Los Angeles psychoanalyst James S. Grotstein refers to himself as a Kleinian. He was initially trained in the classical tradition of American ego psychology; but when Wilfred Bion taught at the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute, Grotstein sought supervision with him. Because Bion believed that only the person who was in the room with a patient could possibly know how best to respond, he treated Grotstein as a colleague rather than as a supervisee. Finding Bion’s supervision disappointing, Grotstein chose instead to learn from Bion by being re-analyzed by him (Grotstein, 2002). Grotstein is a versatile, prolific, and highly original contributor to many different aspects of psychoanalysis. My present concern with his mysticism addresses only a portion of his oeuvre.

THE INTELLIGENT CREATIVITY OF THE DREAM

Grotstein’s approach to the mystical had its basis in the following dream. Grotstein (1981b) reported:

When I was a second year medical student I had a dream the night before the final examination in pharmacology which I remember across the years as follows: the setting was a bleak piece of moorland in the Scottish Highlands engulfed by a dense fog. A small portion of the fog slowly cleared and an angel appeared surrealistically asking, “Where is James Grotstein?” The voice was solemn and litanical. The fog slowly re-enveloped her form as if she had never existed or spoken. Then, as if part of a prearranged pageant, the fog cleared again but now some distance away, at a higher promontory where a rocky crag appeared from the cloud bank revealing another angel who, in response to the first angel’s question, answered as follows: “He is aloft, contemplating the dosage of sorrow upon the Earth.” (p. 359)

Grotstein reacted to his dream as do many people who have religious or mystical experiences or who know the “aha!” experience of creative
inspiration. He knew that he could not have produced the experience by himself. The dream exhibited features that were beyond the powers that he attributed to his sense of self. Grotstein (1981b) wrote: “I was deeply impressed, mystified, and bewildered. I knew that I had experienced the dream, but I did not know who wrote it. I wanted desperately to be introduced to the writer who could write those lines” (p. 359). Grotstein’s reaction to his dream was a rational response to the creativity of its manifest narrative. In the article discussing his dream, he also cited some dreams that exhibit “creative thinking and planning,” such as the famous dream of the chemist August Kekule von Stradonitz, whose image of snakes biting each other’s tails solved the puzzle of the benzene ring (p. 409). Grotstein also cited a well-known clinical phenomenon as further evidence of the creativity of dreams. Dreams are sometimes able to disclose unconscious materials that cannot be accessed through free associations (p. 409).

Grotstein (1981b) concluded that “this creative, exploratory aspect of the dream bears testimony to the ‘thinker’ behind the dream” (p. 409). “The dream represents the product of an intelligence or coherence that has access to memory and hidden emotions and can construct for the dreamer and analyst a narrative that is capable of meaningful decipherment” (Grotstein, 2000b, p. 19). “In this respect it is a revelatory function” (Grotstein, 1981b, p. 410). Grotstein recognized that Freud never adequately accounted for dreams’ intelligent creativity. Freud (1900) had famously assigned the unconscious dream-making function to an irrational process, consisting of condensation, displacement, and considerations of representability, that translated the latent content of the dream into symbolism. He acknowledged that the latent content of the dream may contain intelligent, rational materials, but he suggested that these materials originate as preconscious thinking during waking hours prior to the dream. Freud (1923a, 1923b) later revised his model, dividing the rational input between the preconscious ego and the superego, to which he now attributed the dream censorship. Rational intelligence in the latent content of a dream, such as Kekule’s ideas about the benzine ring, might be argued ex hypothesi as preconscious materials that first became conscious only following a detour into the unconscious dreamwork (Kris, 1950). However, the dream’s access to the preconscious cannot explain its access to autobiographical materials to which free association, the preconscious process par excellence, has no access. Moreover, Grotstein recognized that latent content formation aside, the unconscious symbol-forming function is itself capable of highly intelligent, rational thinking, inventing a fantasy scenario, organizing its imagery, and so forth. The dream not only has a latent story line, but also a manifest script, casting, stage direction, set decoration, and a great deal else. To account for “the