

May 2021

The Case of the Dream Maker: Perec, Pontalis, and Dream Writing

Aubrey Gabel

Columbia University, aag2188@columbia.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/sttcl>



Part of the [Child Psychology Commons](#), [French and Francophone Literature Commons](#), [Modern Literature Commons](#), [Other Psychiatry and Psychology Commons](#), and the [Other Psychology Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Gabel, Aubrey (2021) "The Case of the Dream Maker: Perec, Pontalis, and Dream Writing," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 45: Iss. 1, Article 27. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.2185>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

The Case of the Dream Maker: Perec, Pontalis, and Dream Writing

Abstract

This article considers Georges Perec's *La Boutique obscure* as a literary experiment in dream writing, by putting it in dialogue with French Freudianism, notably the clinical papers of J.-B. Pontalis, Perec's long-time psychoanalyst. Pontalis describes a patient type, the "dream maker," who provokes an extreme case of counter-transference and requires new methods in dream therapy. Pontalis, like many of Perec's literary critics, was suspicious of the authenticity of Perec's dream journal and denied it both therapeutic and literary status. This article reinserts *La Boutique obscure* into Perec's literary program. Through a discussion of the text's formal attributes and its sociological context of production, the article demonstrates that Perec drew on non-psychoanalytic traditions of dreams, like dream journals and dream sociology, and continuously undercut any symbolic readings of his text. Most importantly, the article investigates the journal's most fraught endeavor: experiencing and writing the concentration camp in dreams. Lucid dreaming becomes a ludic space for experiencing the unexperiencable horrors of history.

Keywords

Georges Perec, J.-B. Pontalis, ludics, dreams, psychoanalysis, sociology

The Case of the Dream Maker: Perec, Pontalis, and Dream Writing

Aubrey Gabel
Columbia University

Whether he liked it or not, Georges Perec was the writerly patient of French psychoanalysts. A privileged object of the second generation of French Freudians, Perec was discovered when he was just thirteen years old, after his drawings caught the attention of child analyst Françoise Dolto. In 1956, Perec met briefly with the neuropsychiatrist Michel de M'Uzan, but his relationship with Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, lasting from May 1971 to June 1975, was perhaps the most infamous. Pontalis seemingly wrote several clinical and conference papers about the author, using a series of pseudonyms ("Stéphane," "Simon," "Pierre," "Pierre G.," and "Paul"). Many of these papers were published in the journal that Pontalis edited, *Nouvelle Revue de psychanalyse (NRP)* ('New Review of Psychoanalysis') between 1972-76, during the analysis.¹ While the subjects' identities have never been definitively confirmed, it is a reasonable assumption that these cases refer to Perec, given personal details and other information that this paper will investigate.² Well aware that he had become Pontalis's favorite case study, Perec published a spatial experiment in the *NRP* in 1977 (Perec "Vues d'Italie"). At the center of their encounter was a reigning problem: what is the relationship between writing and psychoanalysis? Can the writer be a good patient? Can the analyst be a good writer?

Literary critics often understand psychoanalysis to be key to understanding Perec's oeuvre. Some psychoanalyze him outright, by suggesting that his works display symptoms or serve therapeutic functions. Others see psychoanalysis as an

¹ See Pontalis *Entre le rêve et la douleur (Frontiers in Psychoanalysis)*, for reprints of these articles. There are occasionally differences between the article and the corresponding chapter in Pontalis's collected works (i.e. the removal of pseudonyms, like "Stéphane," to further anonymize the patient). Articles include: "La pénétration du rêve" 21-40 ("Penetrating the dream" 23-38); for "Pierre," "Faiseurs de rêves" 39-51 ("Dream-makers" 39-48); "Bornes ou confins?" 203-18 ("Boundaries or Confines ?" 155-65); for "Stéphane," referred to in the chapter version as "the patient," see "A partir du contre-transfert" 225-42 ("From Counter-transference" 170-83); for "Simon," see "Sur la douleur (psychique)" 257-72 ("On Psychic Pain" 194-205). For "Pierre G.," see Pontalis's autobiography *L'Amour des commencements* 165-66 (*Love of Beginnings* 143-45) and for "Paul," see the untranslated interview "Paradoxes de l'effet Witticott" ('Paradoxes of the Winnicott Effect') 161-65 in *Perdre de vue* ('Losing Sight').

² I am far from the only person work from this premise. Bellos notes that Pontalis never contradicted the assumption that "Stéphane" and "Pierre G." refer to Perec. Burgelin identifies "Simon" and "Paul" as pseudonyms. Kemp and Perruche cite Pontalis's accounts as if they referred to Perec. I have identified "Pierre" as a pseudonym based on its repeated description of the dream maker. See Bellos 476-77, 612-13, Burgelin 95-97, Kemp 563-64, 569, and Perruche.

underlying structural principle of his texts or a model for literary form.³ Biographical critics are undecided about whether psychoanalysis accelerated or impeded his writing.⁴ The critical tradition surrounding Percec and psychoanalysis centers on *W, ou le souvenir d'enfance* (*W, or The Memory of Childhood*) and his unfinished autobiographical works, but often downplays Percec's *La Boutique obscure: 124 Rêves* (1973) (*BO*) (*La Boutique obscure: 124 Dreams*)⁵, a dream journal written from 1968-1972, overlapping with Percec's time with Pontalis.

La Boutique obscure has arguably been understudied as a literary document.⁶ While we cannot definitively corroborate that *La Boutique obscure* includes dreams that Percec recounted to Pontalis, Pontalis's accounts establish a patient type: the dream maker. The dream maker's dreams are overtly literary or textual, rife with codes, wordplay, crosswords, and puzzles. This textuality reveals an analysand all too eager to impress—or deceive—his analyst. Pontalis's skepticism belies interesting assumptions about what dream writing should look like and what constitutes a healthy psychoanalytic relationship (Can dreams be well written? Are there not patients who want to impress their analysts?), but falls short of calling dream writing literature.

In the paratext of *La Boutique obscure*, Percec confesses to having dreams only to write them. Percec describes dreams that were, as Pontalis surmised, dreamt to be texts, whether “trop rêvés, trop relus, trop écrits” (Percec *BO*) ‘overdreamed, overworked, overwritten’ (*124 Dreams* 1). In the essay “Les Lieux d'une ruse” (literally ‘The Places of Ruse,’ translated as “Backtracking”), republished in the collection *Penser/Classer* (*Thoughts of Sorts*), Percec describes dreams that are too beautiful to be dreams: “ces rêves n'avaient pas été vécus pour être rêves, mais rêvés pour être textes” (Percec *Penser/Classer* 68-9) ‘these dreams were not lived to become dreams, but dreamt to become texts’ (*Thoughts of Sorts* 51). Percec does not

³ Lejeune characterizes *W, ou le souvenir d'enfance* as an act of “self-therapy.” For Leak, the novel self-consciously represents childhood and screen memories. Motte reads Percec's oeuvre as engaged in the Freudian work of mourning, while Kemp reads it through Winnicott's notion of play as a creative act of self-production. Burgelin also uses psychoanalysis to decode Percec's texts. See Burgelin 11-18, Leak 75-90, Lejeune, “W or The Memory of Childhood” 165, Motte 56-58, and Kemp 557-71.

⁴ Bellos argues that being analyzed was generative for Percec but that it put his larger projects on hold (154, 529). Perruche claims that Percec turned to psychoanalysis when his writing was in crisis (29).

⁵ I cite *La Boutique obscure* hereafter as *BO*. The French-language text has no page numbers, so I cite dream numbers where possible. As the English translation bears the same title, I cite it with the subtitle, *124 Dreams*.

⁶ *La Boutique obscure* is not included in the most recent Pléaïde edition of Percec's works. Gascoigne reads it as both a psychoanalytic and literary object, offering a Freudian analysis of the text. Paul Schwartz includes the journal in an overview of Percec's literary project but does not analyze it at length. See Percec *Œuvres* (‘Collected Works’), Gascoigne 129, and Schwartz *Georges Percec: Traces of his Passage* 55.

insinuate that he made up his dreams per se, but that dreaming had become subsumed to writing; it was another experimental space that produced fodder for literary constraint.⁷ What would it mean to treat *La Boutique obscure*, not as psychoanalytic proof, but as part of his literary program? Psychoanalysis is conspicuously absent from what Perec identifies as his four principal fields of inquiry: sociology, autobiography, ludics, and novel writing (Perec *Penser/Classer* 10; *Thoughts of Sorts* 4).⁸ Nevertheless, the dream journal exemplifies this literary project: it is sociological, prefiguring later analyses of generational and collective identity; autobiographical, with transparent allusions to Perec's life; ludic, organized chronologically, according to an index and misleading user's guide; and novelistic, retelling dreams in narrative and filmic forms.

Perec was an important case study for Pontalis, notably for theorizing dream therapy as it relates to resistance and counter-transference. Perec, however, self-consciously distanced himself from Pontalis and Freudian dream analysis. He opted for a postface by sociologist Roger Bastide and republished his dreams, as well as essays on dreams, in the sociological journal *Cause Commune* ('Common Cause'). By considering Pontalis's anonymized accounts of dream therapy, we can interrogate what dream writing, in opposition to dream transcription, does as a literary form. Dream writing catalogues dream imagery and experiments with formal methods for transcribing dreams. *La Boutique obscure* is not therapy-induced accident—an "act of dumping" as Bellos calls it—but another step in Perec's ongoing literary project (Bellos 530).

Most importantly, however, dream writing allowed Perec to experience what he did—and could—not: life in concentration camps. The child of a Jewish deportee whose body was never recovered, Perec famously represented camp life through a fictional society structured around competition in *W, ou le souvenir d'enfance* (1975), which was first published in serial form in 1970. The very first dream of *La Boutique obscure* (1973) opens on the space of the camp:

Comme de bien entendu, je rêve et je sais que je rêve comme, de bien entendu, je suis dans un camp. Il ne s'agit pas vraiment d'un camp, bien entendu, c'est une image de camp, un rêve de camp, un camp-métaphore, un camp dont je sais qu'il n'est qu'une image familière, comme si je refaisais inlassablement le même rêve, comme si je ne faisais jamais d'autre rêve, comme si je ne faisais jamais rien d'autre que de rêver de ce camp. (Perec *BO* n°1).

⁷ Perec characterizes dream writing as an exercise in oneiric rhetoric, or the formal possibilities of dreams (*Je suis né* 78). See Bonnot for a reading of *La Boutique obscure* as an Oulipian exercise.

⁸ Perec situates the text in the autobiographical vein of his work, as does Schwartz. See Perec *Penser/Classer* 10; *Thoughts of Sorts* 4, and Schwartz *Georges Perec: Traces of his Passage* 55.

Naturally, I am dreaming and I know that I am dreaming, naturally, that I am in a prison camp. It's not really a prison camp, of course, but an image of a prison camp, a dream of a prison camp, a prison-camp metaphor, a prison camp I know only as a familiar image, as though I were ceaselessly dreaming the same dream, as though I never dreamed of anything else, as though I never did anything but dream of this prison camp. (Perc 124 *Dreams* 3)

Perc views dreaming as a space of lucid reflection. The rhythmic obsession with the dream's matter-of-factness ("comme de bien entendu" 'naturally') muffles any direct expression of horror, but the lucid dreamer is far from manipulating the dream to his satisfaction. Frozen in a space populated with *unheimlich*, prefabricated images, the dream subject must confront a cold array of second-order representations ("metaphors" or "images"). These experiences are never described in and of themselves but are somehow representative of what a camp should be. This "metacamp" is not the camp, but trying to be one, existing in clear opposition to the superlative real. At the heart of this opening dream is an uneasy balance of inevitability—he's the child of a deportee, of course, he dreams of the camps—and the dream's catastrophic failure, its total incapacity to capture the reality of history. It is hard to imagine how a Freudian or a psychoanalyst might approach such a dream: how does one analyze images that already subverted, already dismissed as representations while they're recounted? The dream does not narrate anything, at least not at the outset. "Images" are not visual and do not obviously stand in for latent desires, except perhaps the fraught desire to experience the unspeakable and unexperienceable.

Perc and Pontalis: The Case of the Dream Maker

Perc wrote substantively about his own psychoanalytic experience only in "Les lieux d'une ruse," a 1977 essay published in *Cause Commune* (1972-1979), an interdisciplinary journal heralded by sociologist Jean Duvignaud and philosopher Paul Virilio. In the essay, he posits an equivalence between writing and being analyzed, between the blank page and the analyst's silence. He recounts an experience that is no doubt familiar to many analysands: the pressure to perform, to produce fodder for analytic interpretation. Perc laments being masterminded by a "clown" or "magician," who is equipped with Freudian clichés and painfully overeager to play the psychoanalytic game (Perc *Penser/Classer* 67-68; *Thoughts of Sorts* 49-50). He describes the practice, established before his analysis, of waking in the middle of the night to record dreams; dreams eventually came to him entirely written, complete with titles—composed, as it were, for readerly consumption.

Whether dreamt to be written, to be texts or puzzles, or to be beautiful, Perec's dreams were no longer lived, or experienced without mediation.

Pontalis, like many Freudians of his time, treated his adult patients using dream therapy, but his career also straddled the literary and psychoanalytic realms. Known for having co-written *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (*The Language of Psycho-analysis*) with Jean Laplanche, Pontalis was also a frequent contributor at *Les Temps modernes* ('Modern Times') and a long-time director at the *NRP*, which regularly published psychoanalytic analyses of literature. When Perec was his care, Pontalis was reconsidering the status of dreams in contemporary psychoanalysis. Traditionally, an analyst is responsible for distinguishing between the dream's manifest content (the dream as it is recounted by the patient) and the latent content (the patient's repressed or unfulfilled desires). The doctor further separates literal from symbolic images and standard cultural symbols from those of the patient's idiolect (Freud *The Interpretation of Dreams* 671-86). In his 1972 *NRP* article "La pénétration du rêve" ("Penetrating the Dream"), however, Pontalis claims that dreams are no longer the primary means of accessing the unconscious but one treatment method among many. Pontalis critiques Freud's reliance on interpretation, claiming that dreams serve various functions in treatment. For Pontalis, the dream is not only lived by the dreamer but shared between doctor and patient. The analyst must separate the dream as a primary experience from the dream as a narrative that is recounted. Dreams can be manipulated: by being transposed from a visual to a verbal register or by becoming objects of pleasure (Pontalis *Entre le rêve et la douleur* 21-27; *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* 24-32).

Pontalis does not mention Perec directly, but describes patients who use verbal acrobatics to avoid participation in the analytical game; they eagerly analyze their dreams, refusing to talk about how the dreams felt or were experienced (Pontalis *Entre le rêve et la douleur* 31; *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* 32). This leaves the doctor at an impasse where he wonders if the patient manipulates or completely fabricates the dream: ". . . s'ils ont vraiment vécu leurs rêves, ou s'ils les ont d'emblée rêvés comme des rêves et finalement rêvés pour les dire . . ." (Pontalis *Entre le rêve et la douleur* 31) '. . . if they really experience their dreams, if they dream them as dreams from the outset or if they dream them just to tell them . . .' (Pontalis *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* 32-33). Like Perec, Pontalis claims that some patients' dreams are not lived or experienced directly, but at several degrees of remove. Unlike Perec, Pontalis argues that dreams are dreamt not to be written, but to be told—consciously produced for the analyst. The patient makes his doctor an accomplice, making dreams into shared objects of pleasure, rather than a means of accessing the self. Following Freud, Pontalis views wordplay as a symptom of resistance; although Freud considers dreams to be prosaic, he specifies that dream work is not creative (Laplanche and Pontalis *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* 505-06; *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* 125).

In a series of follow-up articles, Pontalis continues to grapple with dream therapy, developing the case study of the dream maker. In a 1975 *NRP* article, “A partir du contre-transfert” (“From Counter-transference”), Pontalis turns to “Stéphane,” a “*faiseur de rêves*” ‘dream maker,’⁹ to explore the problem of counter-transference. Transference refers to the process by which the patient projects unconscious desires or memories onto the analyst, using him as a surrogate for other people. Counter-transference refers to the inverse: the analyst’s unconscious reactions to the patient. While Freud surmises that transference is a normal part of the psychoanalytic treatment (albeit an obstacle), Laplanche and Pontalis assert that transference and counter-transference are notoriously hard to define, as they can embody many aspects of the patient-analyst relationship (Freud, *A Case of Hysteria* 115-7) (Laplanche and Pontalis 103-4, 492-99; *The Language of Psycho-analysis*). Stéphane’s case is situated at one end of two extremes: if some patients are overbearing in their willingness to tell all, others like Stéphane, refuse to divulge. If the former are virtually “unanalyzable,” the latter construct a “false self,” a term that Pontalis borrows from Donald Winnicott to label a patient who constructs a defensive façade, actively deceiving the analyst. Stéphane’s dreams are a symptom of this deception; they come too easily and are never fully fleshed out, impeding the expression of any real affect (Pontalis *Entre le rêve et la douleur* 234-36; *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* 178-180). This dearth of emotion, in particular, makes the dreams suspect. Freud notes dream affect rivals affect in waking life, but they are often attached to dream thoughts that appear unworthy of such heightened emotional responses (Freud, *On Dreams* 459-60 and *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis* 173, 235).

For Pontalis, the dream maker produces objects of pleasure: literary, not psychic objects. The dreams do not merit Freudian analysis; dreams are a sight of resistance, not of creative self-production. Dreams merely fill the silence of the session, transposing the burden of expressing emotion from patient to doctor. The dream maker becomes a “daytime insomniac,” producing dreams that are at once unreal and too real, products, not of the unconscious, but of a “psychic pseudo-reality” (Pontalis *Entre le rêve et la douleur* 235; *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* 179). Dreaming is an obsessive behavior; it is “a substitute and not a metaphor” for Stéphane’s dead parents, meaning that it is not protective or nourishing—like Winnicottian play—but symptomatic of an unfinished work of mourning (Pontalis

⁹ The pseudonym for Percec, “Stéphane,” is removed from the chapter version of the article. Pontalis first uses this term in a 1973 lecture, “Faiseurs de rêves” (“Dream-makers”), where he discusses “Pierre,” also a “dreaming-machine.” See Pontalis *Entre le rêve et la douleur* 40; *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* 39-40.

Entre le rêve et la douleur 237; *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* 181). Dreams serve no therapeutic function.¹⁰

This conclusion is unsatisfying because Pontalis refuses to interpret, or offer examples of, what he has just so painstakingly rejected: the dreams themselves. The dream maker merits a case study and Stéphane can be diagnosed, but the dreams themselves are denied analysis, as if by dint of being made literary, they are no longer interpretable. Pontalis rejects the dream texts, and subsequently, dream analysis, altogether.¹¹ Dream writing, in Pontalis's continued study, is repeatedly identified as an obsessive behavior. In a 1976 conference paper, for instance, Pontalis describes "Simon," a patient who is suspended in a living death:

. . . c'est une extraordinaire machine à produire les rêves (non à rêver), à jouer avec les mots (plutôt qu'à les laisser jouer), à enregistrer la vie quotidienne (à condition qu'elle reste figée). Il s'était constitué un système clos—clôture et séparation, une sorte de camp de concentration mental (Pontalis *Entre le rêve et la douleur* 266-69)

. . . he was an extraordinary machine to produce dreams (not to experience dreaming), to play with words (rather than letting them play), to register daily life (on the condition that it remained petrified). He had built a closed system of enclosures and separations—a sort of mental concentration camp (Pontalis *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* 200-01)

Machine-like textuality becomes symptomatic of an inability to yield to the experiences of life and dreaming. Simon's self-imposed "mental concentration camp" straddles bodily and psychic experience; it is a division between endless mental activity and an unproductive psychic life (Pontalis *Entre le rêve et la douleur* 266; *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* 200). Like the dream-texts, this psychic prison forces the psychoanalyst in the position of accomplice; he transcends his role as doctor, becoming the lifeblood of the patient: what Pontalis calls "witness, guardian, and warrant" (Pontalis *Entre le rêve et la douleur* 264; *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* 201). In a final 1984 interview, Pontalis continues in this vein, revealing his frustration that the dream-maker patient had reduced the analyst to an

¹⁰ While Perec's readers are drawn to Winnicott's notion of creative play, Pontalis repeatedly rejects this reading of the dream maker. See Kemp, who reads Perec's essay on psychoanalysis and his oeuvre as a Winnicottian move from "reactive" to "creative" thinking. According to Pontalis, Stéphane not only stopped recounting and remembering his dreams but stopped dreaming altogether. See Kemp 559-61, Pontalis *Entre le rêve et la douleur* note 1, 235, *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* note 1, 210.

¹¹ In a 1974 *NRP* article, "Bornes ou confins?," Pontalis does not mention Perec directly but again discusses extreme cases of counter-transference. See Pontalis *Entre le rêve et la douleur* 203-18; *Frontiers of Psychoanalysis* 155-65.

answering or interpreting machine mirrored after the patient, himself “une machine à rêver, à associer, à mentaliser” (Pontalis *Perdre de vue* 163) ‘a dreaming, associating, imagining machine’ (my translation). It is important to recall that we cannot know for certain that the dream maker, under various pseudonyms, *is* Perec; we do not know what Perec was treated for or what his diagnosis was, nor do we know that he was ultimately cured. But while Pontalis asserts the dream maker is a patient type, it is hard to envisage that he had several machine-like writerly patients, known for their obsessive, oneiric wordplay.

In these articles, dream writing exists in opposition to a productive psychoanalytic encounter. Textual dreams become substitutes for dreams, for emotions, for reality—drawing the dream maker further away from any treatment or truth. On the whole, Pontalis’s articles establish a patient type: a writer whose elaborate dreams constitute an obsessive activity that substitutes for mourning or psychic pain and belies an inability to breach the unconscious. This patient type circumvents traditional dream therapy and makes his analyst into an unwilling accomplice. To the literary critic, however, there is one aspect of Pontalis’s case studies that continuously stands out: the utter absence of textual analysis. No doubt many patients manipulate their dreams or fail to tell the whole truth—is this not the crux of Freud’s obsession with Dora? Pontalis dismisses the value of literary dreams, and yet, he continues to analyze literature and the dream maker long after Perec’s death.¹²

La Boutique obscure: Dream Writing and the Metacamp

Pontalis’s articles and Perec’s essays both indicate that one cannot read a text like *La Boutique obscure* exclusively as a therapeutic document or a transparent transcription of dreams. On the contrary, a dream’s failure as a psychoanalytic text appears as a condition for its literary success. In *La Mémoire et l’Oblique* (‘Memory and Oblique’), Philippe Lejeune claims that *La Boutique obscure* produces more or less faithful transcriptions of the manuscript of Perec’s dream journal, with minor alterations, like the elimination of daytime entries or accompanying drawings (Lejeune 52). As Gascoigne points out, however, the dreams were edited for publication (Gascoigne 129). Pontalis’s frustration with the dream maker’s textuality further suggests that dreams like Perec’s, even in manuscript form, were already produced as texts from the instant the pen touched the page. Analysis was not the only reason that Perec transcribed his dreams; he began several years earlier and published them before completing his analysis. If in “Les lieux d’une ruse,” Perec traffics in Freudian clichés, here, he barely gestures

¹² Henry Schwartz argues that Pontalis underestimated the long-term effects of counter-transference. See Schwartz, “On the Analyst’s Identification with the Patient: The Case of J.B. Pontalis and G. Perec” 125-26.

to his ongoing analysis. In n°81, the dreamer sees his analyst, Monsieur Bezu, but the dream skips over the session itself; in n°83, Perec discovers an article devoted to Oedipus and writes his own (Perec, *BO* 81, 83).¹³ Much like the entry “Freud” in the index of *La vie mode d’emploi* (*Life a User’s Manual*), which redirects the reader to the table of contents, these psychoanalytic references are red herrings, indications that Freudian dream analysis will not function here (Perec *La vie mode d’emploi* 598; *Life, A User’s Manual* 524).

The dream journal also lacks concrete autobiographical references and context, without which one cannot untangle symbolic references from concrete ones, meaning that for the psychoanalytically inspired reader, dreams, much like the dream maker, are essentially unanalyzable. Deciphering autobiographical references demand an intimacy with Perec’s life that extend beyond common knowledge. His use of initials, for instance, is inconsistent. Some friends are mentioned by full name (Perec’s friend and translator, Eugen Helmle, or his *Cause Commune* colleagues, Jean Duvignaud and Paul Virilio), while others appear under multiple monikers (his childhood friend, Noureddine Mechri, appears as “Nour,” “Nour M.,” and “Noureddine M.”). Perec generally presumes the reader’s ignorance or laziness: for who could—or would bother—to pick apart childhood friends and Oulipians from his *Ligne générale* ‘General Line’ or *Cause Commune* colleagues, without reference to Bellos’s encyclopedic biography (produced some twenty years later)? The text also includes dreams from “P.” (his wife, Paulette) and three from “J.L.” (his friend Jacques Lederer) but offers no explanation for why they appear (Perec *La Boutique obscure* n°38-40, 104).¹⁴

¹³ Pontalis was perhaps intrigued by the “Pierre G.” dreams, as this is a pseudonym he chose for Perec. In both of Perec’s dreams, however, Pierre G. is not a stand-in for Perec, but likely his friend, the artist Pierre Getzler. See Pontalis *L’Amour des commencements* 165-66, *Love of Beginnings* 143-45, and Bellos 391.

¹⁴ Bellos identifies several initials frequently employed, including Paulette and Jacques Lederer, as well as “Z.” for Suzanne Lipinska, Perec’s one-time lover. See Bellos 530. Other allusions are likely friends and acquaintances from Perec’s various social circles, although not all of the references have obvious historical referents. Here are names that can be reasonably (although not definitively) identified: “Abdelkader Z.” is another of Perec’s childhood friends, Abdelkader Zghal; “J.L.” “Pierre G.,” “Régis,” and “Claude” are Perec’s *Ligne générale* colleagues Jacques Lederer, Pierre Getzler, Régis Debray, and Claude Burgelin; “H.M.” (or “Harry M.”), “Marcel B.” and “Jacques R.” are fellow Oulipians Harry Mathews, Marcel Bénabou, and Jacques Roubaud; the stage director “Marcel C.” (Marcel Cuvelier) adapted Perec’s work; “Philippe D.” is Philippe Drogoz, a composer who collaborated with Perec; “Denis B.” (Denis Buffard) worked with Perec in the early 1960s. Perec’s family also features predominately. See Bellos 236-7, 275, 297, 306-09, 391, 467 737 for biographical information.

Perec frequently submits his dreams to literary manipulation.¹⁵ Several of Perec's dreams are ostensibly reworked as artistic objects: described in filmic terms (with close-ups and panoramas), subtitled with innovative genres ("Brechtian musical"), written as a third-person novel or as free verse poetry (Perec *BO* n°4, 14, 28, 60). In fact, Perec even published his "cinematic" dreams before the volume, in the *Nouvelle Revue française* in 1971 (Perec "Quatres rêves" ('Four Dreams'); *BO* n°14, 19, 41, 60). Perec dreams about the perfect crossword puzzle clue and about a translation of *Les Choses* (*Things*) for stutterers; his nightmares also reflect his literary projects, like finding a thousand stray "e's" in *La Disparition* (*A Void*) or documenting a space in the wrong month (Perec *BO* n°57, 95, 119). On the one hand, if dreams are, as Freud declares, a continuation of "trivial" matters of waking life, then it is not unusual for a novelist to worry about writing in his dreams (Freud *The Interpretation of Dreams* 113, 173). On the other hand, these metaliterary in-jokes prove what Pontalis suspected: dream transcription became another laboratory for formal play.

Such metaliterary references play with our assumptions about the compatibility of complex literary form and authentic dream content. If a writer's dreams are writerly does that make them less true? In the paratext, Perec explains how he homogenized dream transcriptions through typography and formatting: paragraph indents correspond to shifts in time, space, sensations, or feeling; italics to exceptional moments, etc. The problem is that Perec rarely employs these typographic features, meaning that this user's guide is an empty interpretive tool (Perec *BO* n°14, 23, 31, 85). Italics are only used four times, the double slash appears in eight dreams, and numbered sequences appear in fourteen. (Perec *BO* n°57, 59, 64, 83, 86, 96, 99-100, 35, 48, 60, 65, 79, 81-2, 91, 102, 103, 114-5, 117, 122). Other more prominent typographic features are left unexplained, like the dreams' titles or sequence numbers. Perec's typography presents logical puzzles: what does it mean to have a dream that is titled, but entirely omitted (n°96, "La fenêtre" 'The window')? Why identify three sequences in a dream in which the latter two are forgotten (n°117)? Perec also regularly uses an unexplained typographic feature that involves publishing one or more letters above others, as in: "Je crie : J'avais bien dit que je n'aurais jamais de ça/chat ici!" (Perec *BO* n°24) 'I shout: I said loud and clear that I won't have that/cat here' (Perec *124 Dreams* 39). If this is a method of transcription, it could hypothetically convey polyvalence (both "ça" and "chat") or uncertainty (either "ça" or "chat"). Perec offers no explanation for the origins of this ambiguity: is the in-dream dialogue unclear, does he not remember, or did he dream in puns? As Gascoigne indicates, however, Freud frequently deploys this typographic feature, suggesting that Perec is self-

¹⁵ Perec claimed to be inspired by Michel Butor's *Matières de rêves* ('Dream Matter'), a multi-volume dream journal that actually postdates *La Boutique obscure*, in which Butor reworked his dreams as narratives. See Butor, *Matières de rêves* (1975).

consciously mimicking the form of Freudian dream analysis (Gascoigne 130). A few dreams are reduced to mere notes, which reveal themselves to be barely coded autobiographical allusions. Neuroscientists have recently identified, for instance, references to neurophysiology in dreams n°30, 53, 68 and 95—a trace of Perec’s time as an archivist in the lab of Professor André Hugelin (Delgado-García, Rodríguez-Návarez, Corona-Vázquez 15). These typographic interventions showcase the failings—or intentional trickery—of transcription itself.

La Boutique obscure’s index resembles that of *Quel petit vélo à guidon chromé au fond de la cour?* (1966) (*Which Moped with Chrome-plated Handlebars at the Back of the Yard?*), although Perec catalogues dream images rather than linguistic or literary forms (Perec *Romans & Récits* 209-10). Perec is less interested in thesauruses or Freudian dream interpretation than in an earlier mode: dream dictionaries. Perec is, of course, famous for his love of dictionaries; *La vie mode d’emploi*, for instance, indexes at least five kinds of dictionaries, though none of them are dream dictionaries (Perec *La vie mode d’emploi* 595, 600; *Life, A User’s Manual* 519-20, 527). Dream dictionaries span multiple time periods and cultures and are often tied to oneiromancy, or the practice of predicting the future through dreams. Perec’s index does not explain the meaning of dream images, nor does it treat them like symbols with consistent meanings. It does, however, use many terms that typically appear in 19th-century dream dictionaries (like under “a,” “acteurs et actrices, amis, animaux, appartements, etc.” ‘actors and actresses, friends, animals, apartments, etc.’).¹⁶ Perec’s index has fewer entries than most, but he is, after all, limited to his own dreams. Where necessary, Perec updates archaic terms to fit modern lexicon (“escalier” ‘staircase’ becomes “escalier mécanique ou tapis roulant” ‘escalator or people mover’). One is tempted to decipher the text with dictionaries in hand, but Perec consciously unravels the dream dictionary’s interpretive schema, including meta-oneiric experiences (“rêver que l’on rêve ou que l’on se réveille, ou être persuadé que l’on ne rêve pas, ou se réveiller soulagé” ‘to dream that one is dreaming or that one awakes, or to be convinced that one is

¹⁶ Dream dictionaries vary in length and depth; individual entries show some grammatical variation, but generally speaking, the indexes are surprisingly consistent. To compare indexes, I consulted several French-language dream dictionaries available on Gallica and currently held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. I worked backward from Perec’s index, looking for his entries in other dream dictionaries. See Halbert d’Angers, *La double clef des songes* (‘The Double Key of Dreams’) (1885); Daniel, *Le grand traité des songes* (‘The Great Treatise on Dreams’) (1881); anonymous, *Nouvelle et complète clef des songes* (‘New and Complete Key to Dreams’) (1876); Lacinius, *La vraie clé des songes* (‘The True Key to Dreams’) (1880); Worthington, *La nouvelle clé des songes* (‘The New Key to Dreams’) (1891); Simon, *La clé des songes* (‘The Key to Dreams’) (1900); anonymous, *Le miroir des songes d’après les traditions orientales* (‘The Mirror to Dreams after Oriental Traditions’)(1906); and Mme de Thèbes, *L’énigme du rêve* (‘The Enigma of the Dream’) (1908).

not dreaming or to wake up relieved’) and figures of speech (“effectivement” ‘in effect’) that are not readily symbolic (Perc *BO*).

Index entries, as well as Bastide’s postface and the republication of dreams in *Cause Commune*, suggest that Perc welcomed a sociological reading. Perc saw sociology as one of the primary veins of his work and experimented with everyday life theory and sociological-adjacent texts.¹⁷ In this light, *La Boutique obscure* and its index should be considered alongside Perc’s later text *Je me souviens* ‘*I Remember*’ (1978). Subtitled “Les Choses communes I,” (‘Common things I’) and modeled after Joe Brainard’s *I Remember* (1975), *Je me souviens* is a long list of short memories that evoke the collective memory of postwar youth. *La Boutique obscure* and *Je me souviens* share several index categories, most of which are fairly mundane (think “autobus” ‘bus’ or “jeux” ‘games’), but enough to suggest that Perc wanted readers to cross-reference topics across multiple novels. For instance, the indexes of both texts reference film extensively, including not only common dream dictionary categories (like “actors”), but also “movie theaters,” “projection or screening rooms,” etc. These categories often refer in-text to the faces of postwar and New Wave cinema: Alain Delon, Jean-Louis Trintignant, Jean-Paul Belmondo, François Truffaut, etc. Cinema falls within this realm of collective memory, not only because the actors and films referenced are specific to the postwar period, but because cinema-going is itself generational; postwar children were among the first to experience cinema as an everyday activity. *La Boutique obscure* also includes entries that could have appeared among the collective memories of *Je me souviens*. “Gag,” for example, alludes to Lucky Luke- and Jerry Lewis-style gags, or the requisite pop culture of any thirteen-year-old boy of the fifties (Perc *BO* 59, 81).

Perc’s contemporary reviewers picked up on this generational aspect. André Marissel, writing for *L’Esprit* (‘Spirit’), saw *La Boutique Obscure* as representative of a new kind of postwar writing, a “nouveau journal intime” ‘new intimate journal’ in the spirit of “nouvelle critique” ‘new criticism’ or the “nouveau roman” ‘new novel’ (Marissel 910). In his review, Perc’s friend Jacques Roubaud describes looking for his own dreams among Perc’s; he encourages readers to read the text in any order, given that the index has a category for every taste. For Roubaud, Perc explores the “how” of dreaming: “comment le travail du rêve se change en travail avec le rêve” (Roubaud 19-20) ‘how dreamwork changes into work with dreams’ (my translation). In both instances, reviewers imply that Perc was revolutionizing the dream journal by making it into a formal experiment; this brand of formal experimentation—far from being a senseless, machine-like textuality—actually situates Perc among a generation of postwar writers, notably the New Novelists, who were experimenting with form more broadly.

¹⁷ See Schilling, *Mémoires du quotidien* (‘Memories of the Everyday’).

In an essay that appears alongside Perec's republished dreams, entitled "La praxis et la nuit" ('Praxis and Nighttime'), Roger Bastide, too, interrogates the nature of "work with dreams," but explicitly in a sociological context. Bastide argues that dreams are necessarily social experiences. Citing a study of dream imagery in black populations in Brazil, Bastide argues that dreams reveal that the structure of the unconscious varies significantly by class and by culture (Bastide "La praxis et la nuit" 41-2). If this study offers a synchronic analysis of dreams across cultures, dream dictionaries—or *inventaires* as Bastide calls them—furnish the material for a diachronic analysis of dreams in a single culture, given that the dictionaries' content often varies over time (Bastide, "La praxis et la nuit" 44). Might Perec's modernized index participate in such a diachronic study? Perec's dreams do provide some insight into uniquely "postwar French" unconscious fears. In n°79 and n°81, for example, Algerian men appear as nameless, menacing figures—an anxiety that echoes the recent conclusion of the Algerian War. The category "manifestation" 'protest' loosely recalls recent events of May '68 (and indeed, the first dream takes place in May '68). On a lighter note, "cheese" dreams recount a lack of cheese, plates of cheese that are too small, or the impossibility of finding any good cheese—anxieties of the quintessential Frenchman (Perec *BO*, 61, 71, 119).

Bastide's postface to the volume also situates dreaming within a sociological, rather than a psychoanalytic frame. He highlights the significance of the term "boutique": it is a public space, open to exchanges and dialogue. In modern society, Bastide surmises, erotic repression has been replaced with political repression—a reality born out in Perec's repeated allusions to concentration camps, isolation, and enclosure. In this sense, dreams are no longer sexually liberating but another site of societal repression and capitalist alienation (Bastide "Postface").

Political repression is certainly a common theme of the index—I will discuss this in the "camp poems" shortly—but there is an obvious dissonance between Bastide's Marxist sociology and Perec's dreams. Perec of the 1970s was a more timid Marxist than when he published *Les Choses* (1965); Marx, like Freud, is conspicuously absent from the text. Among Perec's republished dreams, one finds dreams about: going to the dentist and finding rotten teeth; looking for a single hotel room and only being shown bridal suites; translating made-up proverbial expressions; killing one's wife and making wine out of her body; and playing tennis with a tiny racket and enormous ball (Perec "Six rêves" ('Six Dreams') 49-52).¹⁸ If some of these dreams embody more or less universal fears (losing one's teeth or difficulty renting an apartment), others, like the "murdered-wife-wine," seem

¹⁸ All of the dreams published in *Cause Commune* n°2 are republished in the same form, except "M/W," which is untitled. See Perec *BO* n°5, 13, 45, 49, 77, 85.

peculiar to Perec's psychic idiolect.¹⁹ That said, the volume has a subtle, anti-capitalist bent. "Argent" 'money' is one of the most frequently cited categories, appearing at least 22 times (Perec *BO* 1, 5, 17-19, 27, 30, 36, 57, 72, 79, 81-2, 85, 87, 89, 93, 98, 102, 112, 114, 121). In contrast, the most overtly sexual category "amour en public" 'love in public' appears only four times (Perec *BO*, 35, 60, 71, 108).

Among the republished dreams one finds, however, what Bastide might identify as a repressed political fantasy. "Le tank" ('The Tank') opens with a seemingly banal scenario: Perec and "P." (his wife Paulette) are living in an abandoned apartment. The dream could have ended here, but instead, the couple witness a young boy being chased by police on the upper level of a tank; the dream shifts in camera perspective and jumps forward in time, ending with a man dramatically threatening to kill himself if the boy is not released. In the dream, the incident is figured as a tabloid scandal, but from the outside, the narrative of "Le tank" is a fanciful, filmic version of persecution.

Like *Je me souviens*, which smuggles a few of Perec's personal memories into the collective, the index of *La Boutique obscure* bears traces of Perec's personal history. The register of WWII and the Shoah is unmistakable: "arrestation, camp, juif, guerre, militaires et service militaire, parachutisme et parachutiste, police et armée" 'arrest, camp, Jew, war, military men and military service, parachuting and paratroopers, police and army.' While in dream dictionaries, "camp" usually refers to an army camp or resting place, here, Perec clearly references the concentration camp. Dreams listed under the entry "camp" intentionally bookend the volume (including n°1, 17, 46, 124). The opening lines of the first dream, "La taille (1968)" ('The height gage') stage dreams as a textual puzzle:

La taille (dont le nom m'échappe: métronome, perche) ou devoir rester ad. lib. plusieurs heures. Comme de bien entendu. L'armoire (les deux caches). La représentation théâtrale. L'humiliation.?. L'arbitraire. (Perec *BO* n°1)

The height gage (the name escapes me: metronome, perch) where must stay ad. lib. for several hours. Naturally. The armoire (two hiding places). The rehearsal. Humiliation.? Arbitrary power. (Perec *124 Dreams* 3)

This opening cipher reveals itself to be a transcription or micro-narration of the dream as a whole: 'height gage,' 'armoire,' and 'rehearsal' represent three sequences in the dream, just as 'comme de bien entendu' evokes the passage about ludic dreaming and the metacamp (see above). As "La taille" continues, Perec

¹⁹ Freud considers teeth falling out a symbolic representation of the castration complex. Freud *The Interpretation of Dreams* 356.

reinvents the banal torture methods of camp life, recounting the constant threat of standing straight under a height gage. The dreamer cycles through numerous interpretations of the gage's significance, only to settle on its arbitrariness:

Mais c'est précisément cette menace évitée qui constitue la preuve la plus évidente du camp: ce qui me sauve, c'est seulement l'indifférence du tortionnaire, sa liberté de faire ou de ne pas faire; je suis entièrement soumis à son arbitraire (exactement de la même façon que je me suis soumis à ce rêve: je sais que ce n'est qu'un rêve, mais je ne peux échapper à ce rêve). (Perec *BO* n°1)

But it is precisely my avoidance of this threat that most clearly proves the essence of the camp: the only thing that saves me is the indifference of the torturer, his liberty to do or not do; I am entirely at the mercy of his arbitrary power (in exactly the same way as I am at the mercy of his dream: I know it is only a dream, but I cannot escape it). (Perec *124 Dreams* 4)

For the lucid dream maker, it is not just the dream content that matters, or its imaginary take on torture in the camps, but the experience of dreaming itself. Lucid dreaming offers a surrogate experience for camp life, in the form of submission to an inescapable, arbitrary rule: you know you're dreaming, but you cannot wake. Is this the "psychic pseudo-reality" or "daytime insomniac" that troubles Pontalis?

In the second sequence, the dreamer rummages through an armoire containing the banal riches of its prisoners: mostly wool and money, stowed away in a false drawer. Quickly, the prisoners realize that this cache is useless, as "mourir et sortir de la pièce sont équivalents" (Perec *BO* n°1) 'dying and leaving the room are one and the same' (Perec *124 Dreams* 5). The third and final sequence of the dream consists only of a fictional name for the camp, which, Perec jokes, could be staged for the theater as "Requiem de Terezienbourg". The dream concludes with an uneasy joke that again characterizes the camp as a recurring dream: "La morale de cet épisode effacé semble se référer à des rêves plus anciens: On se sauve (parfois) en jouant" (Perec *BO* n°1) 'The moral of this faded episode seems invoke older dreams: One (sometimes) saves himself by playing' (Perec *124 Dreams* 5). This wry conclusion is disturbing on many levels: it is not clear that Perec or any of the other prisoners are saved, nor where "playing" is located in the narrative. Is the yardstick its own morbid game? Is Perec "playing" at dreaming and writing about camp life? What earlier (unpublished?) dreams corroborate this "moral" to this story? The ludic dreamer is all too conscious that the game is fixed and that being conscious while dreaming offers little respite; the camp dreams will inevitably return. Poignantly, the dreamer fails to experience, or Perec refuses to narrate, the logical end of the camp or metacamp: death by work or extermination.

In n°17 “La badine” (“The Switch”), Perec returns to the quotidian experience of the camp, with the same uncomfortable irony: “‘Un beau matin,’ je me retrouve à nouveau dans un camp” (Perec *BO* n°17) ‘One fine morning,’ I once again find myself in a concentration camp’ (*124 Dreams* 29). If in “La taille,” the dreamer occasionally acquires a certain degree of theoretical distance (looking at caches that are not his own), here, he is inserted in the inspection routine, lining up before an officer wielding a switch. The dreamer panics at the idea of being beaten, only to conclude: “L’univers du camp est intact: on ne peut pas agir dessus” (Perec *BO* n°17) ‘The universe of the camp is unbroken: nothing can be done to affect it’ (*124 Dreams* 29). In the metacamp, this “on” again operates on two planes: the prisoners cannot alter the world of the camp, nor can the lucid dreamer. As much as the dreamer might desire an alternate reality or a revenge fantasy, he must submit to the dream. The end of “La badine” slips into free association, as the dreamer cries at the sight of children with incurable diseases, only to ruminate that they might be transformed into diet pills (Perec *BO* n°17). Free association is a standby of dreaming, but in the context of a camp dream, this string of associations, which narrate the progressive dehumanization of sick children, is certainly unsettling, if not a bit perverse.

“N°46, *Camp de concentration sous la neige ou Sports d’hiver au camp*” (“Concentration Camp in the Snow or Winter Sports at the Camp”), bears a long title that is in stark contrast to the dream itself. The dream consists of a single line:

Il n’en reste qu’une image: celle de quelqu’un qui aurait des chaussures faites de neige très dure, ou de glace, évoquant irrésistiblement l’idée d’un palet de hockey” (Perec *BO* n°46).

Only a single image remains: that of someone with shoes made of very hard snow, or ice, irresistibly suggesting the idea of a hockey puck. (Perec *124 Dreams* 76)

Under the laborious and painterly title, the snow-shoe converted into the shoe-of-snow has the ominous quality of a torture-object. One wonders if the hockey-puck-shoe is a “petrified” image, as in N°31 “Le groupe” (“The Group”). N°31 is not listed under the camp, but again consists of a single, italicized line, describing a Watteau-like image of a country party: “l’image immobile, presque pétrifiée, insidieusement angoissante, d’un groupe” (Perec *BO* n°31) ‘the image—static, almost petrified, insidiously upsetting—of a group’ (*124 Dreams* 31). Ch. 27 of *La vie mode d’emploi* also opens with a fixed image, this time a “souvenir pétrifié” (‘petrified memory’), which ends up being a portrait of the Gratiolet family before the couple’s separation (See Perec *La vie mode d’emploi* 804; *Life, A User’s Manuel* 119). All of these frozen images bear the brunt of conveying feelings that

cannot be stated outright. Instead, the emotion of dreaming has been displaced to the text's structure, as both n°1 and n°31 appear under the loaded category "Angoisse" 'Anguish/Anxiety' (Perec *BO* 1, 31; *124 Dreams*). If Perec cannot easily narrate emotion, he can categorize it.

The final camp dream, n°124 "La dénonciation" ("The Denunciation"), is written in unnumbered, quasi-filmic sequences, with abrupt shifts between camp and metacamp, which again mimic the disjointed experience of lucid dreaming. Unlike the other camp dreams, however, it produces a real memory. The dream explicitly takes place in 1941: the dreamer and his father have been denounced, and they travel through Paris under the watchful eyes of the SS. They are oddly casual, stopping to drink a coffee or admire neogothic architecture, but their casualness masks their ultimate destination, the train station: "Je sais ce qui nous attend. Je n'ai pas d'espoir. En finir au plus tôt. Ou alors, un miracle . . . Un jour, apprendre à survivre?" (Perec *BO* n°124) 'I know what's waiting for us. I have no hope. Get it over with. Or maybe a miracle . . . One day, learn to survive?' (Perec *124 Dreams* 238). The dreamer is conscious of the camps that await him—a reality that was not as transparent to most deportees—but also fantasizes about alternatives to his fate, like the possibility of surviving, or rather learning to survive (the camp or the dream?). Rather than being deported, however, father and son are briefly secluded; the dream flirts with the symbolic register, as the dreamer transforms into a fish or a serpent. The dream returns to the ongoing narrative, as father and son arrive at the camp, where they are greeted by grotesque caricatures of SS guards, with ridiculous, half-remembered titles. In a hallucinatory twist, the guards become engulfed in flourishes and coats-of-arms, transformed into photographs in an album. Finally, the dream performs another scene change, as the narrator attends a commemorative ceremony that leaves him both elated and disgusted.

On the whole, dream n°124 produces a series of "metacamps": a filmic escape narrative, a fanciful animal-transformation (torture?) scene, a jab at SS titles, a perverse commemorative album, and a ceremony commemorating something unstated. In dreaming and writing n°124, Perec cannot decide if this is a dream about being deported or about camp life, or if it is about someone who remembers and contemplates these events from afar. The dream does not express any feelings about the camps or his mother directly but awkwardly negotiates the relationship between history, literature, memory, and dream. Surprisingly, the dream closes on a scene of childhood play, which allows an actual memory to surface:

Je suis un petit enfant. Sur le bord de la route, j'arrête un automobiliste et je lui demande d'oser pour moi aller réclamer au jardinier du grand verger la balle qui est passée par-dessus le mur (et, en notant ceci, retour du souvenir réel : 1947, rue de l'Assomption, je jouais à la balle contre le mur du couvent, juste en face de notre immeuble). (Perec *BO* n°124)

I am a little child. On the side of the road, I stop a motorist and ask him to dare, for me, to go see the gardener from the big orchard to get back my ball, which went over the wall (and, in noting this, the return of a real memory: 1947, rue de l'Assomption, I was playing ball against the wall of a convent, just across from our building). (Perec *124 Dreams* 239)

No matter how unsettled the narratives of the “metacamp” may be, the act of transcribing has recovered, at least momentarily, the very childhood memory that Perec professes not to have in *W, ou le souvenir d'enfance*. In both the autobiographical and parable portions of the novel, Perec routinely confuses memory and dream, and memories are often described as oneiric. The parable’s narrator, Gaspard Winckler, describes his travels as “rêves [qui] se peuplaient de ces villes fantômes” ‘ghost towns [that] came back to live in my dreams’ and “souvenirs sans fond” ‘bottomless pit of memories’ (Perec *W, ou le souvenir d'enfance* 13; *W, or the Memory of Childhood* 3). In parallel, Perec describes speaking and writing about his early memories and dreams so much that they became denatured; one of his earliest memories, of his father giving him a key, is brief and dream-like (Perec *W, ou le souvenir d'enfance* 26-27; 13-14). Memories, like dreams, are fabricated and unreliable—not easily verified by factual evidence.²⁰ However, if memory is routinely subverted in *W, ou le souvenir d'enfance*—dismissed as a screen for the inaccessible truth—in dream n°124, the memory is presumably accurate, or at least, unredacted. Perec’s “camp” dreams also provide a complementary, if less fleshed out response to the fictional parable of *W, ou le souvenir d'enfance*, or the “island of W.” The metacamp bears traces of the island’s concentrationary society, especially in tone; the camp dreams are parable-like and mostly maintain an ironic or satiric distance from the camp itself. The main difference here is perspectival; the dream-narrator observes and visits the camp, and sometimes, he’s in it.

Perec’s camp dreams and dream journal at large stand in stark contrast to the rest of his oeuvre, where relatively few dreams are narrated or experienced. The first chapter of *Les Choses* is narrated in the conditional and portrays the feverish desires of Sylvie and Jérôme for conspicuous consumption (Perec *Romans & Récits* 51-55). *La Disparition* recounts not dreams per se, but how Anton Voyl cannot sleep and is eventually hospitalized, only to be discharged, still sleeping poorly (Perec *Romans & Récits* 320-22). *La vie mode d'emploi*’s Celia Crespi is twice depicted sleeping, but when she does dream, the dream consists only of a short portrait of a death-eater (Perec *Romans & Récits* 86). The text and the film of *Un*

²⁰ See the passages where Perec uses footnotes to “correct” the failings of individual and familial memory. See Perec *W, ou le souvenir d'enfance* 27-28, 36, 53-61; *W, or the Memory of Childhood* 14, 20, 33-35.

homme qui dort (*A Man Asleep*) might be read as a feature-length nightmare, as the narrator slips in and out of consciousness and depression, but it does not narrate dreams explicitly. In all of these ostensible dreams, the act of dreaming or the dreams themselves are conspicuously absent; Perec narrates around dreams rather than about them.

La Boutique obscure can be read as an experiment in dream writing that is contingent on a series of failures in the psychoanalytic process: failures to communicate, to transfer or counteract transference, to recount dreams correctly or to dream at all. The dream journal is riddled with clues that turn out to be false leads, as Perec sets up a series of potential readings that fail to cohere: dreams that are too writerly or cinematic, oblique sociological allusions and paratext, and a ludic index riddled with potential readerly paths. All of these unresolved clues point to the literarity of Perec's text, and its status as an experiment not only in form, but in autobiographical writing. Dream writing allows Perec to highlight the gap between the many intellectual modes by which he came to understand his life (notably sociology and psychoanalysis) and the trauma of inherited historical violence that he would never fully grasp. Perhaps dream writing afforded Perec a certain degree of emotional protection—what Gascoigne understands as Freudian “second revision” or protective description of the dream after the fact (Gascoigne 132-34). It seems more likely that it was yet another space where he felt the gap between life and representation, or between what he could lucidly imagine and what he could never know.

Works Cited

- Anonymous. *La clé des songes*. Vermot, 1901.
- Anonymous. *Le miroir des songes d'après les traditions orientales*. J. Rouff, 1906.
- Anonymous. *Nouvelle et complète clef des songes*. Paris: Le Bailly, 1876.
- Bastide, Roger. “La praxis et la nuit.” *Cause Commune* vol. 2, 1972, pp. 41-49.
- Bastide, Roger. “Postface.” Perec, Georges. *La Boutique obscure*. Denoël, 1973.
- Bellos, David. *A Life in Words*. David R. Godine, 1993.
- Bonnot, Marie “La Boutique obscure : une tentative d'épuisement du récit de rêve?” *Relire Perec*. Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2017, pp. 271-284.
- Burgelin, Claude. *Les Parties de dominos chez Monsieur Lefèvre: Perec avec Freud, Perec contre Freud*. Circé, 1996.
- Butor, Michel. *Matières de rêves*. Gallimard, 1975.

- Daniel, Joseph. *Le grant traité des songes*. Chez les héritiers de Nibofraïm (Memphis), 1871.
- Guillermo Delgado-García, Guillermo; Rodríguez-Návarez, Carolina; Corona-Vázquez, Teresa; Estañol, Bruno. "Neurophysiological dreams in Georges Perec's *La Boutique Obscure* (1973)" *Neurology* vol. 90, 2018, p.15 Supplement.
- Freud, Sigmund. *A Case of Hysteria, Three Essays on Sexuality and Other Works. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. VII. Translated by James Strachey. Hogarth, 1966. XXIV vols.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. XV. Translated by James Strachey. Hogarth Press, 1966. XXIV vols.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Interpretation of Dreams." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. IV. Translated by James Strachey. Hogarth Press, 1966. XXIV vols.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Interpretation of Dreams (Second Part) and On Dreams." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. V. Translated by James Strachey. Hogarth Press, 1966. XXIV vols.
- Gascoigne, David. "Dreaming the Self, Writing the Dream: The Subject in the Dream Narratives of Georges Perec." *Subject Matters: The Subject and Self in French Literature from Descartes to the Present*. Ed. Paul Grifford and Jonnie Gratton. Rodophi B.V., 2000.
- Halbert d'Angers, Arthu. *La double clef des songes*. Bernardin-Béchet et Fils, 1885.
- Kemp, Anna. "Playing and Being in Georges Perec." *French Studies* vol. 72 no. 4, 2018, pp. 557-571. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/kny155>
- Lacinius. *La vraie clef des songes*. T. Lefèvre, 1880.
- Laplanche, Jean and J.-B. Pontalis. *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*. Presses Universitaires de France, 1967.
- Laplanche, Jean and J.-B. Pontalis. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Hogarth Press, 1973.
- Leak, Andrew. "W: Dans un réseau de lignes entrecroisées: souvenir, souvenir-écran et construction dans W ou le souvenir d'enfance." Ed. Mireille Ribière. *Parcours Perec: Colloque de Londres -- Mars 1988*. Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1990, pp. 75-90.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *La Mémoire et l'Oblique*. P.O.L., 1991.
- . "W or The Memory of Childhood." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* vol. 29 no. 1, 2009, pp. 163-175.

- Marissel, André. "Review of *La Boutique obscure, 124 rêves* by Georges Perec." *Esprit*, Mai 1974, pp. 909-910.
- Motte, Warren. "The Work of Mourning." *Yale French Studies* vol. 105, 2004, pp. 56-71. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3182517>
- Perec, Georges. *Entretiens et conférences*. Ed. Dominique Bertelli and Mireille Ribière. Vol. II, 1979-1981. Joseph K, 2003.
- . *Je me souviens*. Hachette, 1978.
- . *La Boutique obscure : 124 rêves*. Denoël, 1973.
- . *La Boutique Obscure: 124 Dreams*. Translated by Daniel Levin Becker. Melville House Publishing, 2012.
- . *Je suis né*. Seuil, 1990, pp. 15-31, 75-79.
- . *La vie mode d'emploi*. Hachette Littératures, 1978.
- . *Life, A User's Manual*. Translated by David Bellos. David R. Godine, 1987.
- . *Penser / Classer*. Seuil, 2003.
- . "Quatre rêves particulièrement influencés par le cinéma." *Nouvelle Revue française* no. 226, 1971, pp. 147-152.
- . *Œuvres*. Gallimard, 2017.
- . *Romans & Récits*. Librairie Générale française, 2002.
- . "Six rêves." *Cause Commune* no. 2, 1972, pp. 49-52.
- . *Thoughts of Sorts*. Translated by David Bellos. David R. Godine, 2009.
- . "Vues d'Italie." *Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse* vol. 16, 1977, pp. 239-247.
- . *W, ou le souvenir d'enfance*. Denoël, 1975.
- . *W, or the Memory of Childhood*. Harvill, 2000.
- Perruche, Mariane. *J.-B. Pontalis, Une oeuvre, trois rencontres: Sartre, Lacan, Perec*. L'Harmattan, 2008.
- Pontalis, J.-B. *Entre le rêve et la douleur*. Gallimard, 1977.
- . *Frontiers in psychoanalysis*. Translated by Catherine Cullen and Philip Cullen. Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1981.
- . *L'Amour des commencements*. Gallimard, 1986.
- . *Love of beginnings*. Translated by James Greene and Marie-Christine Réguis. Free Association Books, 1993.
- . *Perdre de vue*. Gallimard, 1988 : 161-5.
- Roubaud, Jacques. "Les rêves écrivent." *La Quinzaine Littéraire* no. 166, 1973, pp. 19-20.
- Schwartz, Henry P. "On the Analyst's Identification with the Patient: The Case of J.B. Pontalis and G. Perec." *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* vol. 85 no. 1, 2016, pp. 125-154.
- Schwartz, Paul. *Georges Perec: Traces of his Passage*. Summa publications, 1988.
- Schilling, Derek. *Mémoires du quotidien: les lieux de Perec*. Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2006.

Simon, Robert. *Explication des songes d'après les plus célèbres onéiromanciens*.

A.-L. Guyot, 1900.

Thèbes, Mme de. *L'énigme de rêve*. Félix Juven, 1908.

Worthington, James. *La nouvelle clef des songes*. E. Kolb, 1891.