

# Minding Dolls



# Minding Dolls:

*An Exercise in Archetype  
and Ideal*

By

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**For *Beresa***



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations .....	ix
List of Tables .....	xi
Acknowledgements .....	xiii
Introduction .....	1
Where Do I <i>Keep</i> My Doll? (Cognitive Wholeness as a Personal Need)	
Chapter One.....	3
Imagination Realm	
Conclusion.....	81
Where Do I Keep My Doll? (Cognitive Wholeness as a Personal Need)	
Bibliography .....	87





## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1.1 *Hylas and the Nymphs* by John William Waterhouse, Public Domain
- 1.2 *A Possible Nymphet*, Courtesy of Laura Galic
- 1.3 “*Lo*” *Sweet* / “*Lo*” *Sexy*, Courtesy of Florence & George Publishers
- 1.4 *A Humanoid Face of Betty Boop*, Courtesy of Emereo Publishing
- 1.5 *A China Doll Effect* by Koitsukihime
- 1.6 *An Advertisement for Living Doll Perfume Oil*, Courtesy of Mara Fox
- 1.7 *Prince Miraflor* by Kay Nielsen, Public Domain



# LIST OF TABLES

1-1 *Light and Shadow* Dimensions of Each of Six Goddess Archetypes



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## On “*Dollatry*”

*We must specialize in describing...doll-love, for there are many varieties...*

—Mrs. F. Nevill Jackson  
(From the book, *Dolls and Why*  
*We Love Them*, 2000)

*....even one that, by its nature, inhabits the imagination  
without having a 3-dimensional body*





# INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

## WHERE DO I *KEEP* MY DOLL? (COGNITIVE WHOLENESS AS A PERSONAL NEED)

*In an issue of **Discover** magazine (July/August 2012), writer Sherry Baker describes five categories of out-of-body experience that are now being studied in cognitive neuroscientific laboratories using up-to-date virtual technology. One such category, titled “Become a Living Doll”, includes studies that strategically use an 11.5 inch Barbie doll and a 13-foot-tall mannequin. Baker describes the conduct of some of these studies headed by neuroscientist Henrik Ehrsson of the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm:*

*...participants wore head-mounted displays connected to two video cameras... the subjects were positioned in beds on their backs while two cameras sent them images of a tiny doll or an oversized mannequin lying on a bed next to them. The cameras assumed the same perspective as the person, looking down at the doppelganger. When test participants gazed through their video-connected goggles toward their feet, therefore, their bodies appeared to be the size and shape of the artificial one nearby. A researcher stroked the fake body with a rod while softly touching the real body of the volunteer in exactly the same way. Participants quickly got the bizarre feeling that they were inhabiting the body of the small doll or the large mannequin (2012: 55).*

*In addition,*

*He measured the volunteers’ evoked skin-conductance response...while they observed someone threatening or cutting the doll with a knife. Skin conductance rose in step with the apparent level of threat, just as it does when a person faces a genuine possibility of physical harm (2012: 55).*

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<sup>1</sup> From the book *Being Doll* (2013), by Lisa Pavlik-Malone.

*Baker then explains what Ehrsson believes to be possible future “practical uses” of systematically facilitating such “out-of-body illusions”. For instance, “...they might one day allow a surgeon to feel as if he or she were inhabiting a microscopic medical robot, directing operations inside the human patient. Or a worker might project himself into a giant robot, maneuvering it as if it were his own body to make repairs at a nuclear power plant” (Baker, 2012: 55).*

*Based on experimental results gleaned from Ehrsson’s studies, it seems possible that self exists somewhere in between the object and the body. As Baker states, “The brain’s tendency to bind what the eyes see to what the body feels is so powerful...” (2012: 52); indeed, subjective experience of self as “the object” may happen not only systematically, but also spontaneously. Through a strong human need for “wholeness” or consonance, one can “bind” self, using tactile dynamics, “gut” feelings (also known as intuition) and emotional reactions, to the (doll) object impersonal, during experimentation. However, this same need may, in essence, drive intuition and emotions towards “my” doll in an increasingly personal, intra-subjective sense i.e., my physical object, my objectified being, my personified idea. Thus, this “added” experience of being “my” doll specifically, may also reside in that “in between” space, where complex dynamics of memory, those of internalized notions and ideas (of opposites such as young and old, for instance), as well as powers of artistic expression, also inhabit.*

# CHAPTER ONE

## IMAGINATION REALM

Thus, to reiterate (from the Introduction), that an “in-between” space or realm may be where—as well as suggesting in what ways—one’s mind wanders, when one has an out-of-body experience of “self as doll”. As was also mentioned (in the Introduction), part of generating the said “space” presumably involves the “complex dynamics of memory”. Indeed, this may be so, whether one becomes the doll object experimentally (van der Hoort, Guterstam and Ehrsson, 2011; Petkova and Ehrsson, 2008, The Quantum Leap Effect), or whether one comes to know the doll object as intimately tied to one’s self. As part of both instances, memory may interplay with sensory experience and sense-of-self in ways which bootstrap one’s imagination towards that which is evermore personal and increasingly intra-subjective. In their 2013 experiments on memory, researchers Bergouignan, Nyberg, and Ehrsson, were able to facilitate out-of-body experiences in their participants. In his March 11, 2014 blog, writer Ed Yong states:

Ehrsson’s team at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm specializes in studying our sense of self, by creating simple yet spectacular illusions that subvert our everyday experiences....with just a few rods, a virtual reality headset, and a camera, Ehrsson can give people an out-of-body experience or convince them that they’ve swapped bodies with a mannequin or another person. (2014: 7).

Loretxu Bergouignan joined Ehrsson’s team in 2009. She had been studying memory. She wanted to know whether sense of self is important for encoding experience. After all, we take in all the events of our lives from outside our own bodies. As Bergouignan writes, “There is always an ‘I’ that experiences the original event, and an ‘I’ that re-experiences the event during the act of remembering.” If she put someone through an out-of-body illusion, could they still make new memories? Is that first-person perspective of the world important for storing information about it?” (2014: 7). These scientists found that having an out-of-body illusion

during a somewhat unusual social encounter, negatively influenced how well the volunteers remembered the information. Yong writes:

Once the volunteers were under, an eccentric professor, really an actor, entered and asked them questions about the material they had learned. He was scripted to be eccentric and memorable. He punctuated his questions with random monologues, bizarre provocative statements, and personal asides. (2014: 8)

A week later, the volunteers returned to the lab, and Bergouignan asked them about their experience with the professor. This was the real memory test...The volunteers who experience the out-of-body illusions were uniformly worse at recalling the details of the day than those who interacted with the professor from their usual in-body perspectives. (ibid., 8)

The out-of-body illusion wasn't more distracting; under its influence, the volunteers were just as good at simple mental tasks as they normally were. And it wasn't just bizarre and off-putting either; after all, we're "better" at remembering bizarre events than everyday ones. Instead, the illusion seemed to hamper memories by taking volunteers out of their normal perspective. (ibid., 9)

Bergouignan supported this view by placing some of her volunteers in a brain-scanner. She was especially interested in the hippocampus, a seahorse-shaped region...that acts as a funnel between our experiences and our memories. It binds information from our senses and emotions into cohesive forms that can be stored, and then helps to reactivate that stored information when we want to remember something. (ibid., 9)

Because the brains of the out-of-body volunteers showed increasingly greater electrochemical activity in the hippocampus during subsequent attempts to remember the events (while the in-body volunteers showed the opposite, which was greater electrochemical activity coinciding with the first attempt to remember the events), Ehrsson concluded that "...without the first-person perspective, the hippocampus can't encode experiences in its usual coordinated way, and volunteers end up with fragmented memories that they struggle to recall. And as they struggle...they could be creating false memories." (ibid., 9)

This is a good example of embodied cognition, where basic aspects of our bodies like sensory information can influence "higher" mental skills like our memories... says Ehrsson, "You need to have that experience of the world to encode and recall your own memories. (ibid., 10)

Hence, if this is so, where engagement in the “outer” world is concerned, might it also be the case that certain mental structures and mental processes, which are part and parcel of the “inner” world or intra-subjective space of the mind, have a significant influence on the encoding and recall of personal memories? For this study, a detailed look at, or characterization of, the “inner” experience of “dollification”, may shed some light on the psychologically complex nature of the imagination realm in the formation of private experience.

### **First-person Perspective: The “Doll Object Experience” as Intimately Tied to Self**

In her books, *Dolls & Clowns & Things* (2011) and *Being Doll* (2013), Pavlik-Malone introduces a theoretical model for understanding the symbolic relationship between the self and the object, which includes an exploration of the classical term *dollification* (coined by Ellis and Hall, 1896). This imaginative act “...refers to the personified experience through an intermediary object—a doll—of which the subject symbolically becomes; in other words, through the eyes of the self, the subject is dollified” (Pavlik-Malone, 2011: xxii). Therefore, in doing so “...this ‘doll’ gives opportunities that ‘playing with dolls’ potentially affords, to try on or explore various personas, identities, and ideas” (Pavlik-Malone, 2011: xxii)”. At its core, the model includes three categories of human experience namely, “My Physical Object” (in which the “object” is an inanimate coveted thing, such as a stick, that acts as a doll or plaything for a player), “My Objectified Being” (in which the “object” is a living, sentient being, whose physical beauty stirs the imagination process in an admirer to such an extent that she becomes a symbolic object for him, into which his desired thoughts, feelings, and behaviors involving her are projected), and “My Personified Idea” (in which, through the imagination process, a three-dimensional being or doll is created, which may be regarded as both an object (non-living artistic entity) as well as a surrogate subject (a material incarnation that, in some way(s), reflects the creator’s “core” identity or “inner” self).

This study will focus exclusively on the second category “My Objectified Being”. In doing so, it is important to initially describe some of the basic ideas expressed within an essay in *Dolls & Clowns & Things* entitled ““They’re All of Them So Lovely’: Semantic Effects of Dollification on Figurative Images of Women”. In it, Pavlik-Malone refers to the beginning lines of a poem about dolls written primarily for children, “They’re all of them so lovely/It’s very hard to choose,/I like that dark-

haired beauty,/with scarlet coat and shoes./The golden-haired is sweeter,/her eyes are just sky-blue..." (Deming-Moore, 2000: 4); however, the poems analyzed in the essay express a content that caters to adult imagination and experience. Both "lovely" dancers and "lovely" wives become dollified objects for "their" male poets, as conveyed by the figurative imagery in each poem. Pavlik-Malone writes:

Lakoff and Johnson have asserted the inseparable nature of the subject and the object...This kind of reality may not only exist in the physical world between subject and object, but also in literary genres such as poetry where imaginary, figurative, and idiosyncratic realities flourish between the subject and "object of interest" or "object of desire." (2011: 4)

In an unpublished manuscript, Gibbs has described embodied cognition as it relates to metaphoric thought. He writes, "metaphoric thought is accomplished by embodied simulation," people construct image-schematic understandings of various concepts and abstract situations...what it must feel like for their own bodies to engage in a particular action...These embodied simulations are essential parts of how people conceptualize ideas and events..." (2-3) Also, Robertson has stated, "...our relationship with certain things can get very personal: we give them identifies and draw them into our social relations..." (ibid., 117)

Thus, a subject found to be physically appealing in some way or ways may become "dollified" when desirable human psychic qualities are projected onto her by an admirer. This admirer projects a psychological profile onto her in order to establish certain social and emotional relations between the self and "the doll" that is highly personal. (ibid., 5)

In the current study, symbolic patterns are explored between female characters in poetry and their admirers (the poets) who "dollify" them. The content of various figurative images is examined to show how admirers, through dollification, create certain social and emotional experiences between the self and their female characters, making them "lovely" in their own eyes. (ibid., 5)

The following are two examples of poems analyzed in the essay, one of a (certain) dancer and one of a (certain) wife.

### A (Certain) Dancer

In *I Knew A Woman* (1958), the admirer creates an erotic encounter with a beautiful woman in the lines, "*how well her wishes went/She stroked my chin,/She taught me to turn, and Counter-turn, and stand;/She taught me Touch, that undulant white skin.../Loves like a gander, and adores a*

*goose:/Her full lips pursed, the errant note of seize;/My eyes, they dazzled at her flowing knees;/Her several parts could keep a pure repose...*" The admirer notes the soft yet vibrant look of her skin as she moves, and the fullness of her morphing lips; both qualities convey the ethereal beauty of a doll that captivates because she want to dance. Thus, she has intent that subverts a "passive femininity" as she leads the way and hopes that "her wishes go well". The admirer's possible want of this "feminine dynamism" in domestic life is suggested in the following lines, *"She was the sickle; I, poor I, was the rake;/Coming behind her for her pretty sake/(But what prodigious mowing we did make)"* (Pavlik-Malone, 2011: 7).

### A (Certain) Wife

In *The Young Housewife* (1935), the admirer creates a fleeting encounter with a married young woman. She is "doll-like" in her persona of innocence and purity with an unassuming "twist" of sex appeal. *"At ten A.M. the young housewife/moves about in negligee behind/the wooden walls of her husband's house./ I pass solitary in my car;/Then again she comes to the curb/to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands/she, uncorseted, tucking in strands of hair..."* When the admirer sees her "again come to the curb" and compares her to a "fallen leaf", her power to seduce makes her suddenly seem less passive in her admirer's eyes. *"The noiseless wheels of my car/rush with a crackling sound over/dried leaves as I bow and smile while passing."* (Pavlik-Malone, 2011: 7-8).

Note that in both of these instances of dollification, certain (presumably) desirable physical characteristics are part of the admirer's very personal imaginative experience, such as *soft, vibrant skin* in the former poem, and the quality of "younghness" in the latter one. These characteristics may even act as "cognitive springboards" that, when instantaneously picked up as (sexually) reproductive signals in the admirer's subconscious, mentally orient him (or her) towards an object of interest or attraction (even when such an "object" is otherwise a "subject" or human being). These sensations and perceptions resonate in the subconscious, to produce nuanced internal experiences that incorporate personal desires, memories, and private understandings; in other words, it is an *even more* intra-subjective "male gaze" (a term coined by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in 1975, to describe the depiction of women as objects of male sexual and erotic desire in art and cinema) for at least two reasons. Firstly, because this kind of "gaze" which this author will characterize here as "gazing at my doll" is much more *inwardly staged*, if you will; in other words, its imagery is meant to be cast as an essentially, private experience, belonging only to the admirer, which may or may not be shared. And secondly, this is so because the individual admirer, less influenced by

narrative hegemonic reinforcements, is more free to create, and revel in, a sensual or erotic image of woman that is more personally authentic or reflective of his (or her) individualistic, even idiosyncratic, needs, wants, and desires.

In her classic essay on the male gaze, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1999), Mulvey states:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups, to strip-tease, from Ziegfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire. (ibid., 837)

Additionally, Mulvey emphasizes the presentation of woman as an, essentially, blatant distraction or even a highly meaningful one, that is meant to play off of the cohesive flow of the narrative of the male protagonist.

The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normative narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of the story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation...As Bud Boetticher puts it... “What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents...the love or fear she inspires in the hero...In herself the woman has not the slightest importance.” (ibid., 837)

***A Passive, and Not So Passive, Femininity.*** In her 2011 essay “They’re All of Them So Lovely”, Pavlik-Malone includes the phrase “passive femininity”, a term introduced by anthropologist A. F. Robertson in his 2004 book *Life Like Dolls*, to characterize the general allure of real (female) dolls.

...A. F. Robertson studied the adjectives used in 247 advertisements for porcelain collector dolls. His analyses showed that *female* dolls are generally described as “beautiful”, “pure”, “dainty”, “hopeful”, and “serene”—adjectives, he says, that suggest a “passive femininity” (2004: 129). Indeed, taken together, these words seem to convey a *lack of power* over another that is unintended, but expected, and even desirable. (ibid., 3)



Indeed, “passive femininity” has been a desired characteristic of the “female as object” projected onto female *porcelain* dolls. This is also true of female *paper* dolls. In their new book *Paper Dolls: Fragile Figures, Enduring Symbols* (2017), authors Katherine H. Adams and Michael L. Keene describe how the paper doll has served as a symbol for “the male desire for the not real”.

As a modern symbol of male attitudes toward women, the power of the paper doll began with a song. In lyrics...that would be recorded over and over again in an array of media, the paper doll has stood for the male desire for the perfect woman, for something not quite real at all...In this song, the narrator thus concentrates on this desire to possess the paper doll, a simplistic version of loveliness and passivity...

*I'm gonna buy a Paper Doll I can call my own  
A doll that other fellows cannot steal  
And then the flirty, flirty guys with their flirty eyes  
Will have to flirt with dollies that are real...*

*I guess I had a million dolls or more-or-less  
I guess I've played the doll game o'er and o'er  
I just quarreled with Sue, that's why I'm blue  
She's gone away and left me like all dolls do.*

*I tell you boys, it's tough to be alone  
And it's tough to love a doll that's not your own  
I'm through with all of them  
I'll never ball again  
Say boy, whatcha gonna do?*

*When I come home at night she will be waiting  
She'll be the truest doll in all the world  
I'd rather have a paper doll to call my own  
Than have a fickle-minded real live girl.  
(ibid., 133-134)*

(Lyrics by Johnny Black)

In addition, with regard to this song, these authors explain:

Beginning right after the Mills Brothers' recording came out, the song became a part of many sound tracks for films about the home front during World War II. In 1944, for example, in *Cowboy Canteen*, about men in a theatrical troupe vacationing at the Lazy B Ranch, where they compete for the same seemingly perfect woman, the Mills Brothers sang the song,

appearing as part of the revue cast. That same year, in *Two Girls and a Sailor*, about two vaudevillians, played by June Allyson and Gloria DeHaven, Lena Horne sang the song even though she felt inappropriate doing so, “it’s a boy song.” After the war, this popular song remained as a symbol of the time. It appeared, for example, in 1974’s *The Execution of Private Slovik*, a television show about a man executed by the army in 1945 for desertion, and in 2007’s *A World without War*, a television documentary mini-series concerning World War II’s immediate aftermath. (ibid., 134-135)

These song lyrics would also enter plays and films, including recent ones, to evoke not just a time period but the view of women in the song. Like Johnny Black’s lyrics, many of these works contrast expectations and realities, with a focus on what men would like to require. (ibid., 135)

Besides these several ideas and examples, there may, indeed, be instances which illustrate the converse of the psychological transition from *human* doll to fake one. In such cases, passive femininity may become real femininity (which often is not so passive), in the mind of a man who projects such a persona onto a doll. A prime example of this is portrayed in the 2007 film *Lars and the Real Girl*. In it, Ryan Gosling plays a romantically shy insecure young man named *Lars Lindstrom*, who purchases a life-sized doll on an adult website. He names her *Bianca*, and through his delusional interactions with her which involve Bianca as his girlfriend e.g., when they quarrel, he can eventually emotionally “let go” of her. By that time, he is emotionally ready to become the boyfriend to a “real girl” named *Margo*, a young woman in the office where he works, who has hinted to Lars, repeatedly, of her romantic interest him. Even the psychiatrist *Dagmar Berman*, played by Patricia Clarkson, whom Lars’ family consults because they are concerned about his “strange” behavior involving the doll, explains to them that, right now, he needs Bianca in his life to help him psychologically work something out. The point here, is that, regardless of the many men who may dream of possessing a paper doll-like girl/woman instead of a human one, there exist, still, many individual instances, where this may not be the case. Besides delusional dynamics, dissonance/consonance dynamics may fuel this contrasting desire. In her 2013 book *Being Doll*, Pavlik-Malone writes:

Part of Cognitive Dissonance theory is its opposite referred to as *cognitive consonance*, which involves “...a situation in which cognitive elements are consistent with one another, that is, one cognitive element follows from or is implied by another” (APA, 2007: 188). Thus, as an internal feeling of dissonance presumably includes physiological changes in the body

associated with anxiety, i.e., increased heart rate and breathing, as well as being linked to the motivational drive to reduce this psychological state of inconsistency, an internal feeling of consonance may be associated with emergent inner harmony and calm, i.e., decreased heart rate and breathing, that is fueled by a motivation or desire to achieve understanding. (ibid., 4)

Thus, it is possible, in at least some cases, that an admirer might look upon hegemonic cinematic images of women with anxiety and dissonance rather than with satisfaction and consonance, since such images portray woman as highly *passive* in her femininity, specifically in the sense that, “as Laura Mulvey states,” she is “...simultaneously looked at and displayed...with appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so...to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*”. For this kind of admirer, the inner, private, and personal “gazing at my doll” experience can bring satisfaction and consonance to one's sensual and sexual being-ness. An example of such a crystallized moment exists in the poem “I Knew A Woman”, in which the admirer, in the midst of focusing intensely on certain pleasing physical attributes of his-doll-in-the-making, i.e., “*that undulant white skin*”, imaginatively uses them as points of departure for characterizing her *active* and *assertive* sexuality, i.e., “*She taught me Touch, that undulant white skin*”.

The nature of such kinds of highly personal imaginative moments necessarily includes neuro-cognitive dynamics which contribute to their creation. In his book *Fire in the Crucible* (1990), author John Briggs, with reference to his consultations with physician William Gray and scientist Paul LaViolette, writes:

According to Gray...thoughts and memories may be coded or logged in the brain according to their “emotional nuances or feeling tones.”

Feelings are basic...anger, rejection, fear, loss, joy, astonishment. Between and among these are a huge variety of possible shades and combinations: nuances. (ibid., 48)

Furthermore, Briggs describes the possible role of nuance cycles in generating highly personal thoughts, in which current perceptions coalesce with emotional nuances or feeling tones. These cycles roam about the limbic system in two rotations or “loops”. He writes:

Loop 1: ...raw sense data pass through the thalamus into the limbic system where they circulate around and around in what is called the Papez circuit, a closed-loop network of neurons connecting the limbic organs...there they trigger feeling-tone responses and generate what Gray and LaViolette call an emotional “theme”...composed of an organized pattern of feeling tones...

Loop 2: ...the “theme”...enters a second loop communicating between portions of the thalamus and the prefrontal regions of the cortex...this loop abstracts and filters out certain nuances and amplifies them...and reintroduces them into the Papez circuit...

With each cycling through the prefrontal cortex, the idea...might be abstracted and amplified...The result would be a thought...The nuances, the complex of emotion and perception are still there, but they now lie in the shadow of this abstraction. (ibid., 52-55)

Note, that this paradigmatic stance, differs, at least to some extent, from a culturally predominant one. In her 2017 book *Play With Me: Dolls, Women, and Art*, for instance, author/editor Grace Banks interviews Turkish artist *Kezban Arca Batibeki* who states:

In Turkey, as is probably the case in many countries in the world, male hege-mony works on the expectation that women should be like dolls... in developing countries like Turkey, wedding plans for women are made as soon as they are born, and women are brought up to attract the appreciation of men ...As the woman loses her true identity and turns into an object, she ends up becoming a mere image. (ibid., 78)

Developing identity is difficult for women in Turkey. There's a constant push to become an object, to become a dollification of herself. (ibid., 81)

In the above case of the dancer, her “*undulant white skin*” and her “*full lips pursed*” are examples of the admirer’s perceptions (or “raw sense data”) of her which enter his thalamus, then enter the Papez circuit where they begin to gel with his nuances or feeling tones. As implied above, these feeling tones take the form of various “subtle shades and combinations” of basic emotions in the individual. These subconscious and nuanced emotional patterns become organized into “themes” that tend to be highly personal or idiosyncratic, within the Papez circuit. As these neuro-cognitive energy flows make their way repeatedly through the prefrontal cortex, their subtle psychological structures become increasingly couched in linguistic abstractions of conscious thought, i.e., “*undulant white skin*” and “*full lips pursed*”. These developing subtleties, such as whether or to what degree her skin is white, and whether or to what degree her lips are full, become part of the fantasy that the admirer “sees” through the filtered lenses of his own eyes, which have neuro-cognitive connections to both his prefrontal cortex and within the Papez circuit of his limbic system. These interconnected brain/eye pathways seem to function as one

synchronized unit creating for the admirer, a very personal and private phenomenological experience. Briggs writes, “These emotional-cognitive structures become organizationally closed when the richness of their nuances is summarized by a simpler emotional response (such as liking blondes)...” (1990: 50). Or, in the case of the dancer’s admirer, his liking for white skin and full lips.

***The desire-emotion complex.*** The private experiences of literary writers and readers, may be essentially the same in some ways, as those of adults (and of children, for that matter) when they daydream. This may be because in all three of these activities, the individual is often highly motivated (such urges are largely generated by neural circuitry in the limbic system which processes pleasure and reward) to make new meaning through his or her conscious and subconscious thoughts, feelings, and memories. In his recent book titled, *At the Borders of Sleep: On Liminal Literature* (2012), English professor Peter Schwenger writes:

The “liminal literature” of my subtitle...is not just a certain body of writing that deals with states at the threshold of sleep though it is that, of course. It is also literature in general, considered under its liminal aspects. While reading, the mind moves in many directions simultaneously; remembering the text, anticipating the text to come, plumbing the implications of what is beneath the reader’s eye at the moment. At the same time, the mind is moving within itself to produce a rich flickering of associations and images. These arise not directly from the text but from a realm notoriously difficult to define that is more akin to a dream than to waking processes of meaning making. To characterize the reading of a literary text as either a fully conscious or rational activity or an immersion into a dream is at either extreme to distort the experience. Literature is liminal; and it is so for the reader and the writer. (2012: xii)

Indeed, might it be that the dream-like wave of experience registered hazily in consciousness is generated, at least in part, by the nuances or feeling tones (which organize as “themes”) within the Papez circuit? And might the “fully conscious” or “rational activity” of giving linguistically creative meaning to private desires and emotions (through both writing and reading a piece of literature), be generated, in part, by neuro-cognitive energy rotations through the prefrontal cortex? Like the mind of a writer seemingly immersed in a daydream about a woman, as well as the mind of a reader of such a poem, the mind of an individual immersed in a daydream or fantasy might therefore also use this synchronized, “desire-emotion complex” (Pavlik-Malone: 2011) to make a new meaning of a highly personal nature. In this case, however, the kind of new meaning generated in the daydreamer is a symbolic entity that is, unlike a story or a

poem, non-externalized.

Some recent studies on desire, lend support to this “rational/dream-like” internal dynamic. In their article titled, “Desire: The New Hot Spot in Self-control Research” (2012), authors Hofmann and Van Dillen define desire as “...an affectively charged motivation toward a certain object, person, or activity that is associated with pleasure or relief from displeasure” (see Kavanagh, Andrade, & May, 2005)... “Desire is the feeling of wanting to have or do something, and thus motivates behavior” (2012: 317). These researchers continue to describe theoretical ideas and empirical findings which cognitively link “desire” with both “temptation” and self-regulatory or meta-cognitive control.

In contrast to general motives, desires are “about” certain objects or people. Desires vary in strength and therefore in their potential to motivate behavior. Whether a given desire turns into a temptation and thus enters the sphere of self-control, depends on whether the behavior implied by the desire conflicts with a person’s values or self-regulatory goals (Hofmann, Baumeister, Forster, & Vohs, 2012). For instance, there is nothing wrong with savoring a delicious cake unless you are on a diet. (*ibid.*, 317-318)

Hofmann and his colleagues introduce their “Dynamical Model of Desire”:

The model is dynamical in the sense that a person’s current level of desire and the desire’s potential to influence behavior are assumed to fluctuate systematically, depending on (a) the interaction of external and internal factors that determine the strength of the affective reward signal assigned to desirable stimuli, (b) the extent to which desire gains access to working memory (and thus becomes a conscious experience), (c) the extent to which iterative processing causes desire to gain further clout in working memory, and (d) the extent to which each of these three mechanisms is offset by powerful attentional distractors or inhibiting mechanisms involved in down-regulating desire or preventing it from emerging into consciousness in the first place. (*ibid.*, 317-318)

In a nutshell, desire originates in a relatively automatic manner as reward-processing centers in the brain evaluate external stimuli (or mental images) against a background of internal need states (e.g., hunger, thirst, substance deprivation) and an individual’s learning history (i.e., the feelings that an individual has come to associate with certain consummatory behaviors, such as feeling relaxation after a drink; Hofmann et al., 2009)...even in the absence of conscious awareness. (Winkielman, Berridge, & Wilbarger, 2005) (Hofmann and Van Dillen, 2012: 318)