

At The Sign Of The Twisted Mind

I am lying on a bed, mostly asleep...in a dim-lit place, it seems to be a radio broadcasting studio...through a large window into the control room, I can see a talk-show host doing his program there...the only light in here comes from his room.

Someone enters my studio and chokes me...I try to scream, but I am fearful stiff, nothing comes out...I must push out of my silence if I am to survive...I croak out a shout once, then again, then another shout, each stronger.

The talk-show host sees what is happening and calls for help over the radio...I feel that I have pulled myself out of a frightening dream.

With another person I talk about this dream of being choked.

Then suddenly I awaken.

“O.K. So what does it all mean?” she asks.

It has no bottom, what my dream was. My eye can't hear nor my ear see it, my hand can't taste nor my tongue conceive it. Not even my heart can report. ¹ What shall I do with this happening and other such, these non-sensical, mysterious, yet living tissues of my life?

In “telling dream” my mouth faintly re-collects an original ambrosial immediacy; but whachamacallit? Your question of meaning, my acceptance that your question has value – these modify my taste. I join you sister, together we can try to know; I accept a new fruit nibble at the tree of knowledge. In so doing, a recreated happening shall be tattled. Then my mouth will know what to call it.

What to call “it”? A “tattle-tale-dit”? By tongue-splitting calling out to you I'll initiate a shared symbolic knowledge. We'll generate word, thought, and

feeling symbols to stand for the “happens”. Distinguishing “it” from other happening by way of symbol is the original step-up to understanding. It is the inclination to consciousness.

Give me leave to wander through conscious mind for a while. In my simple understanding, consciousness is selective attention. Many earthly beings seem to display what we call consciousness, they freely selectively attend to pieces of their environments. Consciousness is a comparing device; to be conscious requires entities and relationships between them. Human consciousness – our peculiar destiny – attends to our own attending.

Our primal relationship bundles whatever it is we claim to attend and the medium of attention through which our claim has been granted.

Attend to your dreaming. Do you ever dream while you’re reading a book? What, other than dreaming, does this behavior imply? The invasiveness or pervasiveness of dreams? Your fanciful, or thoughtful, or scatterbrained or visionary character? The book’s weakness (or strength)?

We bring off this secondary attending, this awareness of our own attending, by creating symbols. Words and phrases, objects of certain forms, colors, mathematical formulas, and odors can be examples of significant or meaningful or important symbolic “things” which refer and stand in for beings or entities to which we attend.

Symbols function as independent stand-in’s for attending. “Radio studio,” “choking,” “shouting” or “dream,” are symbol-pieces invented and shaped by customary use. We treat them as correspondents to supposed referents of our attention. The referent events thus indicated are conceived as existing separate from our symbol-toys, and we humans only know the events’ being by means of our symbolic fashioning of worlds. Our abilities to pull this off -- our consciousness symbol-trick -- fosters hope that we might use the position of the symbols’ autonomous standing to effect the world of referents we have made.

How do symbols do their work? How is something – a symbol – “about” something else? How does this about-ness help our understanding of conscious mind, and mind that is not-conscious?

Root meaning of our concept “conscious” is “to know-with another being.” As we’re in interaction with each other, together we splice or thread the symbolic-things we have gathered. When the symbol-spliced threads at all begins to

resemble itself into recognizable creation – a rope or a knot of knowledge, a cat’s cradle string theory – we tie it up as our culture. We use symbols to refer to other symbols as we weave inside our culture of symbol-things and symbol-actions. We cast off unfit ignorance to some other outside irrelevance, though on occasion we can incorporate wisps from outside as new symbol fragments.

Humans relax into inhabiting these our cultural ambient hammock habitats. From our creative beds we dream up our castles in the air. I notice how completely we attend to our own system of attending, I notice how we come to believe-in and belong-to our consciousness, I notice how our shared conscious mind makes experience, how it brings itself and we who partake of it into existence. We allow our consciousness to become the berth of life.

We are knowers who know we are fiction-makers, the authors and creators of our understandings. We are free! Our consciousness is freedom: freedom *from* mysterious, chaotic creating; freedom *to* understand; freedom *for* responsibly forming life. This freedom is an ability to separate. In our symbol-mindedness our understanding of being always separates us from being. We can remove ourselves, disconnect, say “No!”, and what we know we call “existence.”

I celebrate our human freedom, it is the bed of consciousness we Westerners have made. Now we must lie in it. Like the riverrun we are. Instead, our wonderful, woven conscious mind bids us welcome with ironic, pro-crusty-an’ smiling. We take the bed as our veracity – we’re hung up in existential seriousness, hung up clinging to our hammock, and forfeiting our fathomless humor.

My mind wanders off into fantasy. My hammock swings wildly. I fathom that only by our conscious illusions do I put order onto world. My dreams taste a liberation distinct from this freedom that consciousness delivers. My dreams taste of a different human potential. I will unravel my hammocks, those threaded, knotted constructions of reality in which I lie, till I fall to earth.

We Western peoples have explored, displayed, and altered our world by bringing the implicit, tacit, or unknown mysterious into an explicit knowledgable form. That which formally and formerly was non-conscious now is drawn into the service of conscious attentive purpose. Since the Renaissance, this way of exploration has led us to proclaim our trust in the beings brought forth by our growing bodies of conscious, symbolic knowledge, to proclaim our trust in the

purposeful and moral self we know. Mindful agency is the privileged definition of human being. We think we are homo sapiens, the thing of consciousness.

Historically, practitioners of this now-privileged view have understood it as advancing “reason” in opposition to “faith.” I believe differences of mind in the Western world are no longer best understood through these concepts. I propose that “reason” blooms in unlike varieties, I propose that “faith’s” promises have been bound into misunderstanding. But slow, be reasonable here.

I accept us as knowledgeable-being. And as much, I contend, we necessarily are the mind for what-for-now I will call faithfulness. This capability, as it initiates and responds, is distinctly different from knowledge. I access it by looping tongue around that same bitter/sweet distinction that consciousness declares. Fantastic chaos drops its pejorative, bitter, deceptive and obsessive distaste in me. I fall into a dreaming, a-symbolic faithfulness, absurdly and formlessly open (whose name my tongue declares to be “fidence”).

The liberation I dream welcomes mystery as no enemy to be banished, contained, or subdued into knowledge. To join mystery is to become faithful, to honor chaos that will not be ordered. All faith roots there, fidence of fantastic abundance. Western conscious mind scorns, fears and calls “madness” a person’s move toward the uproariousness of fantasy, but such a move is the only path to faithful living. In the home of faithfulness, life births forth a-symbolic mystery – yawnin’, harem-scare-‘em fantastic, senseless foolish.

Coming out, coming out from hibernation’s cave I am yet a bear embodying blackberry-sweet, ferocious mystery; slashing, clawing, nuzzling, and shuffling my way into human nature. I bring slaverings of the non-conscious mind in which I live. Surely not the same as yours is my dreaming madhouse of symbols-which-can-substitute-for-one-another. But my symbolic asylumbledge stands forth examining life unaware.

I reach for the whole. I need the conscious apprehensive knowing that freedom provides as my help-meet going into mysterious sleep. I reach for relationship between faithfulness and knowing, a relating which corresponds to the human humor in the modern and post-modern West.

Mind is so unaware, and its mystery so immense as it grasps my throat I am frightened almost shoutless. Come with me in my dreams! Yours and mine! Hold my hand as we try to understand, hold my hand as we try to fly! Together let us savor this our world.

I'm ready to come to terms: "No" and lying, fiction and fantasy, fidence and knowledge, inner and other, being and exi-stance, not-being and insi-stance. Possessed by these terms I write a book, *Old Man Dreams*, the result of my wanderings into the world between human knowings and our unknowns. Fantasies are its real data, dream "happens" tattled (translated) become the examples that here inform our mind. What do you make of them? Here I lie with them, make their fantasy into threads of knot telling fictional form.

My major concern in this writing is with the two ways human mind of the cultural West has respected its doubts, despair and fears: concerned with the ways we know our freedoms, concerned with the ways we liberate our faithfulness. "Can I trust (it)?" I have journeyed into others' mind as if it were mine own. From my best recollections of my peregrinations and their implications, I have developed a map, a four-fold guide to contemplate Western mind at its culmination of recording more than four millennia. I have chosen a different set of basic vocabulary to communicate the face of each fold in the map so you might understand how deeply distinct I believe each is from the others.

I thank Dick Farson and Miles Richardson for their off-handed comments many years ago which helped me set my course. Dick wondered and wished for some "psychology of the absurd." Miles wanted for anthropology the rich hermeneutics in Martin Heidegger's way toward authentic being. These men followed their own paths toward what they sought, while I took their inspiration far to return an absurd authenticity.

Early readers of my writing, including Anne Gero-Stillwell, Jere Moorman, Virginia Graham, Bob Lee, and Hildegard Steuri, helped me by spitting out many phrases where my intentions were not well-served by my writing. More important, these friends encouraged me to persevere. I deeply appreciate their interest, love, support, and critical minds directed towards me.

In this edition revised a dozen years after the original, my attempt continues to celebrate clarity *and* wonder. My basic notions and ways of expression are not much changed, yet like an indulgent further to *my* fiction, I plug new pitch to leaks

I find in this my burden basket carrying Western wisdom at the end of the twentieth century. Yes, I'm making fiction, but awed and excited in creative fantasy "I could make some thing of this!"

Old Man Dreams is like my life, a gamble in spirited living. As I re-read it, my experience is similar to traveling faces of the waters; sometimes smooth and easy, sometimes treacherous and quick; sometimes pooling, sometimes rapid. I like that, that it takes certain skill and attention and intimacy, and that it allows certain rest. I wonder if parts of my journey recall your experience and thought. Or have I adventured too far over the edge, alone among windhead cherubs blowing out of the four quarters?