

Dreams of Love

Beauty and love are all my dream;
They change not with the changing day;
Love stays forever like a stream
That flows but never flows away;

from *Beauty and Love* by Andrew Young

Love has an amazing ability to confound rational attempts to define it. Ethicists define it as some abstract that reflects its participants into dutiful roles, and poets complain that the love they know is unrepresented, killed, or otherwise distorted. Poets call upon the imagination and stir the spirit with their confections and philosophers complain that the heart of the matter is thus more hidden than revealed.

This ability of love to defy reason is not a fluke of human thought or a weakness in any individual dedication to uncovering the truth of love. It is central to love itself. All of the illusions of love, the ways it distorts one's view of reality, and the psychological components which are engaged by love, are not secondary or undesirable side-effects; these are the heart of love itself.

A life characterized by love is said to be like "living a dream." I will argue that it is not merely like that— that loving and dreaming are the same thing. This essay was inspired by Waking Life, an independent film written and directed by Richard Linklater. Waking Life has little to do with love, but everything to do with dreaming.

1 Defining Dream

Clearly, when I use the term "dream", I do not simply mean, "the sequence of sensations that occur during REM sleep." Nor do I mean the state in which life seems to be "as good as it can get." I mean dream in the surrealist sense, which has many aspects, which I will consider in turn. Dream is an experience. I claim that the things that make the experience of a dream what it is are the same things as make love what it is.

Moreover, the qualities of the state are essentially the same, awake or asleep. Descartes asked if it is possible to know if the "reality" we experience reflects something that exists outside of ourselves or if it is like a dream, such that one might wake up some day and realize that all of life has been an illusion. Normally, there are certain aspects of life which distinguish it from dreaming, but I claim that love dissolves these distinctions.

1.1 Dreams Defy Reason

Like dreams, love not only works outside reason, but seems to contradict it. In the Legend of Tristan and Iseult, Tristan ignores endless warnings and places himself in dangerous situations for love's sake. Knowing the irrationality of his actions, Tristan says, "Well, then, let come Death!" As soon as he did that, giving into his dream, so to speak, his ship which had been sitting on the ocean for some time, began to race toward its destination.

This is one example of the magic that is not only possible in love and dream— it is integral to the structure of the lover's and the dreamer's universe. At one of their secret meetings, Iseult says, "Oh, Tristan, I have heard that the castle is fairy and that twice a year it vanishes away. So is it vanished now and this is that enchanted orchard of which the harpers sing." Later, when Tristan is trying to escape the king, he throws himself off a cliff. As though in a flying dream, the wind catches Tristan and bears him uninjured to the ground. Love is a force capable of succeeding against any odds, and answering any question.

1.2 Dreams Arise from Memories

Dreams have their foundation in the events and impressions that precede them, not (particular) the events in the real world outside of the dream. So it seems to be with love. In Casablanca, the well-spring of Rick's love is his memories of Paris. As much as he knows that the Ilsa's husband is alive and present and that his affair with Ilsa is over, he cannot escape his memories. Love is not so much blind as it is slow to react.

In the Tao of Steve, Dex's mantra is "be desireless; be excellent; be gone." That is the way to make a woman love. Love comes from the excellence, but it arises in the reliving of memory. Stendall described the effects of love as like those of a cave on a stick thrown into it, which crystallizes and shines. The cave is memory, and by impressions aging, they become sweeter and more desirable. He also related the anecdote of a young woman who saw a man she thought would be her husband, and thought about him so much and so often, that when another man appeared who she was to marry, she was distraught. Although she knew nothing of the first man, his memory had grown so powerful that she did not want to part with it.

Dream Guy in Waking Life says, "See, in the waking world, the neurosystem inhibits the activation of the vividness of memories. Now this makes evolutionary sense. See, you'd be maladapted for the perceptual image of a predator to be mistaken for the memory of one, and vice versa." In love, that barrier weakens. Looking at a loved one, one sees overlying reality all of the things that make that one lovable.

1.3 Dreams are made of “Holy Moments”

In Waking Life, Caveh Zahedi speaks of how moments can be “holy”. “You don’t first think of the story of the song, and then make the song. It has to come out of that moment, and that’s what film has... like this moment is holy.” Moments have meaning; they are important in a creative, all-encompassing way. We usually do not see the holiness of a moment, because we are caught up in the stream of time and always looking more to the past and the future than at this moment.

In dreams, every moment can be conspicuously holy. In Waking Life, Speed Levitch pronounces that “the ongoing *WOW* is happening right now.... We are the authors of ourselves, co-authoring a gigantic Dostoevsky novel starring clowns.” In a dream, that becomes more clear. Within each moment, there are no distraction— one is always “in the moment.” In a sense, one is the moment. Time expands and contracts, especially in retrospect, until the whole of a dream can be a single experience, a single state. Every aspect of the dream “comes out of” or reflects a single moment.

In the same way, love makes lives full of Holy Moments. Every instant starring into a loved ones eyes is such a moment and one is “lost” in the moment. Love feels as though it has been for all existence and will be for all eternity. The time spent with one’s love is an “ongoing *WOW*” in the most beautiful sense.

2 Defining Love

Just as dreams have “love-like” characteristics by creating a context much like that of love, but the core of what it means for something to be love is found in its relationship to dream. There seem to be multiple kinds of love and multiple directions from which one might approach it, but the very ways in which these different loves are similar are those ways wherein they are like dreams.

2.1 Existential Love

Sartre defined love as a relationship characterized by the perpetual struggle implicit in an individual trying to know what he is. The struggle is perpetual because the mode of pursuing the goal defeats itself. For an individual to know what he is, his “content”, or his in-itself, it must be freely reflected back to him by an Other. However, the “use” of the Other for this purpose make the Other an object, ignores its freedom, or its for-itself, and thereby makes it useless as a reflector.

In Waking Life, Steve Brudniak tells Wiley Wiggins, the main character and primary dreamer, “ You haven’t met yourself yet. But, the advantage to meeting others in the meantime is that one of them may present you to yourself. ” Love is an attempt to see oneself. Dream is the creation of a world which is a reflection of the self. That is, it is also an attempt to see oneself. In dream, every Other is a reflection of the dreamer.

The world as we experience it as a meaningful entity, is not only a stream of sensations— it is a stream of meaning-containing symbols, where the significance, and therein the true nature, of every experience or situation is forever subjective and individual.

A dream is only another stream of symbols, divorced somewhat from their sensational foundations. In a dream, things happen not because of physical laws, but because of what it means for them to happen when they do. The differences between waking life, which is the experience of waking life, and dream, which is the experience of dream, are largely imperceptible. Dream Guy noted, “To the functional system of neural-activity that creates our world, there is no difference between dreaming a perception and an action, and actually the waking perception and action.”

In fact, it is the very process of making these experiences similar that is love. Communication exists for the sake of love. Blonde Girl in Waking Life notes “a striving and a frustration... is where I think language came from. It came from our desire to transcend our isolation and have some sort of connection with one another.”

Dream is the merging of the conscious and the unconscious worlds— the direct communion through the interchange of symbols between the in-itself and the for-itself. Dream may be the only way one can truly see oneself and in this way it is an idealization of love.

2.2 Erotic or Intimate Love

Eros is the aspect of love which is most closely related to desire. It is a selfish love, a love for the lover, and is intimately tied with sexual love. Existential love is very like *eros* in that it is similarly “purposed” and related to desire (the desire to force an Other to show one to oneself). In this section, I will consider the sexual, romantic side of *eros* as it relates to dreams.

The connection is in control. In Waking Life, John Christensen describes the power of the dreamer in a lucid dream:

That’s one of the few things you can’t do in a lucid dream. What the hell, I can fly around, have an interesting conversation with Albert Schweitzer, I can explore all these new dimensions of reality, and not to mention, I can have any kinda sex I want, which is way cool.

However, throughout the movie, Wiley Wiggins seems to be forever at the whim of his dream. He can't wake up, and he seems forever tossed from one situation to the next. Put on the spot to say his name or address or what he is doing, he replies, "You know, I can't really remember right now, I can't really recall that. But, that's beside the point...."

This is the experience of desirous, selfish love. According to Sartre, desire makes an object of the desirer by enslaving him to the object of his desire, and to the desire as a subject. The experience of *eros* can be two ways. The first is that of John, who places the emphasis on the object of his desire. As Kant notes, "sexual love makes of the loved person an Object of appetite," and this is the source of pleasure for John and the source of shame for people who are unwilling to make an object of another human. For these people, who always recognize their desire as strongest object in a relationship of *eros*, they are at its whim, and lose themselves to the dream.

2.3 Spiritual Love

Agape is generally considered to be the other side of love from *eros*. *Agape* is a giving love, unconditional and divorced from the body. This form of love is associated with God and is sometimes said to come from God.

The experience of *agape* is like the experience of "going along with" a dream. A random character in Waking Life comments at Wiley, "Kierkegaard's last words were, 'Sweep me up.'" Kierkegaard once said, "This is all that I've known for certain, that God is love." The whole of Waking Life is a dream at the time of death, and it can be seen as Wiley's journey to the acceptance that life is a dream and the acceptance of that dream as such.

2.4 Fulfilling Love

Peck describes a kind of secular *agapic* love, whose measure is the personal growth of both parties. He defines it as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." Peck's concept of love is very close to Pirsig's concept of gumption from Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: that which helps one take an active perspective on life and embrace new knowledge.

This is the kind of love that a parent has (or should have) for his or her children; it is a nurturing love. At first glance, it seems to have nothing to do with dreams, but it is not wholly divorced.

For one, Peck places a strong emphasis on the word "will" in his definition: it is not simply the desire to nurture, and it is not necessarily the action of nurturing; rather it is a form of

desire which, in any way it can, will become action. So it is with lucid dreams, where the desire to do is all that is needed to do. That is, in lucid dreaming, the prerequisite of “will” is implicitly filled.

A synonym that Peck uses for his kind of love, or the entering into that kind of love, is “cathexis”: the expanding of the ego boundaries to include something else. This is the experience of dreaming— the authors of King, Warrior, Magician, Lover (described below) note that the “self” that experiences dreams is a self with considerably weaker ego boundaries, one more associated with the id. In a dream, because one creates the environment out of oneself, it is natural that one should feel “at one” with it.

Peck also spends long pages describing what love is not, because he notes many of the destructive side effects that love can have and notes that these are incompatible with his definition. Peck’s kind of love is certainly an aspect of love, but I do not believe it to be the whole of love, so I will content myself with the above which shows that his kind of love is found in dream.

3 Contexts of Love and Dream

Another connection between dream and love is their nature in context. Dream and love play the same “roles” in many situations, and they play their roles in similar situations.

3.1 Value, Inspiration, and Play

Love and dream have similar capacities to inspire, enliven, and confuse. Myth and legend are full of prophetic dreams and heart-enblazing loves. Love can be a reason to live life, as fantasy (the heart of dream) can provide a goal to live it for. As Thomas Moore said, “there’s nothing half so sweet in life/As love’s young dream.”

Both love and dream are “play” of sorts. They are not engaged for the sake of rational progress or miserly improvement. They are sought as relief from these, although they each may result in situations far worse from those fled.

3.2 Interaction and Causal Relations

In a dream, interaction is almost always natural. That is, there is rarely a question of why one is in a particular interactive situation or who the people are with whom one is interacting.

Throughout Waking Life, Wiley moves from conversation to conversation, simply accepting that at any point in time he is talking with the strangers he meets for a reason.

When the dream goes wrong, by virtue of being a dream, it can go horribly wrong. It can become a nightmare. The flow of a dream is not determined by causal laws, but it is directed and arises from emotion and carries emotion to its extreme. The same is true of love. A breakup is as painful as love is strong, and can make life into a nightmare, just as love can make life into a dream.

3.3 Memory and Temporal Consistency

Often within a single dream, and more apparently in the wake of a dream, one finds that only certain key aspects are memorable, or one remembers that a feeling of exhilaration or fear or excitement characterized the dream, but not remember its source. This same phenomenon is apparent in love, as Christina Rossetti's "The First Day":

I wish I could remember the first day,
First hour, first moment of your meeting me;
If bright or dim the season it might be;
Summer or winter for aught I can say.
So, unrecorded did it slip away,
So blind was I to see and to foresee,
So dull to mark the budding of my tree
That would not blossom, yet, for many a May.

Dreams are also characterized by temporal and informational inconsistency. However, these are always, within the context of the dream, perfectly reasonable and natural (or so they seem to us, while dreaming). This is an aspect to being "carried away" by the moment of a dream. Also, in love, inconsistencies in the behavior of a loved go unnoticed, thought irrelevant, or imagined to signify things that seem to an individual outside the relationship as absurd, in the same way as in dreams.

3.4 The Lover Archetype

Love is the domain of the Lover. In King, Warrior, Magician, Lover, Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette divide up the human psyche into four "archetypes" or personalities which interact and provide energy and perspectives to an individual. The Lover archetype is the source of aesthetic perspective, holistic impressions, and empathy.

The Lover, more than any of the other archetypes, lives in a world of dreams. His world is one of mystical connections and nameless emotional draws. He lives on his intuitions and gains knowledge about his world through perceivable symbols, not the rational thought of the Magician, the sensations of the Warrior, or the divine principles of the King. The Lover believes that the nature of existence is experienced in feelings or emotions, not in laws and action.

4 Conclusion

Loving requires dreaming. To enter into a relationship of love is to enter into a fantasy or a dream. It is to freely accept the illogic and the magic of a relationship. Entering into love is like entering into a world built of love, where one interaction is with love as an entity and a irresistible force.

The substance of a dream is love. Dreams are an existential attempt to see oneself. Dreaming is seeing oneself by creating a world of oneself in the context of Others, and this creation is love. The world of dream is the coalition of all the memories and emotions that make the world meaningful, and love is that quality of being meaningful.

The potential power of love as dreams is that they may circumvent the Sartrean wheel of love for seeing oneself. In Waking Life, Blonde Girl describes the dilemma:

When I say “love,” the sound comes out of my mouth and hits the other person’s ear, travels through this Byzantine conduit in their brain, through their memories of love, or lack of love, and they register what I’m saying, and they say “Yes, I understand,” but how do I know they understand?

However, in dream, we have a chance to understanding what we are by communicating with the Others who are aspects of ourselves. The Byzantine conduit is the same, the memories equally create oneself and the Other, so symbols can be communicated freely. As William Sharp once said, “Love is a beautiful dream.” So is dream a beautiful love.