

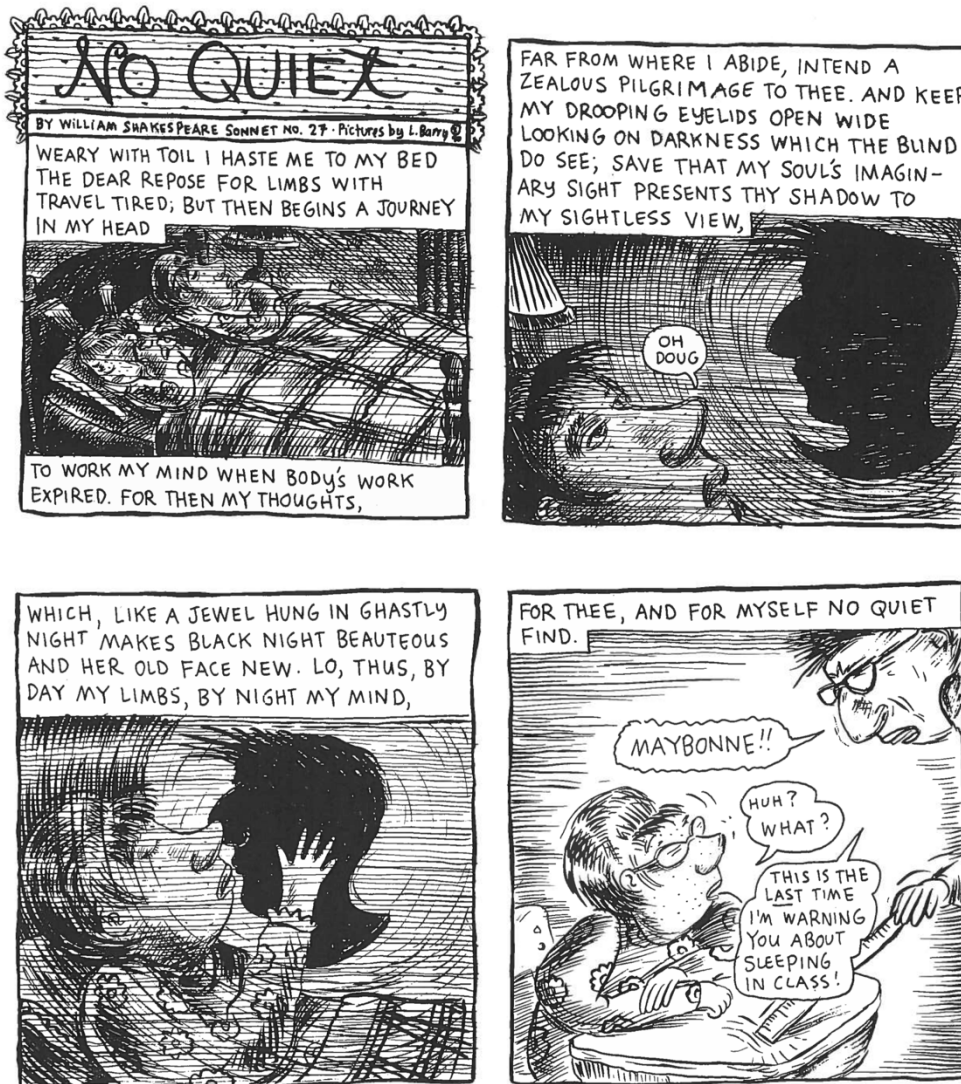
# Education and the School of Dreams: Learning and Teaching on the Invisible Edge of Reality and Fantasy

DAVID LEWKOWICH  
*University of Alberta*

**T**O CHANCE AN ENCOUNTER WITH DREAMING IN SCHOOL, and then to listen and dwell in this chance's elusive effects, is surely to also consider how life itself must be influenced by that which remains in the dark and cannot be strictly seen. Too often, it seems, education remains obsessed with the visible and the quantifiable, and as a teacher educator committed to studying the emotional and affective qualities of reading and aesthetic experience, I wonder how this obsession unknowingly defines and limits our objects of study, inspiring a disavowal of that which cannot be precisely read. As a way to counter this preoccupation, this paper involves a series of speculations, through literature, on what it might mean for the teacher and student to dwell on the precarious frontier of dreaming (Ogden, 2005) – an internal, though also potentially intersubjective and social dialogue – and also, what education is bound to lose if its efforts only allow the immediate qualities of doing and knowing, ignoring the hints of a life that doubles the one we live in the clear of day. Through its “play [of] inattentiveness, absurdity, [and] non-sense” (Britzman, 2009, p. x), the troubling illusions of dreaming invariably throw into question a version of education that celebrates a variety of impossibly unambiguous objectives: forever forward moving, always wakeful, totally lucid, intentional, dispassionate, and precisely focused on measurable goals. Against this model, and following Deborah Britzman's (2006) consideration of the psychic values of uncertainty in spaces of teaching and learning, I here agree that our “mistakes and misunderstandings,” toward which dreaming certainly contributes, “are not the outside of education but rather ... constitutive of its very possibility” (p. 43).

Writing about the mercurial and the undecidable nature of the psychoanalytic situation, Thomas Ogden (2004) describes it as “a lived emotional experience,” that “cannot be translated, transcribed, recorded, explained, understood or told in words” (p. 857). As I conceive of it in this paper – structured between two or more people, multiple histories, unconscious and conscious thinking, emotional life and curricular demands – the pedagogical encounter is also a similar venture. However, as with the use of psychoanalytic

case studies, the educational realm has much to learn from story, much to learn from the narrative gestures of fictional and non-fictional representations of life in school. By closely interpreting stories of educational relationships, we may thus perform a productive juxtaposition between the uses and functions of theory, the ethos of story, and the vagaries of lived experience. As an especially fertile example of the upset that education can often be seen to suffer when dreaming approaches its ranks, I will open this paper with a short illustration of the powerful urge to the wakeful and rational, drawn from the pages of comic artist Lynda Barry's (1992) graphic narrative *My Perfect Life*. I will then explore the creative possibilities of dreaming as found in Laurie Halse Anderson's (1999) young adult novel *Speak*, which offers a useful example of a teacher at times encouraging his student's movement to dream.



### No Quiet

In this particular passage from Barry's book – a short narrative of four panels, appropriately titled “No Quiet” – the adolescent protagonist, Maybonne, is shown asleep and dreaming at night in her bedroom. However, since “the fact that we dream ... doubles us” (Phillips, 2006, p. 111), the actual dreamer dreaming the dream (Grotstein, 2000; Bollas, 1995) is asleep in her high school English classroom. As she dreams of herself dreaming, the words of a Shakespearean sonnet (XXVII: *Weary with toil, I hasten me to bed*) interact with an abstract representation of a boy's head floating toward Maybonne's sleeping self in tender embrace. The dream thoughts, then, appear to unconsciously employ the curriculum content of her English class to decidedly different ends than those of her teacher, who in the last panel wakes his student up with abrupt and sudden force, ending her dream with the sharp snap of a ruler upon her desk.

In this short strip, Barry therefore signals the subversive potential of the dream in educational environments; “In our dreams,” Adam Phillips (2006) tells us, “we can do things and things are done that we can't do and can't be done” (p. 108). Moreover, as Jonathan Lear (2005) describes the imperative of psychoanalytical dream interpretation, “the ultimate authority on the meaning of a dream is the dreamer” (p. 92), an interpretive detail which necessarily humbles the teacher in the face of a sleeping student. Thoroughly non-compliant, dreams are an always-intermediary force, bridging the seemingly unquestionable limits that separate self and other, fantasy and the outside world, the past and the present, while offering “an interim space in which to negotiate the conflicting demands of a hostile external reality and the relentless drives from the inside” (Sliwinski, 2014, p. 236). As Tamara Bibby (2015) describes it, despite its often being treated with revilement, dreaming – which happens “continually, both while we are awake and while we are asleep” (Ogden, 2010, p. 328) – is an important and unavoidable aspect of learning and classroom life. Indeed, it is only in dreams, allowing ourselves to merge with the inchoate world of feelings and thoughts that language can only approximate, that we can truly satisfy what Sodr  (2015) calls the “need of the human mind to fictionalize” (p. 74) – a creative impulse that constitutes one of the origins of passion in learning, “a moment alive with desire ... [and] the need to give voice to the inarticulate” (Ogden, 2005, p. 9). In the educational context, then, the question that I here pose is whether and how we can allow our students to make meaning from stray fragments of their dreams, to begin to read the illegible scripts of desire and memory, “but refashioned internally to make one's hopes and longings for the future” (Milner, 2010, p. 31). For the theory of dreaming that I here pursue, dreams are a kind of reminder of the “primary ‘madness’” and the primary psychic processes of infancy, “which all of us have lived through and to which at times we can return” (Milner, 2010, p. 33). These maddening moments – before language, before love, and before loss – also persist as a form of symbolization and play in the “gap between the inner reality of feeling and the available ways of communicating what we feel” (p. 153). To somehow create meaning from this gap, to construct the sense of a bridge between inner and outer, first entails that the dream is read as a persistent presence, and whose purposes are beyond the simply defensive and escapist.

In her classroom dream, Maybonne absorbs the words of Shakespeare (literally and involuntarily dreaming along with the literature), inscribing them on and sleeping them through a screen apart from conscious intention. Caressing the disembodied head of a wished-for lover, she dreams her reality as a mixture of what it is and what she in part desires it to be, a wishing cut short by her teacher, demanding that Maybonne join the

straightforward conversations of conscious, waking life, demonstrating the neurotic tendencies of contemporary education: to “take control of, and have mastery over, intentions, desire, thoughts, thinking and learning” (Bibby, 2015, p. 51). Since her teacher cannot value what he cannot see and cannot read, he also cannot allow for the possibility that – even as she sleeps – his student may still be crafting meaning. Focused only on the strength of his own objective, he is blind to the possibilities – indeed, the mysteries – of what Hélène Cixous (1993) describes as the “School of Dreams”: a site “to restore those moments when we are greatest, strongest in strength and in weakness—when we are *magic*” (p. 90). Using Barry’s comic as an incitement to further thought, I therefore wonder what the possibilities of dreaming in the classroom might look like if imagined apart from condemnation, and how dreaming may contribute to a theory of education that does not necessarily have to disavow what it cannot read, and what it does not yet understand. Though much of what follows admittedly emphasizes the positive effects of dreaming, I also proceed with an awareness that – since we can never presuppose the psychic effects of looking and thinking within – dreaming may sometimes bring distress and discomfort. Though she also draws attention to its productive influence, Britzman (2013) underlines that dreaming always carries a certain degree of risk:

In nocturnal romps reality goes missing, or is safely set aside only to return as intricately displaced, disguised, condensed, and reversed. The difficult problem however is when one cannot wake up and tell the difference between wishful mental acts and what reality actually presents (p. 3).

Situated on the porous and invisible edge of reality and fantasy, I interpret the creative energies of the dream as equivalent to those of the developing and forever fluid “potential space” between mother and infant. For psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (2005), in the initial months of an infant’s life, the role of the primary caregiver is that of providing a “facilitating” or “holding” environment in which the baby’s knowledge of psychological separateness and exteriority is postponed. In providing the baby a shelter in which to develop apart from anxiety, the role of the mother – for Winnicott, the “good-enough” mother – involves maintaining a necessary state of illusion, in which there is no opportunity for differentiation or for the baby’s want. This is therefore also a condition of being that the infant eventually needs to abandon; even though this initial environment may provide a haven for safe development, the infant gradually needs to accept the reality of a world of others and other’s desires. But, as Winnicott emphasizes, this move cannot happen too suddenly or too soon (and we should here remember the suddenness with which Maybonne’s teacher woke his student); if the infant experiences a premature awareness of themselves as subject, they may feel forced to adapt to the separate needs of their mother, and in the process, sacrifice that which is most spontaneous about themselves. Ultimately, though, as the infant grows away from this maternal envelope, the role of the mother moves from illusionment into gradual disillusionment, as the baby’s adaptation to a world outside of itself occurs within a “potential space,” between mother and infant, symbol and symbolized, fantasy and reality, which is also the intermediate location of play, and the origins of cultural experience and creativity. Not surprisingly, given its place on the edge of inner world and external reality, this sense of freedom and lack of conscious control also describe the forever-emergent space of the dream.

For Cixous (1993), if we take the time to listen to their elusive call, dreams can offer an important lesson – with resonance “under the bed, in the depths of night,” as well as “in waking reality” (p. 103) – about the mysteries and the tenuousness of authority and knowledge creation: “It is what dreams teach us: not to be afraid of not being the driver” (p. 100). For teacher and student alike, then, the very idea of “not being the driver” suggests the possibility of a relation to knowledge that “is not authoritative” (Britzman, 1998, p. 52), cannot be mastered or captured, and as Felman (1982) writes of the paradoxical nature of literary knowledge, “is not in mastery of itself” (p. 41). It may, however, allow for the student’s gradual “discovery of what was already there in herself” (Winnicott, 1989, p. 316). Moreover, as Rose (2003) describes, while dreaming involves an internal regression to a temporal past, it nonetheless also points to potential futures: “Although dreams are not prophetic,” she notes, “they are generative, forward-looking, not in the predictable but unpredictable sense. Precisely because they lead us back into the deepest recesses of the psyche ... they lead forward into something else” (p. 121). Thinking back to Maybonne’s dream, she uses the words of waking reality to dream deep into fantasy, forward into an imagined future that may not come to pass. If she were able to dream further, or take the time to consider the dream’s consequences, she may have also begun to recognize something significant about the relationship between reading and dreaming, between the uncertain qualities of literature and life. For Maybonne’s teacher, though, refusing to recognize and thus foreclosing the potential value of the dream for his sleeping student, these ambiguous and unpredictable lessons remain unheard and treated as nothing more than a distraction and impediment; distraction, that is, from the teacher’s desire to remain steadfast and firmly wedged in the driver’s seat.

As Winnicott argues that the infant’s inevitable knowledge of psychological separateness must not be rushed, the disturbance of a sleeping student can be read as an untimely impingement on the dream’s unique qualities of unintentional, imaginative play. If we accept, along with Ogden (2010), that “dreaming continues while we are awake” (p. 328), and even though this “jerk ... to wakefulness” (Bibby, 2015, p. 64) may be an impulsive move on the part of the teacher, I nonetheless wonder how the dream and education may be structured in a different and more productive interrelation. Rather than defensively drawing the student from slumber, how may the teacher instead encourage a space “to bring dreams down to earth and [let] them interact with facts” (Milner, 2010, p. 104), imagining the dream’s potential for growth, self-discovery, and their student’s elaboration of inner reality?

To situate this conversation within the reconceptualist tradition of curriculum studies, I agree with Doll’s (1999) impression that, “Education should not just lead out; it should lead in” (p. 112). The task for teachers, as she puts it, is similar to that of the analyst: “how to read psychic speech” (p. 107), of which dreaming is an exemplary condition. Stressing the freedom of thought that dreams allow, Britzman (2006) describes how, “Through the unconscious we are affected by what consciousness cannot imagine” (p. 4). Following from her pioneering studies (Britzman, 1998), multiple other curriculum theorists have explored the uses of psychoanalytic theory as a way to better understand the inner complexities of educational experience (Aoki, 2002; Casemore, 2008; Ellsworth, 1997; Grumet, 1988, 1998; jagodzinski, 2004; Matthews, 2009; Mishra Tarc, 2015; Pitt, 2003; Robertson, 1997; Salvio, 2007; Silin, 1995; Shaw, 2005; Taubman, 2004, 2006, 2009; Todd, 1997). In his development of the autobiographical method of *currere*, Pinar

(1973/1994, 1975/1994, 2012) has often stressed the importance of “Working from within” (1972/1994), as well as to emphasize what Taubman (2011) has called a “turn to the humanities for ways to understand teaching” (p. 180). In explicitly psychoanalytic terms, *currere* has been conceptualized as an “interpretation of experience [that] involves the examination of manifest and latent meaning, conscious and unconscious content of language, as well as the political implications of such reflection and interpretation” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995, p. 521). Though my theoretical touchstones in this paper are psychoanalytic, I remain indebted to those theorists whose work have allowed for a consideration of psychic life in contemporary educational contexts.

In what follows, I introduce a variety of scenes from Laurie Halse Anderson’s (1999) award-winning young adult novel, *Speak*, which offers a generative counter-example to Barry’s comic. In this novel, the adolescent protagonist, while dealing with the aftereffects of a sexual assault, develops a number of strategies (such as artistic creation, a meaningful silence, and the exploration of multiple representational forms) that, supported by her art teacher, allow her to begin the process of dreaming the meaning of her traumatic experience differently. While Maybonne’s teacher may be seen to suddenly shut down the dream, the character of Mr. Freeman, the art teacher in *Speak*, fosters a space of illusion and encourages his student to take her time and dream her passions *into* representation, adopting what Leo Bersani (1998) calls “the notion of art as salvaging somehow damaged experience” (p. 224).

### Speak

*Speak* tells the story of Melinda Sordino, an intelligent 14-year-old with an acerbic wit, and who, as we learn through a series of flashbacks, was raped by an older boy at a summer party leading up to her first year in high school. As the school year begins, Melinda – whose last name, as Tannert-Smith (2010) points out, is actually an anagram for the word ‘indoors’ – finds herself ostracized from all her old friends, and as she navigates the perils of high school life while repeatedly encountering the boy who raped her, she withdraws further into herself, and employs a number of strategies of silence and separation. Unable to articulate – even to herself – the reality of her traumatic experience, much of this narrative can therefore be read as a creative process of self-examination, “looking inside for the story that speaks” (Tannert-Smith, p. 408), and learning to dream through a landscape of troubling emotion.

In her struggle to voice her experience, to be able to create from the productive silence of dreaming a link between inner and outer, Melinda develops a number of survival strategies, the most important of which suggests an understanding of the variable nature of silence itself, “and the difference between being silent and being silenced” (O’Quinn, 2001, p. 54). Though her silence is often interpreted by those around her (her parents, her teachers, her peers) as a simple refusal to speak – and thus as an absence, a neurotic move, an emptiness akin to the popular notion of the idle daydream – her uses and meanings of silence are actually as varied as the uses and meanings of speech and intelligible enunciation; resisting, refusing, postponing, dividing, connecting, concealing, protecting (Granger, 2011, p. 241). Taking the time to dwell in the silence of “an underground current

of meaning” (Brown, 2007, p. 840), Melinda is therefore able to defer what she cannot yet speak, until she is both able and willing to tell it.

For Melinda, words are visceral, vicious, viscous, and potentially violent. “Words climb up my throat” (Halse Anderson, 1999, p. 5) she says. “My throat burns.” “I can’t stop biting my lips” (p. 17). “It is easier,” she tells us, “not to say anything. Shut your trap, button your lip, can it” (p. 9). “Words,” she wisely remarks, “are hard work” (p. 84). However, even through she shuts herself off from speaking with others, she continues to communicate internally, through the medium of what she titles her “headvoice” (p. 28). Her silence is therefore not a self-muteness, but an act of resistance against a world that repeatedly refuses to listen. While her English teacher tells the class that, “Hawthorne’s symbolism is just like multiplication,” and “once you figure it out, it’s as clear as day” (p. 102), Melinda accepts that language can also function differently: as a way to avoid the difficult knowledge that, at least when it comes to the self, there is much that is actually murky as night. Indeed, it is from her suspicion of the emptiness of conscious discourse that Melinda invites the thinking of night to seep into day, as her continued capacity for silence allows her to develop and experiment with the extra-lingual character of dream thinking. As Ogden (2010) describes this form of unconscious thinking that persists in day as well as night, it is always about movement and change, and the interplay between temporalities, states of consciousness, and various psychic positions.

When experience is thought through a dream, the dreamer may observe and interpret reality from multiple, simultaneous, and at times contradictory points of view. The workings of developmental time may also be felt as oddly mutable, and the dreamer’s infantile self may communicate meaning along with their more mature and developed structures, allowing the dreamer to actively engage in unpredictable, unconscious dialogue with themselves (such as Maybonne – the dreamer – dreaming of dreaming), while also allowing external reality to enter the terms of this peculiar, playful exchange. As Ogden (2010) describes, a potential benefit of dream thinking is the “development of a sense of an emotionally alive, creative, self-aware person, grounded both in the reality of himself and of the external world” (p. 329). When lived experience is subjected to this unconscious psychological work – where the dreamer might inhabit the space of another, potentially standing outside of themselves, bearing uncanny witness to their own experience – previously unthinkable, unbearable thoughts and feelings may finally be dreamt: moved from a place of defense and evacuation to one of dynamic exchange.

For Ogden (2010), however, while dream thinking may be accomplished alone, there is always a point at which one person may need another to dream their most troubling emotional experiences, to find a way out from their “unending, futile wanderings in [an] internal object world” (p. 193). In Melinda’s case, her art teacher, Mr. Freeman, serves this function, and as he tells Melinda on the first day of fall term, “Art is the only class . . . where you can find your soul, if you dare. Where you can touch that part of you that you’ve never dared look at before” (Halse Anderson, 1993, p. 10). Encouraging his students to play with a variety of representational forms, Mr. Freeman acknowledges the “dream potential” (Winnicott, 2005, p. 70) of art, and as an artist himself, he models the precarious nature of creative, cultural production. At one point, he had been working on a painting of his own for a number of weeks, until, as Melinda describes it, he “steps back, as if he has just seen something new in his own picture. He slices the canvas . . . ruining it with a long, ripping sound that makes the entire class gasp” (Halse Anderson, p. 92). For this teacher, then, the

power of the practice of art is its potential for “creative regression” (Adams, 2006), where the artistic subject – a consummate dreamer – can engage in an intimate struggle with the flexible nature of aesthetic form, which may then prompt a subjective “dissolution and reconstitution” (p. 707). “Don’t be so hard on yourself,” he tells Melinda, as she struggles with her work, “Art is about making mistakes and learning from them” (Halse Anderson, p. 122), or in other words, about playing in “the germinal point of nascent thought” (Meltzer, 2009, p. 114), dreaming between the unformed and the space of words and external reality.

In contrast to theories of learning that require the learner to remain wide awake and in a state of full and persistent consciousness, Mr. Freeman takes a slow and gradual approach, asking his students to complete only one assignment for the entire year. Each student is given an object and asked – in turn – to bring it to form and voice, to dream through it, to develop an intimate relationship with it, to shift their emotional investments onto the world of art and uncertain representation. “You will spend the rest of the year,” he tells Melinda’s class, “learning how to turn that object into a piece of art. You will sculpt it. You will sketch it, papier-mâché it, carve it” (Halse Anderson, 1993, p. 12). By encouraging his students to experiment with the ways in which form can be variously manipulated and differently articulated, Mr. Freeman’s assignment approaches an actualization of the dream process; if dreams remind us of “a treasure locked away somewhere,” the process of dreaming acknowledges that “the treasure is in the searching, not the finding” (Cixous, 1993, p. 88). Moreover, as students make changes in the outside world, they may also be prompted to recognize the similarly mutable nature of experience and memory, relating the character of the object outside to the nature of “visual imagery in the mind’s reel of dreams” (Farley, 2011, p. 24).

However, for this teacher, it is not enough to simply experiment with the tangible qualities of form, as he also demands that his students *make meaning*, though a process similar to the aforementioned imperative of dream interpretation: “It is for dreamers to say what their dreams mean, and they do this by explaining (to themselves) how the dream fits into their lives as a whole and why it matters” (Lear, 2005, p. 93). “By the end of the year,” Mr. Freeman tells Melinda, giving her a tree as the particular object that she will be tasked to work on, “you must figure out how to make your object say something, express an emotion, speak to every person who looks at it” (p. 12). The idea here is that Melinda will learn to use this abstract object as a screen or a conduit on which to eventually project a part of her own voice; transporting “unthinkable thoughts and unbearable feelings” (Ogden, 2010, p. 329) to a space of thinking invested with the transformative qualities of dreaming. Similar to how the mother, involved in the infant’s potential space, “communicates ... his formerly undreamable/unthinkable experience in a form that he is now more fully able to dream on his own” (p. 330), this gradual creative process may prompt the student to explore new categories of meaning, and generate potentially surprising methods through which to order the nature of their lived experience.

Over the following weeks, Melinda experiences moments of gradual breakthrough, though at times compromised by Mr. Freeman’s enthusiasm to make his student dream too quickly and on demand. Though different from the urge to wakefulness in *No Quiet*, this overestimation and strident articulation of the teacher’s desire for his student to become artist and dreamer nonetheless serves to disrupt and impinge on Melinda’s developing capacity for dreaming on her own terms. After Thanksgiving, Melinda rescues a number



of turkey bones from her parents' garbage, and enters her art class newly motivated to create something out of this leftover carcass. Unsurprisingly, "Mr. Freeman is thrilled" by Melinda's initiative, and as she works on uniting the bones of the bird and the concept of tree as one, Mr. Freeman stands behind his student, telling her, "You are on fire ... I can see it in your eyes. You are caught up in the meaning of the effect of commercialism on this holiday. This is wonderful, wonderful! Be the bird" (Halse Anderson, 1993, pp. 61-62), demanding that she step directly into the representational space where forms are unmoored, as if into a state of play, "where dream and external reality are fused" (Milner, 2010, p. 108). The dream, however, is that of the teacher's, rather than that of Melinda's, and in this context, Mr. Freeman's precocious enthusiasm develops the threatening nature of what Milner (2010) calls a "spiritual enveloping": a "subtle secret possessiveness which, under the guise of loving consideration, can hardly allow the other to be itself at all" (p. 68).

"You are the bird" (Halse Anderson, 1993, p. 62), Mr. Freeman continues unabatedly, while Melinda, voiceless, proceeds to place the head of a Barbie doll inside the turkey's body. "Sacrifice yourself," her teacher carries on, "to abandoned family values and canned yams" (p. 62), to which Melinda simply replies silently, in her head (and most appropriately), "Whatever." After she completes her work, Mr. Freeman asks his student, "What does this say to you?" (p. 63), challenging her to describe what emotions or meaning her sculpture implies. Melinda, however, remains unable to speak. Or rather, she has already begun the process of speaking with and through her sculpture, but unfortunately, this form of knowing in "the private language of one's own subjective images" (Milner, 2010, p. 142) is only valued if then transformed to "the public language of words." "This has meaning," Mr. Freeman answers in lieu of Melinda, "this has meaning," he then repeats, defining such meaning as "Pain" (Halse Anderson, p. 65). Along with a "spiritual enveloping," Melinda's teacher also steps into the space of "educative ambition": determined and powerful interpretive attempts that Freud, in the context of psychoanalysis, describes as "no doubt ... laudable," while also careful to caution that they are "far from being in every case advisable" (cited in Valdre, 2014, p. 60). As Rosella Valdre describes, there is the tendency in practicing such ambition for the inexperienced to slide into "a narcissistic problem" (p. 60), similar to Winnicott's descriptions of impingement, "whereby we unconsciously attribute to the patient [or the student] desires and aims which [more appropriately] belong to us" (p. 61). While the turkey sculpture may be described as a representational form whose "self-strangeness" (Russell, 2013, p. 147) points to the possibility for opening new capacities of dreaming, Mr. Freeman's enthusiasm only serves to usurp and interrupt Melinda's potential for spontaneous, creative discovery.

Over the following weeks, Melinda laments the lack of progress that she's able to make with her tree. "My tree is frozen" (Halse Anderson, 1993, p. 103), she says, which insinuates Ogden's descriptions of undreamt and interrupted dreams, a situation where the patient is "unable to learn from (make use of) experience ... imprisoned in the hell of an endless, unchanging world of what is" (p. 19). Even though, as Melinda looks through a catalogue of landscapes and trees she "feel[s] like a regular forester," she also admits with regret, "I can't do what I'm supposed to. The last time Mr. Freeman had anything good to say to me was when I made that stupid turkey-bone thing" (p. 103). While she struggles in her art class, though, she appears to experience moments of representational play in a variety of other contexts. In her biology class, for instance, while examining an apple

closely with her lab partner, Melinda pursues a creative mode of transgression. “I bite my apple” (p. 67), she tells us. “White teeth red apple hard juice deep bite,” and after she calmly cuts the rest of the apple into four pieces to reveal twelve seeds, she observes an evocative sight, suggestive of survival and regeneration: “One of the seeds has split its shell and reaches a white hand upward. An apple tree growing from an apple seed growing in an apple” (p. 67). Through biting this apple and noticing a series of “infinite natural regression” (Tannert-Smith, 2010, p. 404), Melinda approaches an aesthetic experimentation of linking the character of the world to her own, similar to what Winnicott (2005) describes as playing with “dream potential”: that, “In playing, the child manipulates external phenomena in the service of the dream and invests [such] phenomena with dream meaning and feeling” (p. 70).

Elsewhere, Melinda experiments with a form of dangerous writing on the space of her body, drawing a paperclip slowly across her wrist, leaving marks that appear as ridges, that as she puts it, makes it seem like she “arm-wrestled a rosebush” (Halse Anderson, 1993, p. 87). While it might initially appear as problematic to think of the act of cutting as an aesthetic move, Melinda herself denies the fact that cutting is necessarily an indication of suicidal intent. “If a suicide attempt is a cry for help,” she asks, “then what is this? A whimper, a peep?” (p. 87). Though examples of cutting in young adult literature have historically been associated with a desire to die, and while many adolescents who cut do need help, as the authors of an article entitled *My scars tell a story: Self-mutilation in young adult literature* (Miskec & McGee, 2007) point out, Melinda’s experience with cutting “challenges the old clichés with a keen awareness and dismissal of the outdated medical language that connects cutting with suicide” (p. 167). In recent young adult fiction, including fantasy fiction, cutting is actually increasingly viewed as an action that is able to momentarily provide teen subjects with an opportunity for reflection, experimentation, and agency over “interpersonal situations and emotions” (p. 167) – in effect, a move towards the generative space of the dream. In describing her experience, Melinda also explicitly characterizes her cutting in terms of artistic expression: “I draw little windowcracks of blood, etching line after line until it stops hurting” (p. 87).

The space of the closet also looms large in this novel, both as metaphorical trope and a place where Melinda works to create and contain her own interior, a process that she describes as “building a fort ... a quiet place that helps [her] hold these thoughts in [her] head where no one [else] can hear them” (Halse Anderson, 1993, p. 50). The closet is therefore connected to Melinda’s broader experiments with silence, and thus, is a space that “will later become crucial to her post-traumatic recovery and identity reconstruction” (Tannert-Smith, 2010, p. 400). While Melinda uses her bedroom closet as a place to shelter her feelings – she often hides there and places her mirror against the wall, facing away from her – she also appropriates an abandoned janitor’s closet at school, decorating it with art and posters and turning it into an “unconventional” and “ephemeral archive” (Latham, 2006, p. 372). She covers a broken mirror with a poster of Maya Angelou, and decorates the walls with her own drawings and paintings of trees, making the otherwise forgotten closet into a “metaphorical forest” (Tannert-Smith, p. 403), an aesthetic space that is hers alone. Once again, we can see that Melinda exhibits a tendency to dreaming that, unlike that proposed by her art teacher, treats the act of naming (whether an experience, or a feeling) as a potential detriment to actual understanding. Similar to Winnicott’s conceptualization of the potential space, Melinda creates in her closet a quality of

reciprocity, troubling the distinctions between dream and reality, and moving between the two “in a complex rhythmic interplay” (Milner, 2010, p. 100). As Melinda describes the closet in saying, “It has no purpose, no name. It is the perfect place for me” (p. 26), we can also consider Ogden’s (2004) valorization of “things unsaid” in the context of therapy: “there are long stretches of time,” he writes, “during which the patient’s healthy feelings of love ... are a felt presence that is far more important than things ‘merely said’” (p. 866). At times, the rush to symbolize in legible fashion may interrupt the patient’s or the student’s need to rest in an area prior to language and the false security of finished form.

At one point, though, Mr. Freeman encourages Melinda to look through a book of Picasso’s art, as he finally recognizes the value of allowing his student the time to dream, and that the task of fostering Melinda’s creative growth is “a methodology of which he is only a part” (Bollas, 1995, p. 28). “Your imagination is paralyzed” (Halse Anderson, 1993, p. 117), he tells her, and realizing that walking away may actually support his student’s development, he states, “I can’t do everything for you. You must walk alone to find your soul.” Reading the book, Melinda is immediately inspired, and given her ability to locate an apple within an apple within an apple, she is drawn to the chapter on Picasso’s Cubist period, which “steals [her] breath away” (p. 118). When she encounters Picasso’s impudent style, at the crossroads of chaos and order, Melinda finally experiences a sense of illumination, and a feeling of “great relief from the crude and awkward conflicts that belong to stark truth” (Winnicott, 1987, p. 236). Here’s how Melinda describes it:

It takes me out of the room. It confuses me, while one little part of my brain jumps up and down screaming, “I get it! I get it!” Cubism. Seeing beyond what is on the surface. Moving both eyes and a nose to the side of the face. Dicing bodies and tables and guitars as if they were celery sticks, and rearranging them so that you have to really see them to see them. (Halse Anderson, p. 119)

Though reminiscent of what she had already accomplished with the apple, in seeing such contortions of form on the page Melinda is able to ponder the artist’s authorial role in handling malleable shapes and aesthetic fissure, and recognizing – through Picasso’s interventions in the sureness of form – “how deceptive the external wholeness of bodies can be” (Milner 2010, p. 88).<sup>1</sup> Becoming an author and artist herself, Melinda then creates a Cubist tree that references her own fractured self, “with hundreds of skinny rectangles for branches,” appearing as “boxes, glass shards, [and] lips with triangle ... leaves” (Halse Anderson, p. 118). Melinda’s personal adoption of Picasso’s anti-representational technique therefore inspires her “to express the otherwise inexpressible” (Tannert-Smith, 2010, p. 399), and – molding an aesthetic link between the inner and outer – to engage in a process of dream thinking akin to Kristeva’s (2009) description of sublimation: “the traversing of suffering in thought’s serenity, in the deployment of the arts: a sort of joy” (p. 89).

Uniting herself with the figure of the tree, Melinda is also able to recognize her own potential as a Cubist figure, with a sense of self that is capable of producing meaning beyond the immediately visible and recognizable. As Milner (1987) writes about one of her patients – that “he had been able to find a bit of the external world that was malleable ... that it was safe to treat it as a bit of himself, and so had let it serve as a bridge between inner and outer” (p. 77) – Melinda likewise described a workable relation between the inner

reality of feeling and outer form. At one point, trying on a pair of jeans in a department store, she stares at herself – and through herself – into the visual echoes of a three-way mirror. “I adjust the mirror so I can see reflections of reflections” (Halse Andesen, 1993, p. 123), she says, “miles and miles of me ... I lean into the mirror. Eyes after eyes after eyes stare back at me. Am I in there somewhere?” Staring deeply into this mirror, Melinda then allows herself to enter into distortion, to become the representation that Mr. Freeman was trying to inspire:

My face becomes a Picasso sketch, my body slicing into dissecting cubes. ... I push my ragged mouth against the mirror. A thousand bleeding, crusted lips push back. What does it feel like to walk in a new skin? ... Mr. Freeman thinks I need to find my feelings. How can I not find them? They are chewing me alive like an infestation. (pp. 123-124)

While breaching the bounds of her mirrored body, Melinda is able to access what Meltzer (2009), after Bion, describes as “the aesthetic level of experience,” a signal of mental health and a complex site of dream thinking, where forms and functions are taken from the outside world, mixed with words, and eventually used “to represent the *meaning* of emotional experiences” (p. 44).

Moreover, this creative moment of dreaming her emotional experience, as unhappy as it might appear, is also the point where Melinda opens up “a version of reality that is invented, not found” (Jurist, 2006, p. 1318), and which is neither dictated by her teacher’s pedagogic ambition, nor a straightforward copy of Picasso’s Cubist distortions. In fact, as Milner (2010) quotes from Cezanne’s description of the transformational nature of aesthetic response, “One is revived, born into the real world, one finds oneself, one becomes the painting” (p. 29). Through aesthetic manipulation at the level of form, and intertextual play “between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived” (Winnicott, 2005, p. 4), it is clear from this moment of (mis)recognition that Melinda can no longer view herself only as an integrated, unified subject. However, it is only by taking herself apart – and on her own terms, and in her own time – that she is then able to gather the strength to dream herself differently, to pull herself back together, and to begin to reinvent herself as the center of her own psychic gravity. By recognizing the inherently splintered nature of her self, Melinda is also able to acknowledge that part of herself that endures as self-interpreter. In the language of dreaming, rather than simply being dreamt, Melinda is newly able to begin living as the dreamer dreaming the dream.

This moment in the mirror (along with that of the apple seed and her discovery of Picasso’s art) signals a new beginning for Melinda, a movement to voice – and through dreaming – that continues to the novel’s final page. Near the end of this narrative, though, and before she begins to communicate her story to others, the boy who raped Melinda attacks her again in the janitor’s closet, but this time she fights him off by holding a shard of broken mirror to his neck, using the malleable material of external form to communicate internal anxiety and desire. As she is newly able to imagine herself in relation to the representationally flexible qualities of objects, Melinda is likewise able to invest parts of herself in the outside world (enabling communication). In this moment of creative judgment, holding the shard of mirror as a wish to achieve a semblance of structure and dialogue between the space of the dream and external reality (and despite her knowledge

that structure is always fleeting and illusory), Melinda breaches what Milner (2010) titles “the paradox of creativity”: “To be able to break down the barrier between self and other, yet at the same time to be able to maintain it” (p. 167). This shard of mirror is therefore used to reflect a metaphorically splintered part of Melinda’s inner self, with which she is able to silence her attacker. Through dreaming herself into voice, and learning about the flexible nature of aesthetic relations (of which she is also a part), Melinda has reestablished her bonds with the outside world, and is now newly able to communicate and speak her story to others.

### Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I’ve argued that dreaming – a creative illusion that involves a powerful capacity for self-communication and dialogue with the external world – should be viewed as an inherently productive component of classroom relations. However, while acknowledging the positive and potentially pleasurable values of dream thinking, it is also important to recognize its consistently disturbing and threatening qualities: even though dreaming allows education to reconsider the value of that which it has typically disavowed (too much silence, too much sleep, too much noise, and too much body), it invariably throws every boundary in question and takes us forcefully out of the driver’s seat – away from conscious control and toward the limits of language, away from legibility and toward abstraction. Moreover, as I noted with Mr. Freeman’s overzealous endeavors, the dream cannot be prescribed, and cannot be willed to life through the teacher’s powers of enthusiasm alone.

What education can support, however, is an uncertain search for the conditions through which dreams may be enunciated, questioned, and appreciated: “Dreams,” after all, “don’t speak for themselves; we make them give voice” (Phillips, 2006, p. 116). Thinking back to Maybonne’s teacher, it is worth remembering that for education to truly acknowledge the dream, it must allow for the student to experiment with their own creations of meaning, which, at least to the teacher’s eyes, may initially look like anything but. Forever emergent at the fluid and dialectical space where self and other meet – within and without, image and language, not quite awake and not quite asleep – the presence of the dreamer plays with (indeed, laughs at) our sense of security and certainty, and it is to this particular gambit that I believe education is best directed; to not take ourselves too seriously, and to see that no form is fixed.

### End Notes

1. As an experience bridging between inner and outer, Milner’s (2010) description of being similarly inspired by Picasso’s artistic technique, and moved to recognize a link between the malleable nature of art and the malleable nature of the self, is here worth quoting in full: “When going to a much-discussed Picasso exhibition and arriving ‘all-to-bits’ from the struggle of living, I had been lifted right out of it by the pictures. And this had seemed because here was someone with the courage to recognize and admit such inner chaos; whatever his position as an artist, he at least showed how deceptive the external wholeness of bodies can be, how one can look to the outside world as a whole person and yet be all in bits inside, full of conflicting wishes and chaotic standards, one’s self can

be nothing but a caddis-worm shell of bits and pieces, picked up anywhere and stuck on anyhow” (p. 88).

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