Surrealist Presencing in Theophile Gautier's 'The Mummy's Foot'

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Abstract

This paper attempts to pursue a Surrealist approach to Existential presencing as projected in Theophile Gautier's 'The Mummy's Foot'. The existentialist individual is thrown into an absurd nonsensical world, and is only capable of giving meaning to his existence by distancing himself from society and proving his presence through subjective continuous action, or else risks his reduction to nonexistence. Likewise, the Surrealist aim is to escape the rational limitations of society hindering the individual's ability to project his full imaginative potential. The only possible way for a Surrealist to truly experience and project his creativity and place in the world is through one's subconscious, only possibly accessed in the dream world, which otherwise is never fully attainable in the waking-state. The paper attempts to offer a fresh perspective as it explores the possibility of tracing existential presencing by utilizing the Surrealist method of dream interpretation in literature. The conjoining of the waking-state and the dream world grants access to the possibility of proving one's existence in either state, so long as subjective action is affected and continued in both realities.

Keywords: dream interpretation, surrealist existentialism, surrealist presencing, theophile gautier

1. Introduction

Becoming the second imperial power after Great Britain, France witnessed dramatic political upheaval throughout the nineteenth century, earning its name as the *Revolution century* (Zeldin1970, 142). Its long history of revolutions affected the political fluctuation of its rule between republic and empire leading to the state of political instability. The century is marked by the constant abdications, exiles and overthrowing of its kings and emperors, from Napoleon I to Louis XVIII, Charles X, Louis Philippe d'Orleans, to Napoleon III, ending with the twenty year Long Depression. Nevertheless, seldom does history mention the state of the ordinary man amidst drastic change, with its sole focus on men resuming and losing power (Richardson 1958, 23). On this topic, Theodore Zeldin states that:

> one of the roles of social history can be to modify our view of the extent to which change actually takes place in a given period of time at the level where life is really lived by the ordinary man. It is now agreed that the study of history has been in the past too much involved with change at the top – political, intellectual and ideological. These aspects of change often affect people less and less as they filter down to the bottom of the social structure, where the important influences derive from the contact of ordinary people with their peers and their superiors (Zeldin, 143).

To get a true sense of French social reality, one should take into account the many reactions of ordinary society affected and influenced by the changes of the period. The widening gap between upper and lower classes not only deepened public scorn, but more so led to the marginalization and poverty of the greater mass of the population affected by industrialization. Although many moved from rural areas and small towns to the main cities in search for work, there was "lower domestic demand for industrial goods" (Zeldin, 143). This is because of the many religious wars and popular revolts that took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that had left their trace in nineteenth century society in the form of economic breakdowns.

According to Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie: "Popular mentalities, like the rural economy, were influenced less by new opportunities than by old miseries" (Ladurie 1974, 575). At the political front, the majority of the population was not allowed to vote except for a few select Nouveau Riche and Aristocracy, thus, further alienating the greater

public from practicing any definitive national decision. Subsequently, many people worked under excruciatingly dangerous conditions, lived in overcrowded houses, and had little work security (Ladurie, 576).

In an attempt to escape the reality of his societal ills, Theophile Gautier (1811-1872), one of the most prominent nineteenth century authors, plunges into the varied ideological and stylistic approaches to literature, adding an innovative element to his numerous contributions. His fiction may be difficult to classify within the era, marked by his eccentricity and purposefully experimental literary diversity, especially with the extremity of his dramatic shift from the deep sentimentality of romanticism onto its harshest critics (Barton 1918, 205). With the many literary influences apparent in his work – Decadism, the Gothic element of Romanticism and Impressionism – and those traditions that he has paved way for such as Parnassianism, Symbolism and Modernism (Richardson, 15-16), a new existential approach to Surrealism may yet be another method traced, especially in his short story 'Le Pied de Momie', or else known as 'The Mummy's Foot'(Gautier,2010).

In most of his fictional work, Gautier projects the ordinary man in his attempt to reach the unattainable with reality prohibiting him from reaching his goal, thus, pausing friction between the ideal and reality (Richardson, 48). His approach however allows his protagonists enough space to explore their truth by transcending reality into the domain of mysticism and otherworldliness – the fantastical – where one may freely project the flaws of society with its decaying sense of morality, and simply exist. Gautier's influence in Victor Hugo nurtured his extravagant and eccentric personal taste, projected in his style of writing, in an attempt to escape the ills of society, by taking part in the many meetings of *Le Petit Cenacle*, the little Upper Room (Richardson, 25). He creates a space "for what is beautiful and exotic, with ease in surrendering to fantasy, and a maturity of skill with manipulating language" through fantastical characters that symbolize the protagonists' unattainable ideals (Nelson1972, 822). His experimental portrayal of exoticism is not however synonymous with that depicted in Modernist work. Like Modernists, his work clearly and openly precludes the ideology of realism by recapturing the past in the hope of making sense of the present. As a journalist for *La Presse*, he got the opportunity to travel to Egypt beside other countries, influencing his creation of many literary productions including travelogues, in which he documented his personal experiences and influences that were later to be projected in his fiction (Richardson, 31). As a literary *abandonné*, he is known to give in wholly to the history he projects.

According to Elizabeth Dahab, Gautier's growing interest in the Orient "served as an alternative to the West, as the elsewhere where [he] could find beauty and escape from the ugliness of […] society" (Dahab 1999, 5). In addition, "the Orient he refers to is not that of his time but rather an archaic and exotic counterpart to Western modernity" (Colby 2006, 7). Gautier's projection of the past is based on these encountered and personal experiences in visited countries, the history of which he recreates, abandoning himself to fiction, in order to juxtapose the ideology of existence with the prevalent state of French society. In this sense, he seems to encourage the re-examination of every aspect of existence within the past to find what holds back progress. Marcel Voisin states that: "Thanks to Theophile Gautier's literary achievements, he reveals all of himself to us, speaks to us about ourselves, our anxieties and our hopes, about the eternal division of human beings between the sunlight and the night" (Voisin 1981, 15 – authors' translation).

Published in 1840, 'The Mummy's Foot' is set in the heart of Paris, against the prevalent harsh conditions of ordinary French society, permeating a sense of reality with the fantastical element only possible through a dream that the protagonist has. The protagonist is an author that, similar to Gautier, appears to have an eccentric taste for ancient objects. The only sense of presencing he experiences is in the local *bric-a-brac* shop he routinely visits, where he collects and preserves rare ancient pieces that transport him to unfamiliar worlds he finds the urge to connect with, in an attempt to escape the state of societal death in which he finds himself trapped. Even though he is not directly conscious of the purpose of his hobby, it on the one hand is a projection of his choice to distance himself from the state of death that he experiences in society, and on the other, unintentionally directs him toward his purpose of being.

In order to fathom the complexity of such projection in his work 'The Mummy's Foot', it is necessary to commence with an understanding of Gautier's perception of *life and death* through an Existential lens, to be followed by the attempt to trace a possible employment of the psychoanalytical method utilized by Surrealists as means for practicing existential presencing in the form of a dream, the interpretation of which will explain the approach employed in this paper.

2. Presencing: An Existential Fear of Death in 'The Mummy's Foot'

Gautier's complex projection of presencing is reflected in his contemplation on the inevitability of death and the despair of the inexorable passage of time, a theme that occupied the minds of many authors throughout time, and one that is recurrent in Gautier's work (Richardson, 40). As death is an inseparable certainty of destiny, his

perception of it forms his way of life, as it becomes a form of escape from the constant state of suffering which the system of thought imposes upon individuals in society. He translates death into a "curiously voluptuous, exhilarating experience which diverts him momentarily from the gruesome reality and conveys his urgent plea for light over darkness, life over 'spiritual' death" (Richardson, 40). In other words, death – projected in his societal reality – becomes a stifling and irreversible finality, unless addressed. Consequently, he attempts to employ the theme of life and death in order to transcend his intolerable reality – depicted in his fiction as a state of death – to another recreated and desired reality existent in the distant past, where existence may be embraced by physically transporting himself back in time, only possible in the form of a dream. Thus, his thematic projection of life and death strongly correlates with the ideals of existentialist thought.

Existentialist thinkers agree to one basic principle, "that existence comes before essence – or, if you will, that we must begin from the subjective" (Sartre 2007, 2). Soren Kierkegaard was the first to acknowledge a present individuality at the expense of objective knowledge, as "subjectivity becomes one's truth and reality of being, and holding responsibility for one's actions leads to his very existence; the task that is usually assumed by religious, and political authorities, monarchs and science" (Ammari 2016, 3). In this sense, the existentialist individual rebukes all forms of societal authority as he believes life, with its social structures and restraints, to be irrational, ludicrous and futile. Such a rejection becomes the one incentive to make sense of and give meaning to his existence. In an attempt to explain the existentialist state of individuality, Sartre asserts that:

> the most fundamental characteristic of man and consciousness is his ability to go beyond his situation. He is never identical with it, but rather exists as a relation to it. Thus he determines how he will live it and what its meaning is to be; he is not determined by it (Sartre 1963, xix).

Likewise, the protagonist's societal background in 'The Mummy's Foot' is entirely missing, with sole fixation on the different time dimensions with which he fuses his being and where he finds meaning, thus, allowing him entrance to different moments in distant times and civilizations of choice, in the attempt to allocating his existence. The curiosity shop is where he assumes absolute freedom, choice, decision-making in each historical object he admires, and therefore he takes personal responsibility for becoming one with it. It becomes the only way to transcend the absurd condition of humanity. As he enters the shop, he gives a meticulous account of its ancient content, revealing particular interest in his detailed description of each object he lays eyes on. He states:

> […] all ages and all nations seemed to have made their rendezvous there; an Etruscan lamp of red clay stood upon a Boule cabinet, with ebony panels, brightly striped by lines of inlaid brass; a duchess of the court of Louis XV nonchalantly extended her fawn-like feet under a massive table of the time of Louis XIII with heavy spiral supports of oak, and carven designs of chimeras and foliage intermingled [….] The striped breastplate of a damascened suit of Milanese armor glittered in one corner; Loves and Nymphs of porcelain; Chinese Grotesques, vases of celadon and crackle-ware; Saxon and old Souvres cups encumbered the shelves and nooks of the apartment (Gautier, 5).

The protagonist's routine visits to the curiosity shop seem to surpass mere interest in its content. The time that he spends examining each ancient object is time away from the absurdity of nineteenth century organized society and the deterioration of social morality. The shop becomes the place where he may go beyond time and place, placing himself in different historical epochs and cultures through the ancient pieces he attaches himself to. His search for the perfect object to purchase projects his desperate need to rationalize his being beyond what seems to him an absurd world. The *bric-a-brac* shop also seems to be the only place where he is capable of freely practicing his personal rationality by choosing an ancient object, through which he associates meaning to himself.

According to Sartre, the state of *bad faith* that humans experience is explained in blindly following societal rationality as a means by which to avoid existential anxiety and fear of being thrown into the world they see as absurd (Sartre 2007, 2). Such *bad faith* hinders the individual from allocating his presence and finding meaning in freedom, reducing it instead to direct and structured experience, thus limiting one's existential potential. Rationality for the existentialist individual on the other hand is always subjective, as it may only be fathomed in finding one's own meaning and sense in the action he affects; an action solely based on one's own conviction and instinct. It is as Sartre puts it:

> […] man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist [… finds himself undefinable], it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself [….] Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism (Sartre

2007, 2).

The existentialist's action is therefore based on his personal conviction rather than the standard of rationality accepted and practiced by organized society, in which case is viewed as absurd and meaningless. The fact that the protagonist never mentions himself in association to society, unless he is out getting intoxicated, assures the reader of his conscious decision to alienate himself from what Sartre claims is *bad faith* (Sartre, 5). His intoxication becomes a means by which to numb his senses when existent in it. This leads to the existential belief in existence preceding essence and consciousness, as there is no meaning to life apart from the one that the individual gives it. In this sense the philosophy of existentialism becomes a way of life.

Likewise, the protagonist's routine visits to the curiosity shop project his desire to continuously renew his existence for the purpose of substituting his world with an ancient civilization, perceived in societal reality as dead, yet projected by himself as very much alive, even more so than the prevalent French society, which in comparison to the ideals of ancient civilization is considered psychologically dead and decayed. Every ancient object he collects serves a purpose in his nineteenth century French abode; its mere fusion with the protagonist's time balances out his state of absurdity, without which he becomes one with the dead state of society. He walks into the curiosity shop knowing what he seeks, an exquisitely authentic paper-weight that no one else possesses. He states: "I want a small figure, something which will suit me as a paper-weight; for I cannot endure those trumpery bronzes which the stationers sell, and which may be found on everybody's desk" (Gautier, 6). He does not want to be associated with mainstream society, and so chooses to collect what he is certain no one else may possess in society. The action that he consciously affects as pertaining to society and himself are based on constant anxiety of failing, and continuous action to prove his being.

Kierkegaard's perception of the philosophy pertains to its fully integrated activity in the life of human beings, as "it is not the mere knowledge of one's reality that matters, but acting upon that knowledge that counts" (Ammari, 4). Existentialism as a way of life then entails the immediate experience of one's presencing through constant and consciously selected action, consequently rejecting associations and representations that lack true meaning for the individual. In this sense, Kierkegaard explains that the existentialist individual seeks "a truth which is truth for [him]" (Kierkegaard 1996, 32). In other words, as the individual recognizes his existence, he instantly embraces the ultimate freedom that comes with it, thus, assuming "power beheld by a higher authority and so he alienates himself from organized society and is content with such alienation" (Ammari, 4). The claim of freedom however has its price, as the existentialist individual constantly holds himself responsible for every affected action, and so is always found in a state of anxiety.

Anxiety is, nevertheless, considered crucial for the activation and assertion of the individual's personal emotions; "because he is a synthesis, he can be in anxiety; and the more profoundly he is in anxiety, the greater is the man" (Kierkegaard 1980, 154). Self-inflicted alienation may also be interpreted as space away from societal influence for the purpose of allocating and projecting one's authentic existence amidst the opposing forces of tradition and drastic change according to Sartre (2007, 10). It is necessary then to recognize the role of personal emotions influencing and informing the authentic act, as it may be thought of as "the necessary component for authenticity and uniqueness, a difference to be celebrated and sustained from the rest of society" (Ammari, 4). Subsequently, the definitive moment for the protagonist lies in the varied historical options to choose from in the shop; the more exotic and different his personal choice for an object is, the more authentic his representation will be, and the more distance from societal norm he affects.

The protagonist takes his time to carefully examine each historical object he lays eyes on, until he finds the object of his desire, a mummy's foot that initially seems to him a man-made sculpture. He confesses:

> I was hesitating between a porcelain dragon, all constellated with warts, its mouth formidable with bristling tusks and ranges of teeth, and an abominable little Mexican fetish, representing the god Vitziliputzili au naturel, when I caught sight of a charming foot, which I at first took for a fragment of some antique Venus. It had those beautiful ruddy and tawny tints that lend to Florentine bronze that warm living look so much preferable to the gray-green aspect of common bronzes, which might easily be mistaken for statues in a state of putrefaction. Satiny gleams played over its rounded forms, doubtless polished by the amorous kisses of twenty centuries, for it seemed a Corinthian bronze, a work of the best era of art, perhaps moulded by Lysippus himself (Gautier, 7).

As he examines the object, the shop vender is skeptical and unpleased with his choice, only to reveal the truth of the preserved ancient flesh that he has chosen to become one with. The protagonist cannot help but share his enjoyment of the beauty, exoticism and authenticity of the foot as he states:

> I was surprised at its lightness. It was not a foot of metal, but in sooth a foot of flesh, an embalmed

> foot, a mummy's foot. On examining it still more closely the very grain of the skin, and the almost imperceptible lines impressed upon it by the texture of the bandages, became perceptible. The toes were slender and delicate, and terminated by perfectly formed nails, pure and transparent as agates [….] The sole, scarcely streaked by a few almost imperceptible cross lines, afforded evidence that it had never touched the bare ground, and had only come in contact with the finest matting of Nile rushes and the softest carpets of panther skin (Gautier, 7).

The flawless foot represents absolute perfection for the protagonist, and his realization of it belonging to a certain princess Hermonthis, the daughter of a Pharaoh, gives him all the more determination to possess it. The choice he makes for a paper-weight is however ridiculed by the shop vender, as he believes that:

> Old Pharaoh would certainly have been surprised had someone told him that the foot of his adored daughter would be used for a paper-weight after he had had a mountain of granite hollowed out as a receptacle for the triple coffin, painted and gilded, covered with hieroglyphics and beautiful paintings of the Judgment of Souls (Gautier, 7).

However odd the protagonist's choice may seem to the vender, the spontaneous pleasure it gives him at first sight attaches him to it, only to find his purpose for being by becoming one with no less than an ancient princess of one of the greatest of all times and civilizations. The sense of repulsion that he has toward the state that society is in does not merely direct him toward self-inflicted alienation from society, but also becomes an incentive to ensure his existence elsewhere. His fear of reduction to the *crowd* may be interpreted as dread of limiting his existence to the pre-determined image set and followed by mainstream society. A yet more direct perception of the existential death of society is found in Friedrich Nietzsche's understanding of the state of the *herd*, which is purposefully employed to suit the connotation it suggests: that "humans are domesticated animals tamed by mainstream society and leading an unauthentic existence" (Nietzsche 1997, 127).

In addition, the protagonist's repeated sense of anxiety, as a result of fear of being reduced to societal inaction and thus psychological death, becomes a crucial prerogative he willingly takes on for the purpose of constantly renewing his existence away from society. As demonstrated by Kierkegaard and Sartre then, the protagonist's entire existence lies upon his "commitment to a continuously repeated, moment-to-moment definition of his existence through free choice of action, which comes in reaction to his self-alienation from society" (Ammari, 5). He employs the ultimate freedom that he has claimed to determine the appropriate path and "whatever means that bring about and sustain his existence, [… even if through the acquisition of an embalmed foot]. Focus is thus shed on the mere fact that he is, rather than how he ends up being" (Ammari 5). By possessing the foot, regardless of the vender's warning, gives him full responsibility for his choice of action which adds value to his life. In this sense, his life path can never be determined, but instead his "existence becomes the very accumulation of a chain of disjointed choices dependent upon the renewed exercise of freedom" (Ammari 5).

The existential choices that the protagonist takes are further reinforced in his realization that the *crowd* fails to offer any true model for existential presencing, because it settles for its pre-determined definition as it blindly follows external authorities, thus reducing itself to essence (Sartre 2007, 4). The concept of the *crowd* that Hegel rejects, reflects the protagonist's rejection of essence; "how the individual should be like according to collective receptive rather than creative and reactive society" (Ammari 6). The protagonist's instinct, however, directs him toward his means of presencing, and his absolute freedom gives him enough space to embrace it. Upon purchasing the foot, he walks down the street reflecting on his state of being in comparison to that of the unauthentic and dead *crowd*. He proudly contends:

> Well satisfied with this embellishment, I went out with the gravity and pride becoming one who feels that he has the ineffable advantage over all the passers-by whom he elbows, of possessing a piece of the Princess Hermonthis, daughter of Pharaoh. I looked upon all who did not possess, like myself, a paper-weight so authentically Egyptian as very ridiculous people, and it seemed to me that the proper occupation of every sensible man should consist in the mere fact of having a mummy's foot upon his desk (Gautier, 10).

The protagonist's existence in relation to the external forces then lacks meaning and is thus considered absurd. The recognition of such death projected in the featureless faces ofthe *crowd* does indeed push the protagonist to reject his association with the rest of society, and instead embrace the repeated anxieties that come as a result of presencing.

Thus far, the paper has demonstrated the roles of societal alienation, ultimate freedom and instinct in directing the actions of the protagonist. His existential attitude was traced in the curiosity shop, and projected on his way back to his abode. However, his alienation from society does not fully serve the endorsement of his existential self-

affirmation in the waking-state, but rather in a dream that he has. Thus, a Surrealist approach to existential presencing will allow the protagonist to maintain his existence in the dream-state, opening enough space and fluidity to practice his individual rationality in the form of a dream, otherwise considered unattainable with the limitation of the waking-state in which he feels trapped.

3. Surrealist Presencing: An Existential Interpretation of a Dream

Surrealists were partly Romantics in their belief in the power of imagination. They however were nonconformists and sought to channel the unconscious as a means to liberate their thoughts from the shackles of societal taboos, moral restraint and rationalism. They believed that rational society repressed the power of imagination, and so found refuge in the power of the psyche to divulge contradictions they saw in society (Chilvers 2009, 611). Another point of departure from the Romantics is in their emphasis on spontaneity and impulse in expressing the unconscious by any means that may be found anywhere, not restricted by place or time, and expressive of personal diligence (Chilvers, 611). Salvador Dali, one of the most prominent Surrealist artists contends that "Surrealism is destructive, but it destroys only what it considers to be shackles limiting our vision" (quoted in Gibson 1997, 289). It sears through the limitations of waking reality, transcending onto the imagery projections that the psyche allows the mind to explore and represent in the sleeping-state. Emerging in the most critical time in French history, Surrealism on the one hand epitomizes escape for the few who could not withhold political and social instability. It, on the other hand, is utilized as a platform to address essential anxieties of human decay (quoted in Gibson, 290).

In the movement's manifesto, Andre Breton, the father of the movement, contends that "Surrealism is based on the belief .. in the omnipotence of dreams, in the undirected play of thought" (Grosso, in Krippner& Powers1979, 193). By employing Sigmund Freud's masterpiece, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (2010), as the means to translate dream images to artistic pieces, Surrealists found more credibility in their projection of the unconscious as expressive of the reality they escaped and the desires they sought (Grosso, in Krippner & Powers, 195). Therefore Freud's psychoanalytical approach to fathoming one's psyche, especially as pertaining to dream interpretation was of great significance to projecting the Surrealists' spontaneity and artistic impulse. In other words, and as maintained by existentialists, trust should first be established with one's own instinct, if societal influence is to be distanced. One's deepest desires are strongly suppressed to the unconscious, only possibly and fully expressed in the dream-state, and hence the conscious decision of translating the images projected in a dream is their basic priority and prerogative in the waking-state.

Although Existentialist thinkers have not thus far explored the aspect of presencing action through the dream world, the end result of affecting action is what truly matters to them, hence, justifying the possibility within an existential dream. Breton asserts that Surrealism does not simply entail movement beyond the real, but rather utilizes the 'impulse' of the psyche to fathom one's true self which is restricted by societal rationale (Grosso, in Krippner & Powers, 196). He states that the movement is a "psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought" (Grosso, in Krippner& Powers, 196).

Surrealism was in conflict with social values as elaborated by Simon Wilson, asserting that "the contribution was in [… the Surrealists'] determination to tap the creative and imaginative forces of the mind at their source in the unconscious and, through the increase in self-knowledge achieved by confronting people by their real nature, to change society" (Wilson 1980, 5). They attempted to liberate their repressed thoughts and emotions from their subconscious in the form of images, which they claimed to express more truth than those captured by the naked eye, as they represented unveiled reality. Furthermore, Surrealists fused unconscious forces with everyday reality through the interpretation of dreams. Breton explains his understanding of the movement through a personal experience with the 'hypnagogic state', through which the image of "a man cut in two by the window" never left his mind (Cardinal, 25).

Likewise, to him, Surrealism echoes the same juxtaposition of two distant realities combined into one, producing true reality. With their specific focus on the dream-state as a substantial and basic means by which to unravel the inner world of the unconscious, Surrealists' rather perplexing, eccentric and unusual imagery seem to be purposefully controversial to shock the rational mind.

The rationale behind the movement seems to be in alignment with the existential way of life, where alienation from mainstream society is a necessity for the purpose of allocating one's presencing. Trust in one's own instinct gives the individual a sense of authority, ultimate freedom, and comes as a result to distrust in the societal systems blindly followed by the crowd, therefore creating one's own world. If continuous existential presencing is the ultimate goal for existentialists, then surely the existential subject will choose whatever form his presencing will

take, so long as the end result is a constant renewal of proving one's existence, giving its subject meaning, even if in the form of a dream. Similarly, the protagonist in Gautier's story is found only twice in public; either in the curiosity shop, or at a restaurant consuming alcohol, both of which serve the purpose of discrediting the world of reality which does not sustain existential renewal.

In the curiosity shop, he loses the rational sense of time and place, as he transports himself spontaneously into the spatial dimension of each object he carefully examines. Otherwise, he is described in the company of 'friends', yet intoxicating himself and numbing his senses in their presence, with the aim of distancing himself from the rationality of society, which to him is clearly absurd (Gautier, 7). Numbing his senses from societal rationality, in order to reach a clear state of mind for personal reasoning, seems to be the only means by which he can allocate his presencing in the waking-state. On the other hand, the protagonist's alienation from society is not enough action in itself to prove his presencing, especially within the privacy of his abode. Therefore, the action that he affects within the context of his dream is justifiable for his existential presencing especially that his subconscious draws its material from his day to day reality and builds conclusions on its basis.

From this standpoint then, the method sought by Surrealists may be utilized to express and visually project existential presencing in the form of a dream. The protagonist employs his subconscious to exercise his presencing in his dream-state, by extracting himself from the undesired dead society, and relocating himself in a more lively world, that of the chosen princess Hermonthis. His choice to transcend space though has consequences only he will have to live with. The sense of anxiety that he experiences as he travels back in time, in the context of his dream, to the world of princess Hermonthis is further justifiable, as he is forced to affect action or else risk association with and reduction to societal death. For the purpose of utilizing the Surrealist method in projecting the protagonist's existential presencing in the dream-state, a thorough understanding of Freud's psychoanalytical approach to unveiling the world of dreams is necessary and projectory of the protagonist's conscious mind in the waking-state.

4. An Ancient Dream of Presencing: Two Intertwining Realities

In his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud openly legitimizes the significance of dreams in unveiling the unconscious mind through which one's repressed reality, emotions, and desires may be translated. He defines the dream as:

> the psychic activity of the sleeper, inasmuch as he is asleep. Aristotle was acquainted with some of the characteristics of the dream-life; for example, he knew that a dream converts the slight sensations perceived in sleep into intense sensations […] which led him to conclude that dreams might easily betray […] the first indications of an incipient physical change which escaped observation during the day(Freud 2010, 14).

In other words, one experiences strong emotions within a dream with more intensity than when otherwise awake because all sensations are fixated toward the psyche, thus reflecting itself physically. The intensity of the fragmented images that surface from the dreamer's subconscious drives him to believe that he has been "transported […] into another world" (ibid,17). Such intensity is experienced in the dream-state because it comprises of material the subconscious selects from the dreamer's thoughts and emotions in the waking-state (ibid, 17), thus the subsequent sensation one gets of the merging of the two worlds. The intensity of emotions that the protagonist experiences is an accumulation of two opposite forces at work; one rejecting societal association, and the other desperately seeking continuous presencing, not merely causing his existential anxiety, but also employing his eccentric taste for art to allocate meaning to his being in the world. He does not find his meaning within the confinement of nineteenth century French society, and so attempts to allocate himself in different historical epochs, where he might find the contextual self-identification that he seeks.

The protagonist's emotional intensity and anxieties experienced in the waking-state manifest themselves in the dream that he has, as it draws its material from his memory in the waking-state. Nevertheless, it is quite unclear when his waking-state is subdued, and the dream-world commences, especially with his "brain slightly confused by [the] few glasses of wine" that he has (Gautier, 10). His confusion intensifies because of the

> vague whiff of Oriental perfume delicately [titillating his] olfactory nerves. The heat of the room had warmed the natron, bitumen, and myrrh in which the paraschistes, who cut open the bodies of the dead, had bathed the corpse of the princess. It was a perfume at once sweet and penetrating, a perfume that four thousand years had not been able to dissipate. The Dream of Egypt was Eternity. Her odours have the solidity of granite and endure as long (Gautier, 10).

The strong scent that the protagonist describes, supposedly still in his waking-state, seems to be only possible in

the fantastical world of dreams, as it does not make sense to the rational mind, unless the world of the princess has invited itself to his in the context of his dream. But the mere fact that he is conscious of its presence demonstrates the close relationship that the waking-reality has with the dream-reality, also proving his desperate need to become one with his dream-reality. He states:

> I soon drank deeply from the black cup of sleep. For a few hours all remained opaque to me. Oblivion and nothingness inundated me with their sombre waves. Yet light gradually dawned upon the darkness of my mind. Dreams commenced to touch me softly in their silent flight. The eyes of my soul were opened, and I beheld my chamber as it actually was. I might have believed myself awake but for a vague consciousness which assured me that I slept, and that something fantastic was about to take place [….] I peered through my room with a feeling of expectation which I saw nothing to justify. Every article of furniture was in its proper place [….] After a few moments, however, all this calm interior appeared to become disturbed [….] My eyes accidentally fell upon the desk where I had placed the foot of the Princess Hermonthis [….] and I commenced to experience a feeling closely akin to fear (Gautier, 10-11).

The protagonist's fear is in place, as his rationality at first cannot fathom the intertwining of his waking-reality with that of his dream. His fear is also reflective of his existential anxiety, of losing his presencing unless immediate action is affected. He soon realizes that his "bed-curtains opened and [he] beheld the strangest figure imaginable before [him]" (Gautier, 11). Never having set eyes on the four thousand year old princess before, the protagonist strangely identifies her from the

> very deep coffee-brown complexion, […] possessing the purest Egyptian type of perfect beauty [….With] the prominence of her cheek-bones and the slightly African fullness of her lips, which compelled one to recognise her as belonging beyond all doubt to the hieroglyphic race which dwelt upon the banks of the Nile (Gautier, 15).

Although the first setting of his dream is his familiar room, he is not familiar with the rest of his dream content. The story does not mention the protagonist travelling to Egypt in the waking-state, nor has he ever set eyes on the embalmed princess. Nevertheless, and according to Freud, some of the dream content may not be recognized as having been experienced beforehand, as the dreamer recollects having "dreamed of the thing in question, but one cannot recall the actual experience or the time of its occurrence" (Freud,21). The dreamer remains oblivious to the source from which the dream content was subconsciously selected, "and is even tempted to believe in an independent productive activity on the part of the dream" (Freud, 21). In fact, the dreamer cannot invent objects or incidents in a dream, as images are reproductions of selected memory in the waking-state. The dreamerrather simply does not remember after he awakes.

Unearthing the source of the dream content may at times be hard to trace, as it may be reproduced from memories as early as one's childhood, or may be the projection of accumulating intense emotions experienced in the waking-state over a short or long period of time. What is remarkable about the reproduction of memory in the dream content is the intentional selection that it makes to project "impressions which have intensely occupied the waking mind" without a conscious choice on the part of the individual to sustain such a memory (Freud, 27). Therefore, the psyche lays substantial importance on the manner in which memory chooses to project itself in the dream.

On the role that memory plays in a dream, Freud states that "[i]t teaches us that nothing which we have once physically possessed is ever entirely lost […] a conclusion to which we are urged by so many other pathological manifestations of mental life" (Freud, 28-29). Freud further quotes Haffner and Weygandt who contend that:

> The dream continues the waking life. Our dreams always connect themselves with such ideas as have shortly before been present in our consciousness. Careful examination will nearly always detect a thread by which the dream has linked itself to the experiences of the previous day [….] that they lead us directly back into everyday life, instead of releasing us from it (Freud, 18).

Whatever the content of the dream may be, it derives its material from the dreamer's reality, especially "from the psychic life centered upon this reality" (Freud, 20). Although the dream content is not projected in the same linearity of that in the waking-state, the different fragments projected in a dream "must always borrow their elementary material either from that which our eyes have beheld in the outer world, or from that which has already found a place somewhere in our waking thoughts" (Freud, 20). In other words, the occurrence of a dreamis explained in memory, where the dream displays the real event already experienced "either objectively or subjectively" (Freud, 20). The dream-reality and the waking-reality then, constitute a strong bond in the choice of dream material that is to surface. In addition, the cause of the dream should not be undervalued, as in many cases, its irrational projection in the dream-state may direct the dreamer toward the understanding of the psychological

state the dreamer experienced in the waking-state.

The irrationality and involuntarity in which the dream material is collected forming an image seems to reduce its value in the waking state as it will not make sense for the dreamer. The German philosopher, Johannes Volkelt, explains that the dream content already free from "the control of reason and intellect, is here no longer held together by the more important psychical and physical stimuli, but is left to its own uncontrolled and confused divagations" (quoted in Freud, 46-47). This is what specifically drives psychoanalysts to lay heavy importance on the dream material, as it has within it the dreamer's true perception of the source in the waking-state.

Likewise, the full visualization of the princess in the protagonist's dream-reality does not necessarily constitute his memory specifically of her, but rather projects a depiction of the existential ideal with which he wishes to become one. At the story level, the princess comes into his world with the sole purpose of reclaiming what is rightfully hers, her stolen foot. Nevertheless, her assertive action of allocating her foot in the protagonist's world within his dream does not merely prove her existential presencing, but rather echoes the protagonist's act of claiming the foot as his in the curiosity shop, thus representing the princess as projective of the protagonist himself. According to Schleiermacher, dreams employ many sensory impressions. This promotes the representations of thought and imagination, as in the waking state, which "more closelyresemble perception than mnemonic representations" (quoted in Freud, 53). In addition, whatever is thought as one falls asleep is transformed into hallucinations of it, "to give place, each time we wake, to the fainter and qualitatively different representations of memory, and resuming, each time we doze off again, its hallucinatory character" (Freud, 53-54).

In this sense, the protagonist's experienced emotions, thoughts and action in the curiosity shop are projected, in the dream-world, in the form of nonsensical images that will not otherwise be comprehended or even possible in his waking-reality. While his conscious mind is subdued, his sub-conscious is free to express, exaggerate and dramatize the perspective of his prensencing in society through the content it selects from the waking-state. His strong desire to dissociate himself from the dead state of the crowd is directly linked to his determination to practice his presencing in the ancient world of the princess. His presencing is clearly apparent through his unexplained ability to communicate with her in Coptic (Gautier, 11). It does not even make sense to him within the dream, and he does not attempt to question it, but rather simply embraces it. The intensity of his subconsciously selected content also goes beyond simple conversation onto an invitation that he receives to join her world, to which he does not hesitate to give consent.

Therefore, in a dream, thoughts are transformed into "hallucinations", projected in the form of images, thus creating a situation that appears to be present, exaggerated and dramatized as Spitta also puts it (Freud, 54). However, such representation does not indicate the activity of thought, but rather that of experience. In other words, dream-hallucinations drive the subject to assume that he is experiencing the thought rather than thinking it as in the waking-state.

Respectively, Karl Friedrich Burdach, a German physiologist, also claims that:

> In dreams, the subjective activity of our psyche appears as objective, inasmuch as our perceptive faculties apprehend the products of phantasy as though they were sensory activities […] that sleep abrogates our voluntary action; hence falling asleep involves a certain degree of passivity … The images of sleep are conditioned by the relaxation of our powers of will (quoted in Freud, 54).

This only projects the naivety of the mind as pertaining to the dream-hallucinations that surface specifically after the suspension of the voluntary play of thought. In this respect, Ludwig Strumpell, a German philosopher that is frequently quoted by Freud, explains that dreams cannot be mere representations, but rather true manifestations of the psyche, "similar to those which come to the waking state by way of the senses" (quoted in Freud, 54).

What is more interesting about the dream in Strumpell's opinion, contrary to that of Burdach, is its ability to capture the special consciousness where images and sensations are transferred and reordered into "outer space", maintaining the same attitude of the waking state (quoted in Freud, 55). In addition, images and sensations represented in the dream-state reach a conclusion that they are otherwise prohibited from reaching in the waking-state, thus, lending subjective activity on the part of the psyche. Therefore, dream images are represented as complete in comparison to those incomplete thoughts experienced by the mind whilst awake. This is because the subconscious mind

> neglects to differentiate between those images which can be exchanged at will and those in respect of which there is no true choice. It errs because it cannot apply the law of causality to the content of its dreams (Freud, 55).

In other words, the distance of the subconscious mind from the limitation of the waking-reality allows it to

subjectify the content of its dream-world. Although the psyche is distanced during sleep from the outer world, its connection to it through memory, however, is not completely broken, that is, through the force of the sensory stimulus, the activity of which is maintained in relation to the psyche. The content of a dream becomes of more real significance the stronger the sensations are in relation to the elements of the dream.

The protagonist's existential anxiety actively informs the selected material in his dream-world, where the discomfort of projecting his presencing in the context of French society within his dream is very much apparent. Therefore, the protagonist chooses, within his dream-reality, to transport himself from the context of his room to that of the princess.This is because the intensity of his sub-conscious emotions as pertaining to his fear of reduction to the crowd's inexistence drives him to transcend his current setting within the same dream onto an unrecognized, inexperienced and different world, where he is capable of projecting himself as a present subject by affiliating himself with the immortality of ancient Egyptian pharaohs and kings. The protagonist further reaches his existential presencing as he enters

> a hall so vast, so enormous, so immeasurable, that the eye could not reach its limits [….] All the Pharaohs were there—Cheops, Chephrenes, Psammetichus, Sesostris, Amenotaph—all the dark rulers of the pyramids and syrinxes. On yet higher thrones sat Chronos and Xixouthros, who was contemporary with the deluge, and Tubal Cain, who reigned before it (Gautier, 15).

Out of gratitude for returning his daughter's foot, Pharaoh Xixouthros offers the protagonist a 'recompense', to which the protagonist adamantly narrates:

> Filled with that daring inspired by dreams in which nothing seems impossible, I asked him for the hand of the Princess Hermonthis. The hand seemed to me a very proper antithetic recompense for the foot (Gautier, 15).

His request directly responds to the very core of his existential presencing, with specific intent on representing his ultimate authority and immediate action by joining the pharaohs and kings' council, through a union with the pharaoh's daughter. Although in the protagonist's waking-reality the ancient Egyptian civilization should be long dead and nonexistent, the pharaoh and the princess with their world are projected in the dream-reality as resiliently and immortally alive through their ideal of life after death. This, for the protagonist, represents his ultimate aim, if capable of establishing an immortal link with them, he will have eternally guaranteed his continuous subjective presencing. He therefore spontaneously requests what he believes is his existential right, his choice to sustain his presencing in the world of immortal pharaohs, by requesting the hand of his daughter.

Although princess Hermonthis approves of the match, it is however ridiculed and denied by her father. The pharaoh states:

> If you were even only two thousand years old […] I would willingly give you the princess, but the disproportion is too great; and, besides, we must give our daughters husbands who will last well. You do not know how to preserve yourselves any longer. Even those who died only fifteen centuries ago are already no more than a handful of dust. Behold, my flesh is solid as basalt, my bones are bars of steel! I will be present on the last day of the world with the same body and the same features which I had during my lifetime. My daughter Hermonthis will last longer than a statue of bronze. Then the last particles of your dust will have been scattered abroad by the winds (Gautier,15).

The societal preservation that the pharaoh claims his kingdom has eternally acquired and immortally maintains, in comparison to the state of psychological death in life that the protagonist's society exhibits on the one hand projects the reality of nineteenth century France. It also directly addresses the protagonist's existential concern and fear of reduction to nonexistence in both realities; the waking and the dream world. Hence, the refusal of the match between the protagonist and the princess is justified. As a result, the pharaoh's refusal translates the protagonist's struggle against societal confinement, limiting his creative potential and subjectivity in his waking-reality. On the other hand, his daughter's approval of the match projects the protagonist's conscious realization of his existential presencing and his right to ultimate freedom, thus, projecting the possibility, in the protagonist's sub-conscious, of proving his continuous existential presencing in his dream.

The protagonist is then forced out of his dream-reality back to his waking-reality by the violent shake of his friend waking him up, in the intent of reducing him to nonexistence, as he is not given the chance to affect instant action with the pharaoh. Nevertheless, upon awaking, the protagonist finds the "little green paste idol [that was around her neck,] left […] by the Princess" on his desk instead of her foot (Gautier, 18). This does not merely prove the intertwining of the dream and waking realities, nor does it only project his attempt to presencing in both realities, but more so suggests the possibility of affecting future existential action upon return to his dream-reality. This

realization manifests the conclusion he otherwise would not have reached in the waking-state, that of perseverance in proving one's existential presencing in different creative forms and realities.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the possibility of proving one's existential presencing in the dream-world from the perspective of a Surrealist utilization of the dream-reality in the waking-state. The close relationship that the waking and dream realities have, from a psychoanalytical perspective, allows enough space to continue one's existential presencing, commencing in the waking-state, and continuing in the dream-world, onto its return to the waking-state. The princess in the protagonist's dream clearly projects his ideal state of existential presencing. By insisting to become one with her, he undoubtedly attempts to affect continuous existential action to sustain his meaning in the world. The fact that the pharaoh refuses the union between the protagonist and the princess, in addition to the protagonist's friend waking him up from his dream, seem to project an immediate reduction to nonexistence. Nevertheless, with the mere fact that an object from the protagonist's dream-reality is transported back with him, not merely to his first setting within the context of his dream, but rather back to his waking-reality, is a metaphorical representation of the protagonist's determination not to give up on his existential presencing, especially that the object belongs to the princess, the clear representation of himself.

The limitation of the possibility of affecting true existential action that would prove the presencing of an individual, forces him to employ other means by which to give meaning to his being in the world. Therefore, exiting one's current setting in the waking-state, by transcending time and place, may be possible in the dream-reality. Gautier's specific choice of Ancient Egyptian ideal of life after death, opens inexhaustible horizons to possibilities of existential thought. This perspective will be explored in the near future, especially within the context of nineteenth century French society, which then hadmarked the birth of Egyptomology.

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