoric emotions" in the generic definition of nightmares seems a (clumsy) conceptual extension enabling nightmares thematically related to separation distress to be included in the same category as nightmares thematically related to traumatic distress.

Monothetic and Polythetic Oneiric Categories

Throughout the literature just mentioned, attempts to define nightmares have involved search for a minimal set of attributes (e.g., dream imagery, dysphoric emotion, immediate awakening with recall) each of which is necessary and the combination of which is sufficient for identifying nightmares (cf. Robert & Zadra, 2014). Such *monothetic* approaches to definitional specificity run several risks: (1) the minimal set of attributes of the class often excludes other relevant attributes (e.g., the frequency of physical aggression in nightmares); (2) selection of that minimal set of attributes often reflects investigator presuppositions, rather than empirical observation (e.g., the "invisibility" of sadness in nightmares); and (3) stipulation of an "essential" set of attributes often leads to false negatives. The latter problem is evident in attempts to distinguish "nightmares" from "bad dreams" on the basis of whether intensely disturbing emotions induce immediate awakening and recall. Hasler and Germain (2009) point out that differences between nightmare intensity and bad dream intensity are small and that the reported absence of immediate awakening with recall after bad dreams is subject to distortion. More telling, though, is that bad dreams involve *different* emotions (e.g., anger) and themes (e.g., interpersonal conflict) than do nightmares (Robert & Zadra, 2014), suggesting that current monothetic definitions of nightmares and bad dreams potentially obscure qualitatively different phenomena. Thus, although the search for monothetic definitional specificity is commonplace in nightmare studies (and throughout neo-positivist psychological science), it may be as ill-suited to its definitional (and classificatory) objectives as it historically has been in taxonomic studies in the biological sciences. The search for a monothetic definition of nightmares (or, for that matter, bad dreams) is much like asking for the "operational definition" of a dolphin.

In general, a contrasting *polythetic* approach to definitional specificity has guided the emergence of biological taxonomies and perhaps should be considered in attempts to attain definitional precision in dream studies. For example, the approach to identifying nightmares might well be guided by classificatory objectives according to which (cf. Beckner, 1959):

1. Each instance of the category "nightmare" is expected to have a large number of distinctive (or at least differentiating) attributes;
2. Each attribute in that array is expected to be an attribute of many instances of the category "nightmare"; and
3. No attribute in that array is expected to be an attribute of every instance of the category "nightmare."

By virtue of the third criterion, no attribute is strictly invariant (necessary); by virtue of the second criterion, each attribute is only more-or-less invariant; and by virtue of the first criterion, the systematic *comparison* of entities across a large number of their attributes becomes the empirical mode of access to these categories. Such comparative category articulation requires the assessment of degrees of similarity, primarily because the degree of similarity between two or more category instances depends upon how *many* parts of each are "the same." This orientation toward category articulation is also found in phenomenological philosophy (Husserl, 1948/1973, §45, p. 193), affirming the relevance of this orientation for the study of *experiential* narratives in the psychological sciences (Kuiken & Miall, 2001).

To some extent, the *polythetic* approach to category articulation has also guided the evolution of diagnostic categories in the *DSM-5* (APA, 2013, p. 733). The diagnostic criteria for PTSD illustrate the structure of a polythetic class: the enduring and disturbing conjunction of (1) at least one of four kinds of exposure to actual or threatened death, injury, or violence; (2) at least one of five types of intrusion symptoms; (3) at least one of two forms of avoidance symptoms; (4) at least two of seven altered mood or cognition symptoms; and (5) at least two of six hyperarousal symptoms. It is not difficult to imagine comparably structured *polythetic* definitional specificity for nightmares, although the taxonomic procedures that facilitate articulation of polythetic categories are not routinely included in nightmare investigators' methodological repertoire. Nonetheless, rather than stipulating monothetic category boundaries, it is important to delineate empirically the polythetic boundaries of the category "nightmare"—as well as other categories of dreams that are "big," "intense," or have "magnitude."

Classificatory Studies of Impactful Dreams

The *polythetic* approach to definitional specificity has shaped the design of a series of classificatory studies of impactful dreams conducted at the University of Alberta. In the first such study, Kuiken and Sikora (1993) asked participants to describe dreams that continued to influence their thoughts and feelings even after awakening. Then, similarly expressed meanings were identified through systematic close reading and comparison of the dream narratives (e.g., descriptions of sudden scene shifts, descriptions of recurrent attempts to avoid harm), rather than according to a priori conceptions (cf. Kuiken & Miall, 2001; Kuiken, Schopflocher, & Wild, 1989).

The presence or absence of these similarly expressed meanings was combined with participant ratings (e.g., of emotion) to create matrices that, when cluster analyzed, yielded polythetic categories. Thus, instances of each category shared a substantial number of experiential attributes; each attribute described many instances of the category; and no attribute was invariant across instances of each category.

These classificatory procedures revealed three types of impactful dreams, each distinguishable by coherent profiles of attributes involving emotions, sensory phenomena, movement characteristics, motives and goals, and dream endings. A category called "nightmares" included dreams with vivid tactile-kinesthetic imagery, vivid or unusual sounds, physical metamorphoses, energetic activity, harm avoidance, and intense fear during the transition to wakefulness; a category called "existential dreams" included dreams with vivid tactile-kinesthetic imagery, light/dark contrasts, ineffectual movement (fatigue), separation and loss, spontaneous affective shifts, and intense sadness during the transition to wakefulness; and a category called "transcendent dreams" included dreams with vivid tactile-kinesthetic imagery, spreading warmth, unusual sources of light, felt vitality, flying and floating, magical accomplishment, perspective shifts, and awe and ecstasy during the transition to wakefulness. Nightmares, existential dreams, and transcendent dreams all differ from mundane dreams; involve intense affect at the moment of awakening; and include imagery that seems "real" even after awakening.

Busink and Kuiken (1996) replicated the Kuiken and Sikora study, using the recurrently expressed meanings identified in the first study as content analytic categories, and found the same three polythetic dream categories (nightmares, existential dreams, and transcendent dreams). Later, Kuiken, Lee, Eng, and Singh (2006) identified these three dream types by cluster analyzing questionnaire items based on the recurrent expressed meanings and rating scales that differentiated the basic dream types in the first two studies. Most recently, Lee and Kuiken (in press) estimated the average attribute profile for each dream category, enabling use of a profile-matching strategy to identify dream types in a new sample. In sum, across this series of studies, the same three polythetic dream categories (nightmares, existential dreams, and transcendent dreams) have consistently been observed.

Emotion Contrasts Across Polythetic Dream Categories

Because of the pivotal role of emotion intensity in generic definitions of nightmares, it is useful to examine more closely the emotions that differentiate nightmares, existential dreams, and transcendent dreams from each other (and from mundane dreams). In doing so, it is also useful to move beyond (1) the usual nightmare-centered characterization of emotion categories (e.g., "anxiety, fear, [and] other dysphoric emotions"; *DSM-5*), (2) the restricted array of emotions that dreamers *spontaneously* describe in open-ended dream reports (e.g., Robert & Zadra, 2014), and (3) the presupposition that a single primary emotion characterizes each dream category. In a recent study of 174 impactful dreams reported online immediately

TABLE 14.1 Distinctive Feelings and Emotions for Each Polythetic Dream Category

	Mundane dreams (n = 54)	Transcendent dreams (n = 22)	Nightmares (n = 41)	Existential dreams (n = 57)
Scared/terrified	0.30[d]	1.91[c]	*3.34*[a]	2.72[b]
Sad/downhearted	0.82[c]	1.32[bc]	1.32[b]	*3.44*[a]
Ecstatic/in awe	0.83[b]	*2.64*[a]	0.46[b]	0.51[b]
Vulnerable/helpless	0.96[c]	1.73[b]	*3.17*[a]	*3.11*[a]
Nervous/anxious	1.24[c]	1.91[b]	*3.02*[a]	2.91[a]
Guilty/ashamed	0.35[b]	0.18[b]	0.63[b]	*2.02*[a]
Despair/discouraged	0.70[c]	0.96[bc]	1.49[b]	*2.81*[a]
Angry/frustrated	0.85[c]	1.14[bc]	1.73[b]	*2.51*[a]
Lost/disoriented	1.02[c]	1.59[b]	*2.32*[a]	2.44[a]
Inadequate/failed	0.67[bc]	0.18[c]	0.88[b]	*1.53*[a]
Disgusted/repulsed	0.46[b]	0.59[b]	0.71[b]	1.32[a]
Powerful/competent	0.85[b]	*1.68*[a]	0.20[c]	0.26[c]
Happy/joyful	1.69[a]	1.68[a]	0.34[b]	0.19[b]
Hopeful/optimistic	1.57[a]	1.55[a]	0.22[b]	0.28[b]
Peaceful/calm	1.50[a]	1.32[a]	0.22[b]	0.25[b]
Longing/yearning	1.04[a]	1.00[a]	*0.22*[b]	1.37[a]
Relieved/made safe	1.02[a]	1.23[a]	0.49[b]	0.39[b]
Affectionate/loving	1.26[a]	1.32[a]	0.20[b]	0.47[b]

Note. Means with different superscripts within rows differ significantly from each other ($p < .05$; LSD).

after awakening, participants rated the intensity of each of the 18 emotions (e.g., scared/terrified, sad/downhearted; from 0 = "not at all" to 4 = "extremely") used in Hartmann's (2013) scheme for assessing central image intensity. As indicated in Table 14.1, this approach reveals a level of emotional complexity that would not otherwise be evident.

Nightmare Emotions

As expected (because it is one of the attributes that defines this polythetic category), scared/terrified was a *distinctive* nightmare attribute. No other emotion category differentiated nightmares from existential dreams, transcendent dreams, *and* mun–dane dreams. This pattern is broadly compatible with the results of prior studies of nightmare emotions (cf. Table 1 in Robert & Zadra, 2014). However, two emotions sometimes attributed to nightmares were *not* distinctively nightmarish. Specifically, nervous/anxious was equally characteristic of nightmares *and* existential dreams (which at least complicates the generic definition of nightmares in *DSM-5*), and vulnerable/helpless was equally characteristic of nightmares and existential dreams (which complicates Hartmann's [1998] attribution of this emotion to nightmares).[1]

Finally, yearning/longing is an emotion whose *absence* is distinctively characteristic of nightmares. Although the absence of an attribute is not usually considered a useful definitional criterion, this possibility becomes salient in the comparative procedures used to identify polythetic dream categories. In this case, an absence is informative; the distinctive absence of yearning/longing in nightmares may help to explain their *lack* of quasi-therapeutic benefit. Clinical wisdom and psychotherapy research (e.g., Diamond, Rochman, & Amir, 2010) suggest that anxious anger *without* shifts to unexpressed sadness is incompatible with progress in psychotherapy. The absence of yearning/longing, then, is consistent with other evidence (see the discussion of Contrasting Carryover Effects on p. XX) that nightmares are *not* endogenous "quasi-therapeutic" events.

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Existential Dream Emotions

As expected (because it is one of the attributes that defines this polythetic category), sad/downhearted was a *distinctive* attribute of existential dreams. Two other emotion categories also differentiated existential dreams from nightmares, transcendent dreams, *and* mundane dreams. First, guilty/ashamed was associated with existential dreams, a finding consistent with prior classificatory studies (Busink & Kuiken, 1996; Kuiken & Sikora, 1993; Kuiken et al., 2006). Second, inadequate/failed was associated with existential dreams, which is congruent with prior evidence that, in existential dreams, the dreamer is tired, weak, or unable to move and unable to attain his/her goals. Whether inadequate/failed should be considered a kinaesthetic aspect of movement ineffectuality, a negative outcome of dream actions, and/or an emotion requires closer consideration.

Finally, the distinctively high ratings for guilty/ashamed, despair/discouraged, and disgusted/repulsed in existential dreams suggest that *moral* inadequacy and failure become salient within that dream type. Guilt is explicitly mentioned in the following example:

> In my dream, from my recollection, I was nowhere. I wasn't inside or outside. I was crying but I didn't know why. Then my close friends appeared and tried to take me with them. I was hesitant to follow them; I remember feeling guilty. My family members showed up, all but my Mom. Then it hit me: We were all upset because my Mom had passed away. I don't know how, when, or how; I just know I was feeling a lot of pain. Next thing I knew people kept appearing and consoling me. I was then woken up because I was crying and I had a horrible feeling in my stomach.

Transcendent Dream Emotions

As expected (because it is one of the attributes that defines this polythetic category), ecstatic/in awe was a *distinctive* attribute of transcendent dreams. Only one

other emotion category differentiated transcendent dreams from nightmares, existential dreams, *and* mundane dreams (powerful/competent), a finding consistent with prior evidence that, in transcendent dreams, the dreamer feels energetic and alive and possesses an exceptional (perhaps magical) ability to attain his/her goals (Busink & Kuiken, 1996; Kuiken & Sikora, 1993; Kuiken et al., 2006). Whether powerful/competent should be understood as a kinaesthetic aspect of movement efficacy (including flying or floating), a positive outcome of dream actions, and/or an emotion requires further study.

Finally, for two reasons, transcendent dreams cannot simply be described as dreams with positive emotions (cf. Hartmann, 2013; Robert & Zadra, 2014). First, ratings of happy/joyful, hopeful/optimistic, peaceful/calm, and relieved/made safe in transcendent dreams do *not* differ from ratings of those emotions in *mundane* dreams. In addition, ratings of nervous/anxious are *higher* in transcendent dreams than in mundane dreams. Thus, a subtle blend of anxiety and elevation (Keltner & Haidt, 2003) distinguishes this dream type, as affirmed by the following example:

> I saw a few beautiful birds; they were flying around my house [and] then went down in my background. They were so beautiful that I want[ed] to touch them. Suddenly, one of them [was dead] because of me. I [was] very sad, so I tried to find out [whether] that was caused by me or not. Then, I came to a monk and ask[ed] him that. He told me just one sentence: "Don't worry, maybe you are dreaming." I woke up after he told me that.

General Comments

The attributes that identify each of the three basic impactful dream types involve not only complex variations in emotion, as just described, but also sensory phenomena, movement characteristics, motives and goals, and dream endings. Further articulation of these polythetic dream categories requires consideration of each level in this multileveled array. Although all three impactful dream types involve emotion that is especially intense just before awakening, considerable complexity would be sacrificed by simply characterizing nightmares as frightening dreams that initiate immediate awaking, existential dreams as sad dreams that initiate immediate awakening, and transcendent dreams as involving positive emotions that initiate immediate awakening.

Although 41% of the dreamers just described had recently experienced significant loss (including traumatic loss) and 27% had recently experienced significant trauma, the occurrence of such emotional complexity in the dreams of individuals diagnosed with PTSD or Separation Anxiety Disorder has not been studied. The prevalence of these particular emotion profiles among individuals diagnosed with Nightmare Disorder also warrants closer study.

The Contrasting Carryover Effects of Impactful Dreams

Distinguishing between nightmares, existential dreams, and transcendent dreams invites reconsideration of both dream formation and dream function. A comprehensive theory of dreaming would move beyond traumatic stress and (nightmare-centred) threat and fear (e.g., Hartmann, 1998; Revonsuo, 2000; Domhoff, 2003; Nielsen & Levin, 2007) to address the distinctive effects of loss and sadness (existential dreams), as well as the distinctive effects of ascent and ecstasy (transcendent dreams). The only attempt to begin this theoretical task is Hunt's (1989) dream typology (nightmares, titanic dreams, archetypal dreams), which roughly corresponds to the preceding empirical classification (nightmares, existential dreams, transcendent dreams). However, Hunt was especially concerned with the formation and effects of transcendent (archetypal) dreams, while my colleagues and I (Kuiken, 1999; Kuiken & Sikora, 1993; Kuiken et al., 2006) have been especially concerned with the formation and effects of existential dreams. Even so, our complementary efforts converge in one important respect. Hunt suggested that the visual-spatial imagery (e.g., flying and floating) of transcendent (archetypal) dreams *metaphorically* reasserts the motifs characteristic of Jung's (1966) big dreams, including their *aesthetic* aspects. We have suggested that the tactile-kinesthetic imagery (e.g., movement ineffectuality) of existential dreams *metaphorically* reasserts the affective themes characteristic of dreams with magnitude (States, 1997), including their *aesthetic* aspects. Theorists often argue that dreaming is metaphoric, suggesting the figurative origins of such aesthetic outcomes.

Theories of Dream Metaphor

According to one family of theories, metaphors are formed and comprehended by a process of *comparison*. For example, according to the structure-mapping theory proposed by Gentner, Bowdle, Wolff, and Boronat (2001), metaphoric commonalities are found by mapping or transferring features of a metaphoric vehicle onto a metaphoric topic. Thus, the 5-year-old child in Foulkes's (1999) studies who said, "I dreamed I was in the bathtub asleep," metaphorically sensed that "My bed *is like* a bathtub." According to another family of theories, metaphors are formed and comprehended by a process of categorization. According to the class-inclusion theory proposed by Glucksberg (2001), metaphor comprehension occurs when the topic is understood as a member of an *ad hoc* category for which the vehicle is an exemplar—while the topic constrains the attributes that are relevant. Thus, Foulkes's 5-year-old dreamer metaphorically sensed that "My bed *is* a bathtub," which enables "seeing" a bathtub as a place for sleeping (even though, like a bed, it is a place that is dry, not wet).

Both comparison and class inclusion theories of metaphor describe a mode of thinking that requires higher level executive functions (metacognition) than are typically available during dreaming (i.e., systematic comparison, qualified class inclusion). However, the *ad hoc* class inclusion part of the class inclusion model

may be all that is needed to describe dream thought as at least *quasi*-metaphoric. Subsuming the vehicle and topic within a single *ad hoc* category (the *is* part; "My bed *is* a bathtub") may be precisely what remains of metaphoric thinking when the higher-level executive function that can constrain it (the *is not* part; "My bath-tub bed *is* dry, *not* wet) has been diminished by the deactivation of the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex that occurs during REM sleep. An array of comparably passive semantic conflations has recently become the focus of research in psycholinguistics: modifier-modified compounds that are not conventionally figurative but that similarly generate category transformation. By this account, Foulkes's 5-year-old may have dreamed a noun-noun compound (bathtub-bed) that is analogous to many conventional (e.g., beach-ball) and creative (e.g., knifing-winds) modifier-modified compound phrases (Mather, Jones, & Estes, 2014). Moreover, an analysis of literary stylistics provided by Mukarovský(1940/1976) suggests that such quasi-metaphoric "crossings" are at the core of *literary* poetics. If this formulation can be generalized to an *oneiric* poetics, dreaming—at least certain types of dreaming—may have aesthetic effects comparable to reading poetry.

The Aesthetic Effects of Impactful Dreams

The viability of this proposal was initially bolstered by studies comparing the effects of nightmares, existential dreams, and transcendent dreams on self-perceptual depth. First, while nightmares consistently evoke postawakening distress such as lingering vigilance, inability to resume sleep, feared return of disturbing images (Belicki, 1992; Miró, & Martínez, 2005), existential dreams consistently evoke postawakening distress *and* self-perceptual depth, for example, sensitivity to aspects of life usually ignored, reaffirmation of personal convictions (Busink & Kuiken, 1996; Kuiken & Sikora, 1993; Kuiken et al., 2006). Second, transcendent dreams, unlike either nightmares or existential dreams, evoke a form of self-perceptual depth that has spiritual import such as attunement to preter-natural phenomena (Kuiken et al., 2006). The self-perceptual depth evoked by existential dreams and by transcendent dreams may be two versions of the same basic aesthetic phenomenon.

Specifically, existential dreams may evoke a form of sublime feeling that com-bines self-perceptual depth with affective disquietude (sadness, inadequacy) and an inexpressible sense of finitude; transcendent dreams may evoke a form of sublime feeling that combines self-perceptual depth with affective enthrallment (ecstasy, power) and an inexpressible sense of reverence. This proposal is risky but not reck-less. The term "sublime" names an experience that resists articulation—sufficiently so to motivate even sympathetic scholars to argue that a theory of the sublime is not possible (Forsey, 2007; Sircello, 1993). Yet literary theories of the sublime, however well-suited to their objectives, have persisted beyond their 18th and 19th century romantic versions (e.g., Kant, Coleridge) to include 20th and 21st century modern (Mallarmé, Woolf) and postmodern renderings (Lyotard, Celan).

One risk in this proposed alliance between literary and psychological theory is that the latter may motivate attention to subjective feelings toward or judgments about "objectively" sublime things such as the Grand Canyon (Konečni, 2011), rather than to a conception of sublimity that integrates subjectivity and objectivity. Kant's (1790/1987) *Critique of Judgment*, which has contributed to discussions of the romantic, modern, and postmodern sublime, remains relevant because it provides just such an integrated conception. According to the present construal of Kant's aesthetics, sublime feeling involves: (1) abrupt recognition of limited conceptual access to an elusive, incongruous, or overwhelming "object"; (2) simultaneous recognition of a partial (preconceptual) grasp of that "object"; and (3) awareness of the expressive mode of engagement through which that "object" has become further (but still partially) disclosed.

So, in the empirical manner of a psychologist—and much to the chagrin of colleagues in literary studies and philosophy—Kuiken, Campbell, and Sopčák (2012) devised empirical indices of (1) sublime enthrallment (the interactive combination of questionnaire subscales that assess wonder, reverence, inexpressible realizations, and self–perceptual depth) and (2) sublime disquietude (the interactive combination of questionnaire subscales that assess disquietude, finitude, inexpressible realizations, and self–perceptual depth). In two recent studies of literary reading (Kuiken et al., 2012), the preceding index of sublime enthrallment was predictably greater following, for example, in–depth engagement with Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," Shelley's "Mont Blanc," and Rilke's "First Duino Elegy." The preceding index of sublime disquietude was predictably greater following, for example, in–depth engagement with Celan's "Death Fugue," Owen's "Exposure," and Levi's "The Black Stars."

The aesthetic parallel between reading poetry and dreaming plausibly includes correspondence between the forms of sublime feeling that occur in both domains. Consistent with this possibility, in two studies of impactful dreams recorded at home using online procedures, Kuiken (2014) recently found that existential dreams were followed by reports of sublime disquietude; transcendent dreams were followed by sublime enthrallment; and nightmares were followed *by neither form of sublime feeling*. Like engagement with literature that portrays and perhaps induces sublime disquietude (e.g., Celan's "Death Fugue"), existential dreams primarily evoke disquietude (finitude) at the limits of expressibility. In addition, like engagement with literature that portrays and perhaps induces sublime enthrallment (e.g., Shelley's "Mont Blanc"), transcendent dreams primarily evoke wonder (reverence) at the limits of expressibility. The carryover effects of these two impactful dream types—but not nightmares—involve a "touch" of sublimity.

Implications

Just as lingering with a poem can bring a reader to the limits of expressibility, so, too, can some impactful dreams. The magnitude of existential dreams is a form

of sublimity that combines self-perceptual depth with disquietude (sadness, insuf-ficiency) and (existential) finitude; the magnitude of transcendent dreams is a form of sublimity that combines self-perceptual depth with enthrallment (ecstasy, elevation) and (spiritual) reverence. Interestingly, *DSM-5* acknowledges that the former occurs during bereavement: "dysphoric dreams may occur during bereavement but typically involve loss and sadness and are followed by self-reflection and insight, rather than distress, on awakening" (APA, 2013, p. 406). Although some evidence (Kuiken, 1993) affirms that separation anxiety during bereavement predicts existential dreams, Cartwright's (2010) studies of dreams that allude to disrupted family relations after divorce suggest that bereavement is not the only form of separation that generates existential dreams, their self-perceptual shifts, and their aesthetic effects.

Despite their agonizing sadness, the self-perceptual shifts and aesthetic effects of existential dreams may contribute to their perceived value. Despite their *angst*, sublime disquietude is not despair; by virtue of the animated engagement that supports *partial* disclosure they are potentially restorative. For this reason, it is crucial to differentiate existential dreams from nightmares within interventions designed to reduce "nightmare" distress (cf. Krakow & Zadra, 2010). Dreamers may be reluctant to let go of diagnosed "nightmares" that in fact involve the sublime magnitude of existential dreams. Their reluctance may reflect a combination of "inappropriate" reluctance to let go of actual *nightmares* and an "appropriate" reluctance to let go of the *existential dreams* (and even transcendent dreams) whose magnitude not only awakens them but also transports them to the limits of aesthetic expressibility.

Note

1. Hartmann actually scored this set of dreams using his criteria for central image intensity. In his assessment, 42% of dreams scored for scared/terrified were also scored for vulnerable/helpless emotion. Only 22% of dreams scored for sad/downhearted and only 5% of dreams scored for nervous/anxious were also scored for vulnerable/helpless emotion.

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