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## THE TERMINATION PHASE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS AS SEEN THROUGH THE LENS OF THE DREAM

The decision about when to terminate analysis has long been underpinned by a theory-driven *criterion model*, which may steer the analytic dialogue away from its customary activities of free association, empathic listening, and interpretation. As a remedy to this situation, the author proposes that by paying careful attention to less consciously crafted patient communications such as dreams, the analytic dyad can consider readiness to set a termination date from a perspective that is context-sensitive and less encumbered by preordained criteria. Tracing the dreams of one analysand from the vantage point of contemporary dream theory, the author demonstrates how careful attention to the dream elucidated the patient's readiness to terminate and her complex feelings about the termination process. Finally, the author challenges the notion that the termination phase is of greater evaluative than therapeutic importance, and provides clinical material as evidence that this is not the case.

**T**he complex termination phase of psychoanalysis, which includes the vexing question of when to end the treatment, continues to be one of the less adequately understood aspects of the psychoanalytic process. Although Freud recognized that termination is an inevitable fact of psychoanalysis, by the time of his death in 1939 he had only

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adumbrated what would become the concept of a termination “phase” (Freud 1913, 1937). There is still disagreement about whether termination should, indeed, be recognized as a phase. For example, de Simone Gaburri (1985) and Blanck and Blanck (1988) have observed that themes associated with termination are present from the outset of an analysis, and so they consider the idea of a distinct termination phase an unnecessary encumbrance. Blum (1989) has noted that termination issues are not invariably the central theme of the terminal phase. In this paper I adopt the more commonly held position: that while the earlier phases of analysis may well contain associative material concerned with themes of separation, ending, mortality, death, and rebirth, it is in the final hours of treatment that such themes emerge consistently and with vigor, often resonating in the analysand’s dreams.

Using five sequential dreams from the termination phase of one particular analysis, I would like to demonstrate how a contemporary psychoanalytic model of dreaming can help the analytic dyad to a greater depth of understanding during this period. I will focus primarily on two aspects of the dream: its role in helping the individual to adapt to the challenges of termination, and its usefulness in communicating to analyst and analysand the salient emotional experiences that termination elicits. Additionally, I will reexamine one long-held assumption concerning the role of termination in psychoanalytic treatment: that it is marginally therapeutic and predominantly evaluative (Blum 1989).

I begin with the question of indices for termination. Freud suggested that the analysis might end when it had fulfilled its mission to “secure the best possible psychological conditions for the functions of the ego; with that it has discharged its task” (Freud 1937, p. 250). Perhaps it was the absence of more specifically defined parameters that prompted Freud’s students to do as he did, behaving in a fairly unilateral way around this issue having derived few clear directions from his writings. For example, following the example of involuntary termination demonstrated by Freud in the cases of Anna O. and the Wolf Man, Glover (1955) postulated that in cases where a transference neurosis had superseded the original neurosis, “the responsibility for giving notice of termination must lie with the analyst” (p. 140) (see also Buxbaum 1950).

Most contemporary analysts do not envision the termination process unfolding in such a hierarchical fashion; they are more likely to recognize that termination is a mutual decision (Orgel 2000). The question of when to terminate remains, however. Many have pondered

this theme, and the following necessary conditions have been proposed: the capacity for enjoyment and happiness; a sense of strength, confidence, and well-being; overall emotional health (including the capacity to love and work and make the unconscious conscious); symptomatic improvement; structural considerations (including attainment of full genitality, mastery of castration anxiety, improved reality testing, enhanced gratification delay, and strengthened sublimations); resolution of the transference neurosis; sustained, positive oedipal transference; an enhanced capacity for self-analysis; the creation of a coherent narrative; and resumption of developmental maturation with the amelioration of developmental derailments (Buxbaum 1950; Ellman 1997; Firestein 1978; Novick 1988; M. and E. Shane 1984; Ticho 1972). Many other contributors have suggested additions to this seemingly benign "list." In fact, my review of the literature finds only de Simone Gaburri (1985) arguing *against* the use of termination criteria, which she believes do not exist and which, to her, are an encumbering formulation. It is her position that termination criteria represent the concretization of a fantasied process. What I will call the *criterion model* of termination appears to be an unquestioned, almost universally accepted notion.

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However, I now question whether it is truly in the best interest of the patient to think of termination in this way. It has been observed that analytic terminations, like so many other aspects of the treatment, are subject to unattainable objectives and idealizations—that in reality most analyses fall short of *someone's* criteria, and that the practiced norm is actually that of an imperfect termination (Golland 1997). Conceivably, lists such as the one above, with their preordained sets of theory-driven criteria for bringing the analysis to termination, may burden the analytic dialogue. Taken to an extreme, in this model the analyst-as-expert observes, and creates judgements about, the analysand's readiness to terminate as if he or she were observing an "isolated, individual mind" (Stolorow and Atwood 1996, p. 182). Although in practice there is usually collaboration in the making of the decision to terminate, I believe that there nonetheless remains too heavy a weighting of the analyst's expertise, and a significant underweighting of the analysand's unconsciously informed "derivative communications" (see Langs 1978) about his or her own readiness to end the analysis. Furthermore, the need to step out of the customary role of predominantly listening and interpreting places the analyst in an

evaluative position that is inhospitable to the analytic attitude of simply “finding out” (Schafer 1983, p. 20). I would be attacking a straw man if I were to suggest that most seasoned analysts apply a checklist approach to termination; my experience in case conferences and in discussions with colleagues indicates that most terminations are quite carefully considered and not at all “mechanized.” Indeed, Novick (1988) advocates remaining attuned to our frequently ineffable counter-transference indicators of whether the signs for termination are premature, overdue, or timely. Nonetheless, I believe that the criterion model is such an embedded notion that we may reflexively yield to its availability and ease of use when approaching termination decision-making. Or, as is perhaps more often the case, we may terminate on a more individualized basis, but then conceptualize and report the process using a criterion model.

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How else, then, can we assess our analysands’ readiness for termination? Or is this function as assessor even an appropriate role? I think that to discard all criteria at this stage would be a devaluation of them parallel to the idealization I have challenged above. But we can, and I propose that we should, grant greater weight to a model of termination that is more phenomenological and context-responsive. Careful attention to material gained from free association, including dreams, fantasies, memories, parapraxes, and introjects, plus the perceptions of both analyst and analysand about the analysand’s readiness to leave treatment, allow the analyst to take a stance other than that of an evaluator. In this paper I propose that the dream, by virtue of its capacity to bridge waking and sleeping states, is ideally situated to illustrate the analysand’s unconscious concerns about the treatment, especially in the termination phase. While this is not a novel proposal, and while others have viewed the dream as a valuable data source (Oremland 1973), over the past twenty-five years considerations of this use of the dream have been sparse in the literature, with few exceptions (Bond, Franco, and Richards 1992).

### **CURRENT THEORETICAL MODEL**

The classical structural model posited that the dream serves to manage core conflicts between id-based, unconscious, infantile wishes and superego prohibitions. This management is achieved by enlisting the aid of the ego via dreamwork (condensation, symbolization, displace-

ment), secondary revision (camouflaging “reprehensible” latent dream-thoughts having to do with conflicted incestuous and aggressive wishes) and simultaneously providing for their hallucinatory fulfillment and discharge (M. Stein 1984). Additionally, as H. Stein (1995) highlights, in the classical model the protection of sleep was not viewed as one of the functions of dreams, but the *only* function.

In the classical model, the “surface” of the dream, the manifest dream, exists primarily to make primitive unconscious thoughts more palatable to the sleeping ego. Its clinical utility is primarily that it elicits associations from the dreamer that may be used to gain access to deeper layers of thought and affect. The manifest dream is generally not seen, as it is in some later models, as an overt depiction of significant psychological content, serving as it does primarily to carry out its task of guarding sleep by evading censorship (Mendelsohn 1990).

While current science has not disputed the role of the successful dream in guarding sleep, and has certainly not disproved the theory that dreams may at times contain deeper meanings decipherable only using free association, these functions now exist among many others. Most contemporary analysts now ascribe to the dream a greater repertoire of purposes in our intrapsychic functioning than was originally envisioned. Sleep laboratory findings continue to indicate that sleep and dreaming serve an adaptive function with respect to the cross-temporal integration of information and experience (Greenberg, Katz, Schwartz, and Pearlman 1992). Although in earlier years it was acknowledged that dreams may draw their “raw material” from present-day events (*day residue*), that dreams might actually draw impetus from contemporary conflicts was considered unlikely (Kanzer 1954). Research in the past twenty years, however, has supported arguments that this is indeed the case. Not only has the dream been shown to be consistently reflective of the dreamer’s ongoing concerns (Greenberg 1987; Greenberg, Katz, Schwartz, and Pearlman 1992), it has been demonstrated that emotionally significant events—particularly their beginnings and endings—are reflected in dreams more frequently than other influences (Kramer 1993; Kramer, Roth, and Cisco 1977 as cited in Kramer 1993). Furthermore, dreams may be the most convincing indication of feelings that cannot be conveyed in any other way (Mancia 1999); readiness for termination is of such emotional import that at times it may be communicated to the analyst only in “code” (Bergmann 1966, p. 365).

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With respect to research findings at a micro level, it is now fairly well accepted that the dream is the end product of a complex series of neural events that serves the adaptive need of individuals both to process crucial information acquired during the waking state and to reprocess it during sleep (Palombo 1978; Fiss 1993; Winson 1990). In the brain's multimodal processing of perceptual data (Koukkou and Lehmann 1993), endogenous and exogenous perceptual signals are translated into codes specific to the receptor sites, and then into "languages" specific to the target brain region. From these geographically disparate points the information converges synchronously into a personal system of cognitive-emotional analysis before it is joined by information from somatic and sensory channels and then re-encoded into individualized symbolic languages. Nonverbal and verbal information is thus encoded, in symbolic form, in separate systems specialized for such representation, and connected by a complex system of referential relations (Bucci 1985). This culminates in a "neuronal multimodal and multidimensional model of the momentary internal realities (thoughts, plans, goals, emotions, feelings, functions of the body) and of the external realities of the individual" (p. 57). Koukkou and Lehmann refer to the overarching process of evaluating incoming information as the *preattentive processes*, which, they suggest, operate during both sleeping and waking, have full access to memory, and work with reflexive speed.

Dorpat and Miller (1992) have focused extensively on the "meaning" of these microevents to the individual. They posit that the primary process system "nonconsciously" evaluates ongoing interpersonal relations, forming mental representations of this appraisal. The primary process (which might be seen as an alternative description of preattentive processing) analyzes the meanings of interactions and interpersonal constellations within the analytic and extra-analytic environments, and represents those meanings through affects, narratives, metaphors, and images.

James Fosshage's organizational perspective (1983, 1997) holds that the primary function of dreams is the emotional-cognitive organization of data. He says, "The supraordinate function of dreams is the development, maintenance (regulation), and, when necessary, restoration of psychic processes, structure, and organization" (1983, p. 657). Drawing on recent developments in laboratory REM and non-REM dream studies (Greenberg and Pearlman 1975), affect (mood-

regulatory) research (Kramer 1993), information-processing studies (Bucci 1985), and neurophysiology, he proposes that the mode of cognition in dreams is closer than previously thought to what has customarily been considered "secondary process." That is, dreams make use of the properties of integration, synthesis, and mastery in a non-defensive manner that is not dominated by so-called regression. When dreams are not thought of as *necessarily* serving primary-process drive gratification and discharge, their other functions are more apt to be considered, including the finding (or creating) of order and meaning, and problem solving. Hence, although the organizational perspective allows that any given dream *may* contain id derivatives, superego constraints, ego-defenses, depictions of internal resistance, and oedipal configurations (the traditional "latent dream thoughts"), these elements would not be viewed as *essential* components of the dream process, but as components that may be present depending upon the task of any individual dream.

### COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION OF THE DREAM

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Particularly germane to the thesis of this paper is the communicative capacity of the dream: that is, that dreams may convey, intrapsychically and interpersonally (in this case to the analyst), the analysand's conscious and unconscious concerns about the analysis ending. Revealing deeply personal concerns as it does, a dream, when told to an analyst or another interested person, becomes a vehicle for relating something meaningful and often pertinent to the analytic relationship (Mancia 1999). Natterson (1993) has described the dream as one of the most reliable and acute indicators of therapeutic action. Bergmann (1966), too, acknowledges that the dream has a communicative function; he maintains, however, that due to the dreamer's approach-avoidance conflict with communication, the nighttime dream censor renders the dream unintelligible.

In any case, the question of how best to understand the manifest content is quite unsettled, and answers remain split along theoretical lines. While many would argue that the overriding purpose of the manifest content of the dream is concealment, others emphasize its capacity to communicate effectively and nondefensively (Gill 1982). Greenberg and Pearlman (1993) offer extended clinical vignettes, drawn from psychoanalytic treatments, that illustrate how the manifest dream

closely parallels the analytic situation. Building on convergent findings from laboratory and clinical research, they demonstrate the utility of working with the manifest dream in a contemporary psychoanalytic framework that retains, yet modifies, classical notions of conflict, defense, transference, and the unconscious. In a similar vein, current theoreticians (Breger 1980; Dorpat and Miller 1992; Fosshage 1997) propose that disguise is not always an inherent aspect of the dream. They submit that dream imagery is not selected for its capacity to disguise; rather it is unconsciously selected for its efficacy and its poignancy. Dorpat and Miller maintain that the process of dream formation is “transformative rather than distortive” (*transformative* referring to the transformation of ideas and affects into visual-analogic-primary process form) (1992, p. 283).

Although I will not attempt to settle the ultimate question of whether the manifest content of the dream is an instrument of obfuscation (as it is in the classical position) or a means of intrapsychic and transference communication, it seems to me that if the dream’s overriding purpose were obfuscation, and if the sleeping dreamer were unconsciously motivated in that direction, the analytic dreamer would learn to report dreams that become increasingly nonsensical until they reach the point of total chaos—in inverse correlation with the analytic couple’s skill in deciphering dreams. Instead, however, we find that as analyses proceed, dreams often become less bizarre (Blum 1976; Saul 1972, cited in Cavenar and Nash 1976; Warner 1983). In the following clinical material, I hope to illustrate how the dreams of one analysand were used by us to inform and enrich our cocreated understanding of the analytic termination process.

### THE CASE OF LAUREN

The analysand I will call Lauren was an articulate twenty-five-year-old unmarried college graduate in a highly skilled, entry-level position in her field. She was seen first in preliminary psychotherapy, and then in analysis for four years, four times per week.<sup>1</sup> She presented with symptoms of boredom and dissatisfaction with her present job, occasional alcohol abuse, mild yet chronic panic attacks, and a serious depression, which she felt was “bottomless.” She stated succinctly:

<sup>1</sup>The key dreams I will present are taken from the end of Lauren’s analysis; two others from earlier phases are presented to illustrate the thread of her core conflicts.

“In this world you can’t depend on anyone but yourself.” She gave herself one year to feel better or, failing that, commit suicide. I believed she meant this. She initially told me that she had received no prior treatment (though this was later discovered not to be so). She had also been placed on a brief trial of antidepressant medication by her family physician. She found this to be of limited benefit.

In Lauren’s family of origin, chaotic shouting and physical fighting were frequent. “In my family it was survival of the fittest.” Her parents were trying to make their way as farmers as part of a back-to-the-land philosophy. But both were alcoholic, and they filled Lauren’s childhood with blatant lies, constant disappointments, and myriad promises never kept. Family life was unpredictable and punctuated by repeated economic crises, including evictions and shut-off utilities. When the business of farming failed and there was not enough money to buy feed, some animals died of starvation. It was typical of her irresponsible parents to walk away from disaster.

Lauren’s mother was prone to rages, and was both narcissistically competitive with her and chronically degrading. In one early session, Lauren painfully and angrily recalled the onset of her menstruation. She had wrapped the used sanitary pads in toilet paper; her mother yelled that the toilet paper was “too expensive” and that her use of it was “wasteful.” Ridicule of menstruation was a family ritual. She came to regard her period as “messy and embarrassing, a pain.” As an adult, her persistent self-degradation in this regard remained apparent; she made comments to me about the “inferiority of the female species.”

Lauren’s father was affectionate, though ineffective and unable to manage the family finances. She was concerned that he might have sexually abused her as a child (she knew that he had abused her sister). Though she had no direct recollection of anything of this nature, he was sexually suggestive with her, teasing her for looking like a boy when her breasts were delayed in developing. When she was young he playfully chased her, and upon catching her tickled until she urinated. He was capricious, volatile, and considerably overweight, and he told her from an early age that skinny fathers were less adequate parents than fat fathers.

Lauren got along well with people at her workplace, and although she had been in a “monogamous” relationship for three years, she had multiple affairs during this time. She described herself as “dishonest and underhanded.”

**Opening Phase of Analysis**

During the initial six-month period of twice-weekly psychoanalytic therapy Lauren began to grow comfortable with what I believed to be her first therapeutic relationship. She developed an increased capacity for introspection, and was putting some of the insights she was garnering from therapy into practice in her daily life. She recalled her dreams with ease, though I never felt that she flooded the hour with dreams or used them in the ways that have been described in the literature as primarily resistive. Nonetheless, for both of us the time between sessions felt long, and there was a shared sense that certain things weren't being addressed. I believed her to be a promising analytic patient. However, it was clear that Lauren could obtain analysis only if I offered a reduced fee—which I was willing to do, in part because she was an early control case in my psychoanalytic training. I did not, however, reveal this to her.

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Though she accepted my offer and my recommendation to begin analysis, I sensed an underlying apprehension or wariness about making the transition. At the time this did not rise to the level of coherence in my mind, nor was it articulated by either of us. The move to the couch occurred without apparent incident, though soon thereafter her associations became halting and she seemed to revert to a reporting mode, rather than providing the fluid admixture of reality and fantasy that she had while sitting up. Initial transference themes on the couch featured me as potentially threatening and predatory. There were manifest and derivative references to pursuit, humiliating dependency, boundary penetration, vengeful castration, illicit sexuality, primal scene exposure, and early deprivation. There was constant competition among dream characters, with alternating views of herself as victor and vanquished. She imagined that I would be disturbed by her wearing shorts to the session, yet she was curious about my reaction. Exploration of this fantasy revealed that there were unspoken family rules of conduct in recognition of her father's poorly managed flirtations, including expectations that the children would not provoke him. She recalled that his "leering" evoked increased modesty on her part, though she was also stirred by his attention. This led to a subsequent revelation that at age eight she had discovered her parents' pornography collection, which, she recalled, elicited simultaneous affects of interest, sadness, and disgust.

The terror of her early life began to unfold in the intersubjective matrix depicted in the following dream. I have selected this dream because it illustrates central concerns that can be followed through the episodes of the analysis presented here:

Following my analytic session you are chasing me with knives and trying to force your way into my closed room. You pry open my locked window and I defend myself by slicing at your finger. Then I run and hide in a ditch by a road, under low-lying tree boughs. You easily find me and laugh as you approach because I am still in plain sight. I feel betrayed.

Her initial association to the dream was from her childhood. She and a friend had played hooky from school. As they were walking down the farm road, they heard a car, driven by her mother, approach, and they quickly hid in the shrubbery, where they were easily discovered. Lauren then told me that she had recently wished she didn't have to say everything that came to her mind, but she wondered if I would then be able to tell that she was "hiding" something. She admitted that what she had hoped *not* to tell me was that she still felt somewhat excited, as well as hesitant and fearful, about the recently increased frequency of sessions.

The interactive genesis of this dream illustrates my central premise: the dream, being an overdetermined phenomenon, is one component of a potent feedback loop about the analytic relationship and process. Lauren's dream was attempting to help her manage intensely conflictual affect states concerning at least four events that had unfolded so far: my offering her multiple sessions per week, my granting her request for a reduced fee, her going to the analytic couch, and my ongoing interpretive comments.

As we were to learn over numerous weeks, my engaging her in the analysis, and perhaps the fee-reduction as well, was an enactment that had elicited fears of being retraumatized by a father/analyst's inappropriate excitations. As Jaffe (2001) has observed, the external demands of psychoanalytic training may precipitate the analyst and analysand into actions and fantasies whose meanings will resonate in the analysis.

Indeed, these events were experienced by Lauren as a seduction. She admitted that she wondered to herself, "What illicit gratification is *he* getting from this?" I believe also that she felt them to be

overstimulating—precipitants of a reexperiencing of her own unacceptable erotic desire. The dream image of a forced entry into her “room” represented penetration of her mind and body by the father/analyst. Her subsequent attempt to slice my finger and render me powerless through castration was a move to protect herself from harm and restore her psychological equilibrium, and thus to maintain a cohesive sense of self (Fosshage 1987, 1997). The attempt to slice my finger may also have represented a defense against her own incestuous excitations. We found that although Lauren both feared and wished that I might engage her in the analysis, my doing so was simultaneously stimulating and horrifying.

She related the dream image of “being seen” to my analytic interpretations. She described that at certain moments she felt as if she could not “escape” my interpretative comments, which caused her to feel at once revealed, narcissistically admired, and humiliated. She was able to relate this to the excitement of being chased early on by her father, and the pleasure of being caught (though this pleasure often devolved into the panic of overstimulation).

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### ***The Middle Phase***

In the middle phase of the treatment, the therapeutic alliance was more secure, and a generally positive transference provided the backdrop for the ongoing work. Lauren changed employment for the better, her initial affective symptoms were markedly ameliorated, and her alcohol use was no longer excessive. Transference themes concerning my being the “penetrating” or invasive abusive father/analyst abated. As these concerns receded, new aspects of the transference assumed center stage. She began to experience increasing anxiety about separations from me, and her concerns about abandonment and dependency were more available for our consideration. Whenever feelings of dependency emerged, they would be met with her own internal condemnations that such feelings were “baby-like,” “shameful,” and “unacceptable.” Lauren expressed emphatically her core belief that people are unreliable, and responded to her feelings of dependency with hopelessness and depression. We were then able to explore how she defended against such feelings toward me and her boyfriend through displacement of her dependency needs into various forms of erotized activities such as flirtation and, often in the next months, coming close to cheating on her boyfriend. We explored how this behavior revealed an unconscious identification with her father.

In the third year of the analysis (following a weekend break), she reported this dream:

I am standing on top of a house and some guy is down below. He looks only somewhat familiar, like I know him, but can't place from where. I know that I didn't trust him before, but now I do. I do have a good feeling when I see him, however. Then it occurs to me that he's got some kind of supernatural powers. I know that I have to run and jump off the building and I'm pretty certain that he will catch me. I jump and he does catch me.

Lauren did not immediately associate to me as the figure in the dream. We were actually discussing another matter when she stated that she occasionally regards me as someone able to understand her "in an almost supernatural way." Those words bolstered my earlier suspicions about the role I might have played in this dream, and moments later she made a similar connection. She added that she had secretly hoped all along that I would be someone in her life that would "make things work out" as in her dream, yet she had feared revealing these wishes out of concern that I might exploit her vulnerability. She stated that she now felt more comfortable revealing these deeply personal fantasies, though she still had some remaining trepidation.

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Here, as in the previous dream, the interactive transference elements of the dream are in evidence. Although it is true that Lauren initially appears to be "on top" and the analyst is relegated to "some guy down below" (perhaps depicting her historical devaluation of men), what emerges through her associations is how the analytic relationship has transformed a deeply mistrustful object relational configuration into one in which she is able to experience dependency with much less fear. Furthermore, the dream suggests the emergence of an idealizing transference that serves the developmental function of reviving her repressed need for an idealized paternal imago.

### ***The Pretermination Phase***

Lauren's fears of abandonment as well as protracted adolescent conflicts surrounding individuation made for an occasionally tempestuous analysis. She periodically spoke of wishing to leave treatment, and not until late in the treatment did she settle into a prolonged period in which her anxieties about being "trapped" were apparently worked through. As we entered the pretermination phase there was a clear

resolution of the symptoms that had brought her to treatment. Her chronic depression and anxiety abated, and her relationship with her boyfriend turned into an engagement. The transference-countertransference matrix permitted the emergence of her deeply held beliefs in the undependable nature of others. There was a very significant dream that suggested that she had not actually been abused by her father, and this brought her a sense of resolution. I felt personally gratified that she was no longer suicidal, and we both shared a more optimistic outlook about her future.

In the midst of the fourth year, Lauren broached the subject of finishing the analysis. Although some believe that it is best for analysands in the neurotic range of ego-functioning to be the first to discuss termination openly (Robbins 1975), I was nonetheless concerned that this might be an “adolescent termination”<sup>2</sup> as described by Novick (1988), as I sensed some anxiety or urgency around this idea. Still, the meaning of her request was unclear, and I thought it best to heed as closely as possible whatever communications she was offering at a less-than-conscious level.

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Within the week Lauren reported the following dream, which I have come to regard as a “key dream,” such as Natterson (1993, p. 68) describes as possessing a “nodal, pivotal quality.”

I am playing a piano. It was like I was playing for the first time, as I had no concept of what the notes were. To my surprise, no matter what keys I hit everything sounded great. I was just playing the keys, and every time I hit the keyboard, some beautiful music played. Though it was odd, because in the dream there were two pianos: an old piano, like the one I grew up playing on, and a newer piano. In contrast, the old piano sounded terrible and the new piano sounded wonderful.

Her initial associations were somewhat concrete; Lauren found it odd that she would dream of the piano as she was not currently a piano player. Over the next two sessions she continued her associations and led us to the most affectively salient aspect of the dream: the image of the *old* piano existing simultaneously with the *new*. She found it intriguing and pleasurable that both were there simultaneously.

<sup>2</sup>He describes an *adolescent termination* as one in which the experienced loss is not for the analyst, but for some aspect of the self. This implies a lack of differentiation between the self and the analyst.

Cavenar and Nash (1976) have described the *termination signal dream* that alerts the analyst to the emergence of termination-related themes, before termination has been manifestly undertaken. They state that in order for the termination dream to occur, the major conflicts and treatment goals will have *already* been worked through maximally. However, although I believe that the “two pianos” dream was a termination signal dream, for this patient it was not until the termination phase began that certain issues could be more fully resolved. In this small sense I disagree with Cavenar and Nash, for I believe that termination may begin before the resolution of key issues occurs. I will discuss this more fully later.

Why do I view this as a termination signal dream? As Novick (1988) has described, termination signal dreams may occur without the customary metaphors of termination. While there may be no manifest allusions to leave-taking, rebirth, etc., they may nonetheless indicate a shift in the analysand, and reveal a newly found creativity that is relatively autonomous of the analyst. Our explorations revealed that this dream represented a fundamental shift in the way Lauren viewed herself in the world. Not only did the dream depict her markedly enhanced energy and pleasure in living, so unavailable to her when she began analysis, but in describing the simultaneous existence of the two pianos she was communicating that she had successfully navigated what had heretofore been an unfinished developmental task: the capacity to experience and integrate conflictual, painful, and pleasurable affects without needing to defensively disavow them. She felt that the dream affirmed on a deep level that she was successfully resolving longstanding conflict and moving toward ending the analysis. Our continued analysis of this subject helped us to understand that her anxiety arose not only from her own residual adolescent pressures to “leave the nest,” but also from her fear that I would be behaving as her mother did if I failed to recognize her genuine developmental achievements and attempted to keep her unnecessarily in analysis.

### **The Termination Phase**

In the following weeks, references to termination periodically entered the analysis, both on manifest and derivative levels. When we discussed this in terms of actual logistics, we considered ending our meetings within a number of months, maintaining the four-times-weekly schedule until the end. When she asked why analysis continued

in this manner to the end, I responded, somewhat rotely, that there was often something important to be gained in this manner of ending.

In hindsight it is clear that I reflexively assumed that termination would continue in the traditional manner, with the full frequency of sessions until the final hour, a supposition that was consequential. One day Lauren reported the following dream:

I am with my mother and father and brother, who is a young boy. My brother gets a bee sting. I think that my mother is making too much fuss over my brother's bee sting. I get angry. My mother throws him in the water while holding him by his ankles. Then I'm with my mother and brother in a car with father driving and father drives over a cliff. We go into a free fall and I am holding my father's and brother's hands. I hope that I fall quickly and die painlessly; I hope that the impact is painless and not prolonged. I hope that I black out in time not to feel the crash landing. To my surprise, when we do hit the bottom we are all okay. The car, amazingly, just lands. I don't know how I could have survived such a long fall and I think it must have been because I was holding my father's hand.

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Lauren then recalled that it was she, and not her brother, who as a child had been stung by a bee, and that she had felt strongly at the time that her mother had overreacted to this. Furthermore, it was her brother who had choked on an olive when he was little, causing their mother to shake him by his ankles until the olive popped out. Lauren noted the transposition of herself with her brother. She had no further associations and fell silent. Considering the dream content, I wondered aloud if she thought the dream might pertain to our recent discussions about ending the analysis.

It was as if a dam broke. She complained bitterly that it had all along been her idea that termination would be a "gradual" process—in her words, a type of "weaning." She felt that abruptly ending the sessions would be tantamount to going "cold turkey," and that she wished soon to reduce the session frequency from four to three meetings per week. I offered the interpretation that in transposing herself with her brother (he choking on the olive, she receiving the bee sting) the dream had depicted her wish that termination would be less serious than a "life and death" event, even as trivial as a bee sting, and that she was annoyed with me (as she had been with her mother) for elevating its importance.

In this context it could be understood that the dream communicated Lauren's strong need to deny her anxiety concerning ending the

analysis. This construction was useful for Lauren, and she was subsequently able to acknowledge that she wished to avoid the feelings of loss that she associated with an abrupt end to the treatment. She was then able to acknowledge that her wish to deny anxiety concerning the impending termination was depicted in the dream image/thought of “hoping to black out” as she fell from the cliff. We were also able to recognize that the dream contained a communication of hope: despite her fear that ending the analysis might resemble hurtling off a cliff, the anticipation was likely to be worse than the ending. She would survive the loss of the analysis, and would remain in better shape than she feared by staying connected (holding hands) until the end. The hand-holding also suggested that she had detoxified the internalized father of childhood, at least sufficiently to form a new object relationship with a male analyst. We considered that the soft landing indicated the supplanting of much of her prior emptiness with a secure foundation.

At this point in the analysis Lauren’s associative material was increasingly organized around themes pertaining to her feelings about the impending termination, leading me to believe that the termination phase was engaged. I find that the entry into the termination phase is known only in retrospect. While it is commonly proposed that there is a most opportune time to commence the termination phase (Novick 1988), I suggest that neither analyst nor analysand, unilaterally or bilaterally, can consciously choose when the termination phase begins. They can only find through careful attention to associative material that it has begun.

As we moved forward in Lauren’s analysis, her conflicts concerning loss became more prominent in her dreams:

I am in a crowd of people, mostly younger, and we are going to some dance. As I get to this event I see that all of the ladies are fussing with their hair, including me. I’m really fussing with it and just can’t get it right. Then it all comes out in my hand, and I’m holding my scalp like a wig. It won’t fit right on my head because my head has been moved all out of shape. I feel so embarrassed that I want to look for a way to sneak out of the event-place, so no one will see how awkward and ugly I am. Then this man appears, some type of do-gooder. He wants to help me leave, but not sneak out. All I want to do is be left alone to put my hair back on my head. I keep looking to sneak out the back entrance to the building, hoping no one will see me.

Lauren's associations were most directly about her actual hair: the problems she has with it, the way she fusses with it, her feeling that it is her best physical attribute, and her wish that it appear "perfect." At that point I asked how she felt about losing me and the analysis. She replied that it was an empty and painful feeling, yet one that she was very reluctant to admit. It reminded her of how painful it had felt to be needful, and that she viewed this as a sign of being "imperfect." She wished she could simply walk away from these feelings, or rearrange them, like her hair.

Then Lauren revealed for the first time in the analysis that she had previously been in psychotherapy. Five years prior, when she left the South to move to a new city, she had seen a therapist there to aid in the transition. She terminated her treatment suddenly and without warning him, summarily announcing that that very session would be their last. To her surprise, she had been flooded by feelings of loss and sadness, and wept uncontrollably when making her announcement to him. Although I'm not certain, I suspect that she had not consciously concealed her prior treatment, but had repressed it. This repression speaks to her great anxiety surrounding separation and loss. While her new recollection was likely elicited by the prospect of our termination, it also suggests that she was able to be consciously aware of feelings that had previously been too painful to manage.

Termination quite often involves painful feelings of loss and even grief. These affects have been equated with mourning in their intensity, and it has been noted how analysands may strive to avoid such emotions in planned terminations (Garcia-Lawson and Lane 1997). Lauren's dream pertains to her attempts to reconcile her embarrassing and uncomfortable feelings about losing the analytic relationship (depicted by loss of her hair) with past experiences of denying loss by behaviorally turning passive into active. Apparently her dream-wish to sneak out the back of the dance area was similar to her wish to sneak out of the analysis, thereby avoiding humiliation. The dream suggested that the analysis had "moved her head out of shape" by bringing her into a close relationship with me, and although this had brought symptom relief, it had also brought her into the uncomfortable and humiliating position of dependence.

This vignette also illustrates the capacity of dreams to gather disparate life experiences and focus them into an iconic metaphor, thereby facilitating the maintenance and development of the self. The image of

her hair being out of place unconsciously juxtaposed Lauren's experiences of prior endings with significant people against her present situation, thus creating a historical context of psychological meaning for her present experiences. We also see in this dream the actualization of the developmental thrust to reintegrate split-off aspects of self, in this case Lauren's disavowed dependency needs. Finally, Lauren and I understood that she had sarcastically represented me in her dream as a "do-gooder" out of lingering concerns about my having offered her, and her having accepted, a reduced fee for her treatment. While my offer made it possible for her to receive treatment that she could not otherwise have afforded, it also caused her to be suspicious of my intentions, and to feel uncomfortably dependent upon my goodwill. Although this was discussed and partially analyzed, I never explained to her that extra piece of information with respect to my willingness to see her for a reduced fee. It seems to have remained, lodged in her unconscious, as a bit of data only partially understood. Again, the co-created aspects of the dream are visible.

As we moved inexorably closer to the planned termination date, a series of dreams and associations followed that pertained to her feelings about the impending separation, and often revealed thinly veiled fears of desertion. She dreamt of a small dog whose owner had been neglectful and permitted it to run into the road, where it was killed and its organs scattered. She dreamt of hiking in the mountains, without carabiners, and having to avoid ever-widening crevasses. She dreamt about fixing a car without the correct set of wrenches. She dreamt of losing her sunblock at the beach and getting skin cancer.

The affect in these dreams was an admixture of fear, triumph, independence, and loneliness. Her anxiety about being suddenly without resources (a metaphor for the ending of the analysis) was undeniable; she feared that her "bottomless depression" might return. It was apparent that I was the neglectful caretaker who would let her run out into the road while she was still a puppy, causing her to be killed.

The upsetting quality of the dreams forced me to consider whether she was indeed ready to end the analysis. There did appear to be a great deal of anxiety about abandonment in the dream content. I wondered whether this indicated an insufficient internalization of our relationship. We did proceed with the termination timetable, and my belief at this point is that these dreams did not contraindicate termination, but advanced the process by helping Lauren reconcile the emotional

salience of the termination process with prior life experiences. Glover (1955) observed that when symptoms remit during the course of the analysis, there may well be a “regressive” return of symptoms in the termination phase. Interestingly, Lauren’s termination phase did not portend such a regression during her waking hours, though her dreams were increasingly filled with anxieties pertaining to loss. That the dream may occasionally serve in the place of typical symptomatic regression points to an additional adaptive advantage of dreaming: that it permits cognitive-emotional renderings of potentially traumatic events, thereby yielding a sense of practice and mastery in the safe confines of sleep. A similar phenomenon was observed by Khan (1974), who described the “dream space” as a possible arena for testing out unfamiliar ways of being.

In the last weeks of the analysis Lauren reported the following dream:

I am in a very grand building, similar to the White House or U.S. Capitol. There is a massive foyer, an elaborate curved staircase, and acoustics that echo. The entertainer Neil Diamond appears, and together we exuberantly sing “Cracklin’ Rosie.” I feel pleasure and excitement, tinged however with a sense that I should not be feeling such pleasure and exuberance in a place of such seriousness and gravity as the White House.

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At first the dream seemed senseless to her. Then she noted that my office has a two-story cathedral ceiling, and that the acoustics tend to echo. She recalled that only the day before she had wished that we could be on a more “friendly” basis, occasionally doing things together outside of the analysis, although she knew that “this wouldn’t be permitted.” She then mentioned that I look something like Neil Diamond, with even a similar pattern of baldness. I offered my observation that perhaps the dream was a depiction of us involved in some exciting, exhilarating project, existing simultaneously with a mental prohibition against this. She replied: “I guess I ended up having more fun in the analysis than I thought that I would. I thought that it would be as stuffy as the U.S. Capitol, but you weren’t!”

It has long been recognized that for some analysands a significant task of termination is the final resolution of oedipal transferences, such as the relinquishment of the hope of gratifying forbidden desires. There may be increased transference idealizations as well. From that perspective the White House dream is very close to a traditional

wish-fulfillment dream, as it depicts a reasonable substitute for more direct oedipal gratification: a rousing rendition of "Cracklin' Rosie."<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, from the organizational perspective this dream illustrates the consolidation of a newly emerged relational scenario in the context of a metamorphosed transference. Her image of us engaging in a mutually pleasurable, nonexploitative activity stands in marked contrast to the generalized transference that characterized the entry into analysis and the early phases of treatment. Having sufficiently worked through the bulk of her fears concerning closeness with authority figures such as myself, she has a dream reflecting this achievement. However, how can we account, if this latter hypothesis is correct, for the apparent sense of anxiety ("I shouldn't be feeling this") in the dream? Again, there are two apparent perspectives from which to understand the dream, and indeed, both were considered and discussed. We did wonder if her anxiety in the dream served to mask her underlying oedipal wishes and the guilt that accompanied her pleasurable response to her father's sexual suggestiveness. We also considered that her anxiety concerning our mutual pleasure was a remnant of the historic anxiety she had felt, along with the notion that pleasure and intimacy with a male authority figure ultimately leads to crossing the boundary of propriety, as she feared it would with her father.

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Two weeks prior to the final session Lauren reported her final dream of the analysis:

I am at the beach with my close friend Lisa. Looking out over the water, I see giant tidal waves are rolling in. Quite frightened, I look to take cover in a small building that is there on the shore. To my surprise, though I thought that the incoming water would crush the building, it doesn't, and I am fine. Leaving the building, back on the shore, I see a small boy playing with a mask and snorkel. I ask him if I can use it and he says that he's just finished playing with it, and it is mine to use. I ask Lisa if she wants to go swimming with me and she says that she prefers to sunbathe. I go the water's edge and it is quite dark and murky, having been stirred up by the tidal wave. But I know that now I have a mask and snorkel and, with the right equipment, I can go anywhere.

<sup>3</sup>Thanks to Ron Furedy for observing that derivative references to alcohol are evident in two dreams: the dream of "hoping to black out" while falling off the cliff, and "Cracklin' Rosie." I think that Lauren unconsciously retains the ideas of alcohol abuse and intoxication as reference points for the experiences of denial and elation.

Lauren directly interpreted this dream as pertaining to the onslaught of worries that she had been feeling concerning the end of the analysis. "I think that the murky water is a symbol for those things that I still don't understand. I guess it doesn't ever clear up completely." I added: "But now you have a mask and snorkel." Lauren also expressed her gratitude for the work that had been accomplished, and thanked me for seeing her at a reduced fee, suggesting to me that there was, after all, an acknowledgement of our separateness.

### **TERMINATION: ALL TALK AND NO ACTION?**

The termination phase of treatment, also described by Glover as a period of "transference weaning and ego re-adaptation" (1995, p. 139), has been regarded in recent years as an aspect of treatment ancillary to the primary therapeutic mission of the analysis. Some theorists suggest that the important "working through" occurs during the middle phase, and that the end phase is more concerned with testing the integrity of newly forged gains (Cavenar and Nash 1976; Oremland 1983). In other words, the termination period is considered to be of greater evaluative than therapeutic significance. This viewpoint is succinctly stated thus: "Therapeutic-analytic goals . . . should have been met before the termination process is initiated" (Moore and Fine 1990, p. 194). This is echoed by Blum, who says, "Though the ending has its own very valuable contributions, to my mind it is not really on a par with preceding phases, or essential to progressive analytic work" (1989, p. 284).

I find that the work with Lauren argues against this traditional wisdom. Although she had used the prior stages of the analysis to work on certain key issues (particularly boundary disturbance, affect self-regulation, and the dependability of the objects in her life), it was *primarily* in the termination phase that she was able to address her equally central concerns about traumatic loss. It was the eventual acknowledgment of the final loss of analysis and analyst that provided sufficient impetus for her to work through earlier issues of disrupted object attachment, and to find new, meaningful attachments in less destructive ways. Bergmann (1997) asserts that certain fantasy material may remain defended against throughout the course of the analysis, and can only emerge when the analysand is convinced that he or she really is terminating. I agree with this, and would empha-

size that Lauren's sense of loss evolved into a mourning that could be talked about and deeply felt only when an approximate ending time for the analysis was in sight. The traumatic childhood deficiency of emotionally responsive parents was a hurt that had been deeply buried, and she subsequently coped by shielding herself from other attachments in a defensive manner. The termination phase, which deals with the rawest issues of loss, can bring into sharp relief some of the most painful and difficult feelings that we as human beings must deal with. While these affects may be defended against in other phases of treatment, termination has the power to tip the balance against the forces of denial. The dream, like the termination phase, can reveal inescapable truths.

### CONCLUSION

Although the material and conclusions in this paper are drawn from a single analysis, and the generalizability of the findings are inherently limited, I have nonetheless attempted to demonstrate how an analytic dyad may make valuable use of dreams to track preconscious and unconscious aspects of the termination phase. This position of analysand-as-expert offers a counterbalance to the position of the analyst-as-expert. In retrospect, it is not surprising that Lauren dreamt repeatedly of her termination; it has been shown that not only do people generally dream about their emotional concerns, but that repetitive themes emerge longitudinally when those concerns are of highly significant emotional import to the client (Domhoff 1993).

The termination phase of psychoanalysis and the phenomenon of the dream share certain unique features that facilitate their concomitant consideration. First, condensation is common to both experiences. Dreaming cognition often condenses multiple experiences and affects into a short narrative, metaphor, or image. Termination-phase dreams may be retrospective or telescopic, providing a vantage point of narrative hindsight and historicity. Similarly, the heightened psychic significance of the termination phase, particularly for analysands who have suffered trauma, frequently prompts a recapitulation of themes drawn from various temporal points of the analysis and from the analysand's entire life (Ferraro 1995). Some consider the microcosmic or condensed aspects of the analytic experience made visible in the termination phase as distinguishing as the first session of an

analysis. In effect, as the first session foreshadows, the final sessions recapitulate (Beratis 1984; Ferraro and Garella 1997).

Finally, both the dream state and the termination phase of analysis are concerned with and transform aspects of the mind that have a quality of being “infinite” (Rayner 1995). The dream enables a consolidation of experience from the infinite parts of the unconscious into the finite and more comprehensible dreamspace, through its translation of affect into bounded words and images. This is similar to Kohut’s (1977, p. 109) description of the self-state dream as “covering nameless processes with nameable visual imagery.” Termination also coalesces open-ended themes from prior periods of the analysis, and focuses them into a delimited context—a type of condensation that, because of the constraint of time, collapses potentially infinite experience into a finite container.<sup>4</sup> With the advent of termination, like a rousing from a long and dream-filled sleep, the timeless quality of analytic reverie ends.

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<sup>4</sup>Ogden (1989, p. 188) refers to a “contraction” that occurs in the termination phase wherein the experienced locus of the analytic process moves gradually from the shared analytic space to the analyst’s mind.

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