Sigmund Freud “The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming,” 1908 "Der Dichter und das Phantasieren" —["Phantasieren" = imagination, fantasy, creative thought. It is not limited to "day-dreaming," as the English translation suggests. All forms of imaginative thought are liberated from rational oversight and reality-testing.] R. Gray lecture notes.

1. How does the poet [artist] come by his material?
   1. How can he arouse these emotions in us?
   2. Poets do not explain it.
   3. We know that not even the clearest insight into the factors conditioning the choice of material will make us writers.
   4. But this does not detract from our interest.
2. Can we find an activity in ourselves which is similar to writing?
   1. If so we could gain insight into the creative powers of imaginative writers.
   2. Writers assure us that every man is at heart a poet.
3. Look to the child for the first traces of imaginative activity.
   1. The child’s best loved activity is play, and at play he acts like an imaginative writer, creating a world of his own, or rearranging the things of the world to please himself.
   2. He takes this world seriously, expending much emotion on it.
   3. The opposite of play is not the serious but reality.
   4. There is “affective cathexis” [investment of mental or emotional energy in a person, object, or idea] in this playworld.
   5. The child borrows the objects imagined from the tangible world, which distinguishes his play from day-dreaming.
4. The writer does the same: creates a world of phantasy, which he takes seriously and invests with feeling.
   1. Language shows this: some kinds of imaginative creation are called “plays.”
   2. Unreality of the poetic world has consequences for technique: many things which produce no pleasure in real life can do so in a play.
5. The adult may remember his serious child’s play and manage to “throw off the heavy burden of life and obtain the great pleasure of humor.”
6. People as they grow up cease to play and appear to give up that pleasure.
   1. But it is extremely difficult to give up a pleasure once tasted: we can only exchange one thing for something else, adopt a substitute.
   2. A grown-up only gives up connection of play to real objects: instead he creates phantasy, day-dreams.
   3. Most do so as long as they live: but this fact overlooked.
7. These phantasies are less easy to observe than play.
   1. The adult is ashamed of his day-dreams and conceals them.
   2. He cherishes them as intimate.
   3. He may not realize everyone else does this.
   4. Day-dreaming is a continuation of play, but the behaviors are different based on different motives.
8. The play of children is determined by their wishes, the one wish to be grown-up, and he plays at this: he imitates the adult life.
   1. The adult knows he is not expected to play any longer.
   2. He is ashamed of his phantasies as being childish.
9. Some, by necessity, neurotics, have to confess their phantasies to a physician, which is our best source of knowledge even of healthy phantasy.
10. Characteristics of day-dreaming.
    1. Happy people never make phantasies, only unsatisfied ones.
    2. Every phantasy contains a fulfillment of a wish in relation to unsatisfied reality.
    3. Either they are ambitious or erotic wishes.
    4. In young women erotic wishes dominate, in young men egoistic wishes.
    5. These trends are often united: the male dreamer often performs heroic deeds for a woman.
    6. Both young man and young woman must suppress their desires.
11. Phantasies are related to time: it is linked with some current impression which has the power to arouse intense desire, to memory of an early experience, generally in infancy, in which the wish is fulfilled, and creates a future situation in which the wish is fulfilled: past, present and future are threaded together.
12. A poor orphan lad imagines himself pleasing his new employer, marrying the daughter, regaining a protecting home and loving parents.
13. If phantasies become over powerful neurosis or psychosis may result.
14. Our nocturnal dreams are such phantasies as we can make clear by interpreting them.
    1. At night, wishes of which we are ashamed become active in us. Repressed, they are pushed into the unconscious.
    2. They can achieve expression only when completely disguised.
    3. Science [i.e. psychoanalytic theory] elucidates the distortion of dreams: they are fulfillments of desires as day-dreams are.
15. Should we dare to compare the imaginative poet to a daydreamer?
16. Two kinds of poets: the poets who created epics and tragedies worked with ready-made materials. Others work spontaneously.
    1. We will limit ourselves to the latter, and to the ones not highly esteemed, the less pretentious and more popular writers of romances and other novels.
    2. All such writings have a hero for whom the writer evokes sympathy and who is protected by providence: e.g. in hairbreadth escapes.
    3. The reader follows the hero with a feeling of security just as a real hero feels secure in saving a drowning man.
    4. Nothing can happen to me!
    5. The Ego is the hero of all day-dreams and novels.
17. Egocentrics stories: the women invariably fall in love with the hero.
    1. People are divided into good and bad, the good ones help the hero.
18. Many imaginative products travel far from the day-dream, but I surmise they can be brought in relationship by transitions.
    1. Even in “psychological novels” one person is described from within.
    2. The writer here splits up the ego into components.
    3. In “excentric” novels the hero plays the least active part, a mere observer.
19. The insight from the similarity to day-dreams leads to this: “Some actual experience which made a strong impression on the writer had stirred up a memory of an earlier experience, generally belonging to childhood, which then arouses a wish that finds a fulfillment in the work in question, and in which elements of the recent event and the old memory should be discernible.”
20. This formula may provide a first approach to the issue.
    1. The hypothesis is that imaginative creation is a continuation of, and substitute for, the play of childhood.
21. The kind of work that remakes ready-made material derived from racial myths and fairy-tales seems distorted vestiges of wish-phantasies of whole nations.
22. We haven’t touched on the means which writers use to achieve those emotional reactions in us.
    1. When we hear the phantasies of the day-dreamer they repel us, but a literary play doe s not: the art is in overcoming our feeling of repulsion.
    2. The writer softens the egotistical character of the day-dream and
    3. He bribes us by offering a purely formal aesthetic pleasure in the presentation of these phantasies.
    4. This is an incitement pleasure, a fore-pleasure used to release underlying tensions in a greater pleasure.
    5. We enjoy our daydreams without reproach.