

Luisa-Fernanda Rodriguez  
Universidad de Valladolid

During the seventies new social groups have appeared. Of them those who take drugs, usually youngsters have grown so as to be considered socially marginated groups. This drug addiction usually as an escape from dayly monotony, had long ago its counterpart in some writers who have given testimony in the philosophy underlying their writings which is the literary equivalent to that dreaming state produced by drug taking and could illuminate, or explain this tendency among some social groups. One of the cultural phenomenon which has affected literature in the English Language is what can be called the «literature of dreams». That is to say, the literary artefact able to create that phenomenon of dreaming which to my mind, is the mirror of those social changes and can be studied as a parallel formation: a parallel formation without a possible point of intersection to tell you the truth.

Following the literary line of this twofold social phenomenon, I want to introduce you to a writer, Anthony Bloomfield, who although belonging to the «so called» establishment has dedicated his work to give the reader the opportunity of achieving that dreaming state through his fiction. This tendency has found its material in what could be called the «guided dream». The notion is taken from Borges and is the title of one of the essays by A. B.

In this essay there are quotations which illuminate the central idea in which the aim of writing is «to create new secondary worlds of our own» in Auden's words; or in Proust's «The pleasure an artist gives is to make us know an additional universe which in Nietzsche's words becomes «art as the metaphysical supplement of Nature raised up beside it in order to overcome it». A. B. himself says that dreams might be described as «nature digested». We must make clear that this characteristic of Literature dates back to the Symbolist in two ways:

- a) A refusal to be attracted by social propagandists and other extra artistic interests.
- b) A refusal to be bound by the conventions of writing which tended to atrophy when attention was withdrawn from them to (strictly) non literary problems.

For we must remember that the aesthetic doctrine of the Symbolist Movement are simply not designated to cope with the problems of historical relativism. This tendency has acquired its greatest intensity with J. L. Borges as the great father figure: He has said, «let us admit what all idealists admit. The hallucinatory nature of the world. Let us do what no idealist has done: seek unrealities which confirm that nature».

There is a very interesting notion in A. B.'s essay, «art is socially what dreams are to the individual: The comunal equivalent to the private experience. It is a matter of course among the psychologist, the sleep investigators, that the essential ingredient whithin sleep is the dream». A. B.'s fiction attempts the creation of a world of dream, for «dreaming is the most important thing for man. It is so important that without dreaming he cannot survive. Deprived of his dreaming an individual grows sick and mad and ultimately dies. Deprived of its dreams, that is to say, deprived of its art, a society suffers exactly the same fate». He makes a statement which might seem exagerated, «so in the last resort unpleasant dreams, even the most torrid nightmare may be life enchantments. *They expand the horizon of consciousness*». I must make clear that for many of the writers who follow the same line, dreaming is not an escape from the anguish of

this world: he states, «prominent in my personal black list... are... internationally all those anguished analyses of the anguished condition of our anguished times which win the approval of Nobel Prize juries...» So we must assume that he considers dreaming not an escape from anguish but an escape from daily monotony, as writing is an end itself (in Schopenhauer there is already present the notion of art being a means of escaping from the snares of worldly and practical existence). He, B., quotes a statement by Burgess, «I like to regard my books as works as works of craftsmanship for sale, objects as well made as I can make them. The deeper issues aesthetic or social metaphysical are not my concern... The professional novelist hopes that his offering will provide refreshment for the mind and at the same time elevate the mind closer to the eternal values of truth and beauty».

Now, how does the writer achieve his aim: I have various records of this. He has given me what, to my mind, is most important, his essays; and what I call his marginal work: short stories of several lengths written in different styles, for they serve the purpose of being exercises on writing, as the author himself has often stressed. It is not that they are careless, the writer is conscious of every single word in the story. I have chosen one of them which is clear enough from the beginning: its title is «The Sleeping Tribe», still unpublished, whose plot is as follows:

An expedition through a central America jungle whose main purpose turned out to be in the end, the discovery of some still unknown Indian tribe. The main character around which the story develops is called Kettner. The story is told in the first person and the author is supposed to take part in the expedition, as he is the character in the story closer to the protagonist. Kettner, the protagonist, is described as a difficult man to work with, his energy could become overwhelming and arrogant. He becomes impatient with those fail to match his efficiency. He is ruthless and dictatorial. He also has priapic sexual appetites. Outstanding professional capability, achieving impressive results. So he could always find sponsors and raise supporting teams. He is physically described as «a big man, over six feet, broad chested, slavic features. No doubt, all the virtues of the stereotyped hero, which is ironically described by the author, but in the story this is obviously a contrast to the state he becomes in the end of the story. During the journey Kettner showed a taste for philosophical speculation, strange in a man of action. After some time, they come across a tribe who knows of another one which they consider insidious spirits, possessed by some mysterious evil and whom they avoid. Kettner discovers it, they are the «sleeping tribe», which is the core of the story. This tribe deserves some description, let us hear the author's:

He thought at first glance they were animals; they were about a dozen of them, of both sexes, all sleeping, some lying touching the others apart, totally naked and unpainted, even the females. Piles of ordure were scattered around. There was a congestion of heavy black flies and the smell was zoo like.

The picture is that of an undeveloped degraded tribe whose most extraordinary characteristic was their propensity to sleep, «which seemed like a narcolepsy». Their only ritual consisted of a group of adults going out of the camp together for a sort of communal sleeping session known as «shared dream». Our hero had become fascinated by this apparently dull people. The state of this tribe is suggested somewhere as a metaphor for the human condition, «the tribe could disappear in months. Their own belief was that the collective spirit of the Ta-Wishu, which is the name of the tribe, would somehow pass into an eternal state of dreaming, so death could be interpreted as the condition of non-dreaming, the hero is able to join them and becomes almost a member of their tribe, sharing their rituals, to the point of being found a few months later «lying naked in a scooped hollow, covered only by a rough canopy of leaves. His hair and new beard were matted with mud, and his smell was repellent. A swarm of flies buzzed all around him as though feeding on a ripe corpse». For this tribe lived in order to dream. The dream world is reality, every action in the real world is organized for transmutation into dream: «*Dream and*

*death had become interwoven*». The story ends with Kettner in a psychiatric hospital, in a catatonic state which is described by the hospital director as follows:

«He seemed to have developed a bizarre illusion. He considered that he had no being except through courtesy of an obscure Indian tribe. He believed himself to live only in their dreams. And that when they ceased to dream of him, if the tribe died out then he would vanish from existence with the last dream.»

Kettner died a few months later, presumably when the tribe had disappeared.

One is so tempted to draw out some moral conclusions that it is very difficult not to make some assertion on the evils of drug addiction but we must not yield to the temptation, this must not be the role of the critic. What must be noticed is how the end of the story gives that sudden twist, how the hero becomes possessed by the mysterious power hidden in the labyrinths of the consciousness. In the essay I have mentioned, A. B. quotes a sentence of Navocob's which justifies B.'s fiction... «Literature... appeals to that secret depth of human soul where shadows of other worlds pass like the shadows of nameless and soundless ships» and another by Auden: «Present in every human being are two desires, a desire to know the truth about the primary world, the given world in which we are born, live and love, hate and die, and the desire to make secondary worlds of our own, if we cannot make ourselves to share in the secondary worlds of those who can».

For A. B. «modelling the incoherent and vertiginous matter of which dreams are composed, was the most difficult task a man could undertake, even though he should penetrate all the enigmas of a superior or inferior order. And it is as Fiedler in *Love and Death in the American Novel* has stated, «novels are a deliberate assault on the common man's notion of reality».

And if A. B. is asked about the effect which he would like a book of his to make, he will invariably reply that... «It may linger perhaps years after, when all the details, the plot, the locus, the character, have quite faded, as something impalpable in a casual reader's imagination. Not even a form, scarcely an image, like a half forgotten landscape or a half remembered dream».

I hope that has been my aim, to introduce you to a writer, one more of those who offer an alternative for dreams is fulfilled. I have drawn on his quotations and work, for I feel that my task at this first step of his presentation, is to remain apart, to give you a cue, not a very subjective opinion, which on the other hand is that his fiction could be ranked as high as Pynchon's and higher than Donleavy's to give you two examples.

His major works of fiction are, *The Roussian Roulette*, *Throw*, *The Delinquents*, *Life for a Life*, and a last novel, which is now in the process of printing whose title is still unknown to me; all of them published by The Hogarth Press. He has also written plays for Television under the pen-name of John Westgate, Short stories, some of them are in my opinion perfect pieces of fiction like «Fidelity», published in ENCOUNTER or «The Colonel and the Canary» published in a USA sexy magazine, GALLERY (By the way, a magazine of that sort would pay even seven times more than a common one...) He is a well known author in London Literary circles, and has been translated into Swedish, German, Rumanian and French. In France his work has been published by Gallimard. In Spain we are still in search of a publisher.

 INDICE