

On the Verge of Reality: Roxie's Daydreaming as Passage Between Two Realms of Existence in *Chicago*

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the question of daydreams and the function of daydreaming. With a major focus on Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming*, it is revealed how daydreaming functions and what its role is in human life. After having presented that dreams, daydreams and thinking can be viewed as a continuum and that the main function of daydreams or fantasizing is wish-fulfillment, this whole concept is examined in *Chicago* (2002) by analyzing Roxie's character, her actions and behavior and the parallel dream world she creates. The story's character and story duplications, both due to the workings of Roxie's daydreaming, are investigated and it is demonstrated how this process can be closed down.

Dreams and dreaming are common phenomena in our everyday lives, but they constitute a great part of our existence which we cannot really understand and interpret. Many have attempted to solve and reveal the mysteries of our dreams with more or less success, but dreams are still hardly explicable, marvelous parts of the human existence. During antiquity, dreams were considered to be related to the supernatural, and they were supposed to be conveyors of messages and inspiration from gods and demons, as was the case in the Middle Ages (Freud 1911).

Certainly, the most outstanding turn in the interpretation of dreams happened at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century when Sigmund Freud started to examine these phenomena from a truly physiological and psychological point of view. His seminal work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, aims to review the previous theories of dreams while presenting Freud's own theory about them, their workings, their function, their role in human life and even their interpretive possibilities. In his theory, what is significant (among various things) is his claim that dreams are physiological and psychological processes and that they are connected to the real experiences of people's everyday lives. The dream content is built up from the dreamer's real experiences, their mental reminiscences, and from their reactions to these (Freud 1911). He also deals with Aristotle's ideas about dreams, which are as follows: "According to the correct but summary definition of Aristotle, the dream is a continuation of thinking in sleep" (Freud 1911).

Freud also states in his work that dreams can be or, rather, are to be interpreted as wish-fulfillments. As he puts it: "We have found that the dream represents a wish as fulfilled" (Freud 1911). However, this issue was and is often debated, even Freud himself was pondering this question for a long time and he added that it can differ from dream to dream (Freud 1911). But what is more essential in his theory is his claim that dreams are complicated intellectual activities which are the elongations of the intelligible psychic activities of the waking state. In his words: "It is a perfectly valid psychic phenomenon, actually a wish-fulfillment; it may be enrolled in the continuity of the intelligible psychic activities of the waking state; it is built up by a highly complicated intellectual activity" (Freud 1911).

What Freud also examines in detail is that how the wish-fulfillment process happens, and he claims that the unfulfilled wishes of the daytime have less importance in the generation of a wish-

dream than the unconscious wishes, which are triggered by a given “actual” daytime wish and result in the realization of the wish in a dream.

In general, however, I am of the opinion that unfulfilled wishes of the day are insufficient to produce a dream in adults. I will readily admit that the wish-impulses originating in consciousness contribute to the instigation of dreams, but they probably do no more. The dream would not occur if the preconscious wish were not reinforced from another source.

That source is the unconscious. I believe that the conscious wish becomes effective in exciting a dream only when it succeeds in arousing a similar unconscious wish which reinforces it. From the indications obtained in the psychoanalysis of the neuroses, I believe that these unconscious wishes are always active and ready to express themselves whenever they find an opportunity of allying themselves with an impulse from consciousness, and transferring their own greater intensity to the lesser intensity of the latter (Freud 1911).

Nevertheless, what I would like to discuss today is daydreaming which, in a sense, is related to dreaming. This is, why I have mentioned dreams first: to see how they function and to attempt to understand their role in human life. Of course, this minor insight into this field is not entirely satisfactory and there is still a lot to be studied, but this amount, in my view, is adequate when tackling the question of daydreams as a primary target. Freud defines daydreaming as a conscious fantasy that behaves in a similar fashion to its conceptual content (Freud 1911). He states that daydreams involve primarily thoughts rather than visions, meaning that dreams consist more of images while daydreams more of thoughts, though it cannot be declared that they can only be this way. Certainly, there are dreams which do not transform the thoughts into images while there are daydreams, fantasies, visions which contain visual images (Freud 1911).

However, what is common in both dreams and daydreams, apart from the fact that the term “daydream” is quite probably derived from the word “dream,” emphasizing the relatedness of the two, is that they have a wish-fulfillment function. Daydreams are wanderings of the mind during daytime when we are considered to be awake. Daydreams are wake-dreams, which suggests a half-conscious state of mind much more similar to dreaming than to being fully conscious and awake. When someone is daydreaming, that person is usually greatly immersed in his/her thoughts and not completely aware of his/her own surroundings. Daydreams generally involve a train of thought, the aim of which is to fulfill a dream or a hope or a wish in the mind (*Wikipedia*).

Donald P. Spence and Joanna Bressler, although concretely examining the patterning of associations with and without awareness by exposing a verbal stimulus under various conditions, produce a very useful utterance when saying that thinking – daydreaming – dreaming can be viewed as a continuum (Spence and Bressler 1962:91-92). Although they were investigating the question of word associations, it is a useful expression because this is what Freud claimed himself: that dreams are continuations of conscious thinking while daydreams are also a kind of conscious-preconscious-unconscious dream-like states. Thus, the three processes are joined into one involving different levels of awareness while being of thought-kind all of them. Spence and Bressler consider the question and cite Freud as follows:

It was one of Freud’s boldest strokes to postulate that thinking is an activity that can be carried on independently of awareness. He argued in the *Project for a Scientific Psychology* that there is a “kind of observant thought process in which indications of quality [consciousness] are never, or only sporadically aroused and which is made possible by the ego following the course of association automatically. This kind of thought-process is indeed far the more frequent and by no means abnormal, it is our ordinary kind of thinking, unconscious, but with occasional intrusions into consciousness.” (Freud 1895: 430-431 quoted in Spence and Bressler 1962:89)

Spence and Bressler also mention Varendonck's *The Psychology of Daydreams* (1921) and claim that preceding this work and Varendonck's research, experimental attention was not really paid to preconscious thinking. And they say that "[b]y definition, preconscious thought cannot be studied directly but it can be detected by its interference with ongoing conscious thought" (Varendonck 1921 quoted in Spence and Bressler 1962:89) They state that Varendonck declared himself capable of recognizing the signal of a daydream and was able to trace back the fantasy which appeared on the fringes of his consciousness through turning his attention inward and backward (Varendonck 1921 quoted in Spence and Bressler 1962:89-90).

Nonetheless, I have been talking about daydreams and I have not mentioned Freud's *Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming* yet which is a must when discussing such an issue and which connects the play of children to the fantasies of the creative writers (Freud 1995:436-443). In this work, Freud claims that the child creates a world of his/her own at play and so does the creative writer with his/her own world of fantasy. These fantasy worlds are opposite to reality but they are serious; this is obvious to the child and the writer likewise while they invest great amounts of emotion into them (Freud 1995:437).

When people grow up, they tend to forget about play but they do not give it up entirely; they substitute playing with fantasizing, they create fantasies in the air which are called daydreams of which they are usually ashamed and they conceal them (Freud 1995:438). But there is something inevitable in connection with fantasy, which is:

We may lay it down that a happy person never phantasies, only an unsatisfied one. The motive forces of phantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single phantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality (Freud 1995:439).

This utterance has a crucial role in *Chicago* since our protagonist, Roxie Hart is a rather unhappy person whose projected fantasies are manifested in the form of theatrical performances within the film. But before going into details about this, let us still have a look at what Freud said about the relation of dreams and fantasies/day-dreams.

Our dreams at night are nothing else than phantasies like these, as we can demonstrate from the interpretation of dreams. Language, in its unrivalled wisdom, long ago decided the question of the essential nature of dreams by giving the name of 'day-dreams' to the airy creations of phantasy. [...] When scientific work had succeeded in elucidating this factor of *dream-distortion*, it was no longer difficult to recognize that night-dreams are wish-fulfillments in just the same way as day-dreams – the phantasies which we all know so well (Freud 1995:440).

In this paper, my aim is to demonstrate that in *Chicago* Roxie's imaginary dream world is the abstract projection of her own existence which run parallel with each other. The two worlds presented to us are that of the "reality" of the filmic body in which the characters exist and the fantasy world of Roxie's imagination manifested in "theatrical surroundings." The two worlds we have this way are that of the film and that of the theatre, which is embedded in the previous one in the form of daydreaming. Roxie is the mediator between these two worlds, and her daydreaming is the passage between these two realms of existence. Her escape(s) to her imaginary theatrical world whenever she is unable to cope with the problems and the tension in her "real" life create(s) (a) "dreamlike summary(ies)" of the core events in the film.

Roxie is the connection between the two worlds and between the structural and the character duplications since the "theatrical versions" of the events are mostly the result of her imagination. She is daydreaming, and through this, her imagination is set into motion and creates the colorful, spectacular and fabulous visions. I said character duplication, too, because there is not only storyline duplication but character duplication, as well. Roxie and Velma are each other's doubles, which can be traced throughout the film. I do not intend to go into detail about this character duplication, only to the extent necessary considering the scope and focus of this paper.

By now, it is clear that only people who have unfulfilled wishes and who generally are unhappy and disappointed engage in fantasizing. All these are true of Roxie's case since she is not a happy person. She does not live in a happy marriage, she is not satisfied with her life from any point of view, she does not love her husband, she gets involved in amorous or solely sexual liaisons with several men, she drinks quite a lot and spends a great amount of time in bars, meanwhile makes dreams about becoming a famous vaudeville performer. She would like to become famous and successful, she would like to be widely known, adored, admired and idolized. She would like to be a great star, but this possibility is not given to her as we get to know it from her during the performance of the song entitled "Roxie." She relates to her (imaginary) audience that she never managed to make her dreams come true and the world was a big world full of NO for her (Marshall 2002).

While she sings this song she creates the vision of her being what she dreams of: famous and successful. Whenever she is daydreaming, everything is glamorous, fascinating and spectacular. With the help of these daydreams Roxie fulfills her wishes. Through this we can see the events of the story in "their reality" and "through the filter of Roxie's imagination," as well, and therefore we get a double representation. However, here we do not have a concrete equivalent in "reality;" it is surely her fantasy because we know for certain that the course of her life does not lead this way. – This scene is quite exceptional from the point of view of its not being a parallel scene, because almost every musical part has its non-musical equivalent (while not all non-musical parts have musical equivalents in the film) but its significance lies in that this scene is the manifestation of all of Roxie's wishes. – The scene could be termed a *mise-en-abyme* of the whole story if we look at it as a "hunt and craving" for fame and stardom because, although, the gist of the story is Roxie's stardom there are several aspects and themes dealt with in it. Thus, we can only call this scene *mise-en-abyme* if Roxie's wish and striving for fame is the concern.

Throughout the entire film, we see everything from Roxie's perspective, through her eyes. This perspective is established at the beginning of the film when her eye can be seen; the first shot, in fact, is of her eye. She is in the central position and she affects and manipulates, in a sense, her own story by creating a double storyline parallel to the first and original one. She lives in these two worlds, constantly moving from the one to the other. The "second world" is her creation, the making of her mind and imagination; those pictures are her daydreams while she lives in "reality" likewise. This way the film operates with a masterfully interwoven duplicated storyline.

The first scene where the double presentation is apparent with "the filmic and theatrical stories" is Roxie and Velma's first encounter in the bar, where Velma is performing on stage while Roxie is a customer enjoying herself and who, in fact, is hoping to become a vaudeville star herself. First, Velma can be seen from the two of them while performing on stage; meanwhile, Roxie also gets into focus as she is shown standing amazed next to a column, she is watching the show thunderstruck and it is evident that she would like to be on stage by replacing the famous vaudeville performer, Velma. Right here, at the beginning of the film, the lives of these two women are already interlocked, clearly shown with the parallel shots of their lives (Marshall 2002).

In this first "double case," "Velma is shown in the theatre and Roxie in the film." As an opening of their relationship, a shot – counter-shot-like interaction can be seen between them. It is not certain whether they really catch sight of each other (recognizing each other as other), but it is very likely. From this point, Roxie's daydreaming is set into motion without a halt as she imagines herself on stage replacing Velma, which, however, happens only in her dreams. The shot is realized by showing Velma with her back to the audience but while she is turning back, she "becomes" Roxie and when we face her again, Roxie stands in her place. Certainly, in reality this does not happen. Roxie's vision of herself on stage is only a wish-fulfillment; she is still standing next to her column in the darkness, not in the limelight (Marshall 2002).

The duplication continues in the following parallel shot of the women: while Velma is still on stage performing, Roxie is being seen home by Fred Casely. As they enter the staircase, Roxie pulls Fred Casely to herself with his tie; Velma, as part of the choreography, acts the same way with a man on stage. Via examining all of these shots, it can be traced step by step that the two women are like each other's reflections in a mirror. They do everything as if they were each other's reflections or mirror images. An example of this is when Fred Casely slaps Roxie's bottom and Velma's bottom is also slapped on stage. Similarly, when they are ascending the stairs and Casely touches Roxie's leg, Velma is touched in the same manner on stage. IN the choreography of the stage performance,

Velma's arms are straightened up by a man and caressed slightly in an erotic mode, and the same happens to Roxie with Casely. When Roxie and Casley accidentally fall in an opening door, a fall takes place similarly on stage. When Roxie reaches up during lovemaking in the bed, a similar movement is performed on stage as Velma reaches up and she is pulled up by the male dancers. The movements of the two women seem as if they were each other's continuation (Marshall 2002).

With this we have got the basis, we have Roxie living in the filmic body while she creates for herself, from time to time, a theatrical world where everything is wonderful, beautiful and everything happens as she pleases. What is more, at the beginning of the film, we can see how she identified herself with Velma as if she were her mirror image, her Ego-Ideal on stage. With this, her identification and self-creation happens parallel with her making of her double stories. The next double scene comes when Roxie kills Fred Casely; there is a flash of Velma on stage – by this time we know she murdered her husband and her sister – a flash similar to that one when Roxie imagines herself on stage in stead of Velma at the beginning of the film. This flash connects the two and as Roxie stares into the mirror, she realizes what she has done – with the murders and mirror images, their identification with each other is established. When the police arrive and the interrogation starts, Roxie feels tense and starts fantasizing; when the detective directs his lamp at her she imagines herself on stage by turning it into a stage lamp while her husband is trying to confess the murder. She is singing about how wonderful he is when she is wakened by a sudden start as she realizes that her husband is not really saying what they agreed upon and rushes out of her dream theatre back into the film, i.e.: "reality" (Marshall 2002).

Roxie is put into jail and, being rather afraid and anxious, she starts daydreaming about Mama Morton's entrée, as well. While we see a rather rugged and morose woman in rigid and cold prison surroundings, Roxie imagines her as a voluptuous, captivating and glamorous figure dressed in gold who is providing a stunning performance in a bar. Certainly, the function of these duplications in the film is that in this manner, the makers were able to adapt the stage musical to screen in a specific mode which made it possible that the songs and dances could still be performed on stage while these scenes could also form part of the film, theatre incorporated into film. With this we do not get a conventional type of film musical where the musical scenes are also shot within the filmic settings.

When Roxie spends her first night on Murderess Row, the "Cell Block Tango" scene comes, in which we learn about the other murder cases in the film. The six merry murderesses sing and dance the death scenes while we see them in the "reality" in the film likewise. Liz, Annie, June, Hunyak, Velma, Mona all relate their cases; actually, they are chatting about them while playing cards or brushing their teeth etc. within the filmic body. At the same time, the theatrical version is also produced in parallel with these recounts where the abstract representation of all this is realized. Roxie's fantasy of all the cases is a tango performance in which the murderesses sing and dance the death scenes and the reason why they did or did not commit the murders (Marshall 2002).

Then, we see Billy Flynn "in reality" and in Roxie's vision. He sings in the fantasy that "all I care about is love" while, in fact, all he cares about is money (Marshall 2002). The press conference follows in parallel with its own puppet show version where Billy Flynn manipulates everybody and everything as the master of the puppet show theater holding the cords. In chronological order, there is Roxie's fantasy about herself as famous vaudeville star, which has already been discussed. This is followed by Amos' performance as Mr Cellophane dressed as a clown. (After Roxie's glittering and sparkling, truly exuberant star persona this worn-out, shabby and lonely figure is really expressive and true considering the characters' personalities.) As Roxie reaches her heights in stardom "in reality," likewise Velma's desperate dance is performed to convince Roxie to join her; Velma proposes that she and Roxie work together. Roxie refuses the offer, but her fantasy version of the dance is quite eye-catching. Hunyak's execution is the next distressing event, which is to be adapted to Roxie's imaginary world because of its hardly-bearable aspect. Roxie imagines the whole scene to be a dignified and elevating happening. And finally the courtroom scene comes which – in Roxie's imagination – is turned into a circus towards the end of which Roxie is elevated into the skies as a saint in an artists' hoop. In the end, her good-bye song is performed in Roxie's imaginary world, which is connected to one of her actual job interviews when she tries to get into show business (although in vain) (Marshall 2002).

In fact, this is her last fantasy because the last glorious scene is "real." Roxie and Velma really become famous and successful and they perform together. People are craving them; they are stars and

they are bathing in glory. Although there is again a photographer's flash similar to the one at the beginning in the bar and at the murder scene as if waking Roxie again that she was only dreaming, still the film closes as if Roxie and Velma really managed to achieve their goals (Marshall 2002).

In the end, these two women stand in the light thrown on them by the thousands of spotlights. Their stardom is hailed and celebrated by the hordes of fans. Roxie and Velma both realize and accept that they have no other way but to join their forces and work together. They also realize that each cannot do anything without the other. In the end, they form a unity and their differences and their similarities are eventually mixed and "welded" into a whole; Roxie is closed down into a unity in terms of character and story likewise thus ending her daydreaming because instead of her daydreams, at last, she starts to live and realize her dream.

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