

Unconscious Revelations and Dreams: An Applicational Study of Freudian Theory of Dreams

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Abstract: Sigmund Freud was known as the ‘father of Psychoanalysis’ who revolutionized the understanding of human behaviour with his Theory of Psychoanalysis. His major contribution was his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* in which he discussed about dreams at length. This paper tries to analyze the dream phenomenon as presented in some literary works. The paper interprets the dreams of certain characters in selected literary works according to Freud’s Theory of Dreams.

Keywords: dreams, interpretation, literature, unconscious, wish-fulfillment.

Introduction

Sleep and dreams exhibit different views of various people. Some consider them as mere imaginations; some consider them a result of chaotic neural impulses and some just a simple mental phenomenon. It was until the arrival of Freud and his Theory of Dreams that people got a comprehensive view of dream phenomenon. He in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* talked about dreams in great detail and what each dream content reflects.

The Love of a good Woman is a collection of short stories by Canadian writer Alice Munro, originally published in 1998. The collection consists of eight stories that reflect the lives of different people in different scenarios. The stories are mainly set between the 1940’s to 1970’s and the setting in almost all her stories is in Canada or places near it.

Bad Dreams and Other Stories is another collection of short stories written by British writer Tessa Hadley published in 2017. The collection comprises ten short stories which are mostly about ordinary people going about their regular everyday lives.

Sigmund Freud was a psychiatrist who developed psychoanalysis, the practice of understanding and curing psychiatric conditions through exploring the mind of the patient. Freud is known for his immense contribution in the field of dreams psychology and interpretation of dreams. Freud emphasized on the view that dreams are not just wild imaginings by an individual but when analysed they reveal a lot about the psyche and personality of a person.

Freud said that the connection between reality and dreaming is never entirely lost. It is not the case that once an individual start dreaming while sleeping, he is completely detached from the external or real world. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud says that dreams draw all of their material from the experiences and memories of an individual. Another aspect is that the experience does not have to be the immediate or near one. It can be the experience of the past or of childhood. Freud says:

The waking life, with its trials and joys, its pleasures and pains, is never repeated; on the contrary the dream aims at relieving us of these. Even when our whole mind is filled with one subject, when our hearts are rent by bitter grief, or when some task has been taxing our mental capacity to the utmost, the dream either gives us something entirely alien, or it selects for its combinations only a few elements of reality; or it merely enters into the key of our mood, and symbolizes reality. (14)

According to Freud, dreams do not reveal themselves easily in their content. The dream which might seem ordinary in nature may contain a highly important part of the unconscious information of the individual and the one which seems extra ordinary might be just a simple dream. He says there two kinds of meanings that a dream will exhibit. As he has written in his most acclaimed book *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

The dream has a very striking way of dealing with the category of opposites and contradictions. This is simply disregarded. To the dream 'No' does not seem to exist. In particular, it prefers to draw opposites together into a unity or to represent them as one. Indeed, it also takes the liberty of representing some random element by its wished-for opposite, so that at first one cannot tell which of the possible poles is meant positively or negatively in the dream-thoughts. (Freud 110)

The actual dream sequence which is recalled by the person is the manifest content of the dream. But the analyst has to look for the latent content which is the deeper and hidden meaning of the dream. It is the latent

content which is revealed in the interpretation of dreams and which reveals the psyche of an individual. As Freud mentions in the book:

The dream-thoughts and the dream-content lie before us like two versions of the same content in two different languages, or rather, the dream-content looks to us like a translation of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, and we are supposed to get to know its signs and laws of grammatical construction by comparing the original and the translation. (290)

In the story *Under the Sign of the Moon* from the collection *Bad Dreams and Other Stories* the protagonist, Greta dreams that she is at Palm House which looked like the old Victorian hotels. Greta's dream is derived solely out of her experience of meeting the man and hearing him say that he will be at Palm House if she wants to meet him. Her experience of meeting the man and talking to him made an impact upon her and sub-consciously she did hear him say the words. She sees herself at Palm House because she heard the name from the man even though she has never been to such a place. Her idea of the hotel was mixed up with the memory of her visits at hotels which were designed in Victorian style. She sees that there are huge pillars and marbles. The corridors are long and covered with bushes and foliage. She also feels the presence of someone else and thinks that she could see the person any moment. The person that she thinks about being present there could be the man Mitchell himself because she thinks of Palm House only in association with him. She had never heard the name of that place before yet she dreams of being present in that place only.

In her case it can be said that dreams do derive their material from the memories, thoughts and experience of an individual. Greta's dream comprises of her immediate experience of meeting the man and having a conversation with him. As Hadley beautifully describes:

That night Greta dreamed that she was at the Palm House at Sefton Park- although this wasn't the place she remembered ever having visited in her real life. [...] in her dream, she was pushing thick foliage- brittle, dusty leaves and clinging creepers and intricately fleshy blooms. And she was aware of someone else moving around nearby, rattling the spiky, dark green leaves, grunting with puzzled and exasperated effort: at any moment they might come face to face. Then she must have wandered out somehow without meaning to. [...] A solid mass of plant growth pressed against the steamed-up grass inside and pushed out through broken panes. Dark figures seemed to be standing around the perimeter of the building at intervals, facing outwards as if they were on guard. (174)

Greta's memory of visiting places which look like ruined Victorian buildings gets mixed the idea of how Palm House would look. As she herself has never visited that place physically so she cannot know Palm House actually looks and that is the reason that she sees that place as some ruined building. The heavy bushes and leaves all come from her memory of a ruined building. In Greta's case her manifest content of the dream is easily remembered by her but it is the other content i.e. latent content which gives meaning to her dream. This latent content has to be interpreted in order to give meaning to the dream. As Freud perceives:

By exposing the hidden dream-thoughts, we have confirmed in general that the dream does continue the motivation and interests of waking life, for dream-thoughts are engaged only with what seems to be important and of great interest to us. We are alone in confronting a different state of affairs; as we see it, there is a new kind of psychical material intervening between the content of the dream and the results of our reflections: the latent dream-content reached by our procedure, or the dream-thoughts. It is from this latent content, not the manifest that we worked out the solution to the dream. (284)

In the story *Bad Dreams* from the collection *Bad Dreams and Other Stories* by Tessa Hadley, a child wakes up in the dark and realises she was sleeping on her bed in complete darkness. She was sure that something had happened while she was asleep. She didn't know what it was but she could feel the dread and confusion in her head. Then she realises that she had seen a dream and it was so real that she could vividly remember the details. She sees a dream that she is reading her favourite book, which she had read over and over but could not get away with it. In the dream she was turning the pages of the book and discovered extra pages that she had not seen before. It was a short paragraph with the heading 'Epilogue'. In the book which she loved called 'Swallows and Amazons' there was no epilogue and the children in that book seem to exist in a parallel universe. In the dream the child sees the epilogues of the book in which her favourite character dies and the story ends in a different way than what she expects or wants.

In this case as well the dream of the child seems to draw its material from the immediate experience of the child. The child is shown to be an avid reader but she re-reads her favourite book and knows each and every word by heart. Again, the dream relates itself to the reality as the reading of the book happens in real life and the child dreams of the same. The part where the child sees an extra section in the book called the 'epilogue' is the child's wish of the story ending a different way. As written by Hadley:

She had dreamed that she was reading her favourite book, the one she had read over and over and actually had been reading earlier that night, until her mother came to turn off the light. [...] In the dream, she had been turning pages as usual when, beyond the story's familiar words, she discovered an

extra section that she had never seen before, a short paragraph set on a page by itself, headed "Epilogue". [...] In the real book she loved *Swallows and Amazons*, six children spent their summers in perfect freedom, sailing dinghies on a lake, absorbed in adventures and rivalries that were half invented games and half-truth. The world of *Swallows and Amazons* existed in a dimension parallel to their own, touching it only in their games. (115)

The dream is never entirely detached from reality but the connection between the two may not be easily observed. Because the child reads the same book over and over again hence, she dreams of the same. She finds herself in the epilogue of the book in the dream as if it was written by her only. Hadley has written:

Now the child seemed to see the impersonal print of the dream epilogue, written on the darkness in front of her eyes. *John and Roger both went on to*, it began in a business-like voice. Of course, the words were not actually in front of her eyes and parts of what was written were elusive when she sought them. *John suffered with a bad heart. The blackett sisters...long illness. Titty killed in an unfortunate accident.* The litany of deaths tore jaggedly into the tissue that the book had woven, making everything lopsided and hideous. (116)

The habits of the waking life find their way in the dream as well since the person has experienced both the worlds. If a person is habitual of stressful thinking then his dreams would comprise of the same and sometimes dreams help in releasing the stress hormones as well. Therefore, as the child is habitual of reading the same book again and again and also enacting it, her dream comprises of the same and in her dream, she makes her own ending of the story. Dream and reality can never be separated from each other as reality is what finds its way in the dream of a person.

Thus, the view of some psychologists can be negated who believe that there is no connection between dream and reality. Freud says, "Dreams are able to continue the intellectual activities of the day and to carry them to a point which could not be arrived at during the day, that they may resolve doubts and problems, and that they may be the source of fresh inspiration in poets and composers" (71).

The story *My Mother's Dream* from the collection *The Love of a Good Woman* by Alice Munro narrates the nightmare of a mother who dreams that she has left her baby outside in the snow and cold. The story is set in 1945, in a small town near Lake Huron where the protagonist Jill lives with some of her neighbours. One-night Jill Dreams that she has gone to sleep and forgotten about her baby outside in the snow. When she realises what has happened, she goes out and searches for her baby everywhere. She also tries to push away the horrible thoughts that she was having like the baby being dead in the cold and being shrivelled like a nut. Jill's husband was killed in the army just before she was about to deliver the baby.

In this story as well, it can be observed that Jill's dream is not detached from the experiences of her real and waking life. Her strange dream of having left the baby out in the snow is the result of her attitude towards her life and baby. Her dream comprises of her experience and reality in which she lives. The monotonous life that she leads, the perception that she has of her own self and the attitude of people towards her, all culminate when she dreams. Her dream arises out of her own experiences of the waking state. This can be validated by the view of Freud who says:

The dream shows how recollections of one's everyday life can be worked into a structure where one person can be substituted for another, where unacknowledged feelings like envy and guilt can find expression, where ideas can be linked by verbal similarities, and where the laws of logic can be suspended. (Freud 114)

In one of the sections of the story *The Love of a Good Woman* titled *Heart Failure* there is Mrs. Quinn who is suffering from a heart disease. She has an extremely caring and young nurse named Enid. The story is told from the eyes of Enid herself and the life that she spends with Mrs. Quinn and faltering through her own problems. Enid has encountered a lot of problems in her life and her thoughts keep on roaming around the fact that what her life would be outside this profession. She always loved taking care of others but her father and mother did not want her to be a nurse initially. They thought it was a job for poor girls and hence Enid had to quit her job but then came the war and she was welcomed with great opportunities. There had been a shortage of doctors and nurse hence anyone who came to them was accepted. Enid also suffers from bad dreams. Sometimes when she sleeps her dreams are quite disturbing and peculiar.

A remarkable peculiarity of dream, about which Freud discusses, is that they divulge the unconscious mind of the brain. Freud was the first person to talk about the mental aspects of the mind and their contribution in dream formation and material. The theory of the unconscious mind formulated by Freud was a milestone in the history of psychology. Although Freud was not the first person to talk about the unconscious mind but it was him who gave a concrete explanation for the same and used it as a backbone for most of his theories. According to Freud, unconscious mind is the hub of all the repressed desires and wishes. These desires or wishes may be repressed due to various reasons such as socially unacceptable or personally embarrassing. Sometimes an individual is not even aware of his unconscious wishes or thoughts. Freud contends that such desires and

thoughts find their way in the dreams of an individual. He was the first person to talk about mental conflicts, traumas and hidden memories of the mind. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he says:

And it is only after seeing man as his unconscious, revealed by his dreams, presents him to us that we shall understand him fully. For as I said to Putnam: We are what we are because we have been what we have been. In this scheme, the 'unconscious' and the 'preconscious' are agencies or authorities which the wish has to satisfy; the unconscious is more tolerant, and helps the wish to smuggle itself past the censorship of the preconscious. As a result, psychical energy is discharged without disturbing sleep. (Freud 147)

The dreams of both characters i.e. Jill from *My Mother's Dream* and Enid from *The Love of a Good Woman* arise out of their unconscious part of the mind. Jill's unconscious guilt of not caring about her baby leads to the formation of her dream where she sees that she has forgotten her baby out in the snow. After the death of her husband she becomes uninterested in her baby and seems to care less. All she can think is the sudden death of her husband. Jill knew that her relatives had no concern for her and only looked at her with eyes of sympathy and she did not like that. She feels that, "at the conservatory, people treated her pregnancy tactfully, as if it was tumor" (298). After her dream she suffers from the guilt of not being able to care for her baby. Before the dream Jill had not done any special efforts to care for the baby but it is later on, she realises her mistake. As Munro writes:

When she got outside, she remembered. She remembered that she had left a baby out there somewhere, before the snow had fallen. Quite a while before the snow had fallen. This memory, this certainty, came over her with horror. It was as if she was awakening from a dream. Within her dream she awakened from a dream, to knowledge of her responsibility and mistake. (294)

On the unconscious part of her mind she does feel guilty about her attitude towards her own child. Jill is overcome by sorrow at the thought of her dream and what would she do if it turns into reality. At the back of her mind, Jill always thought that would she do with the baby now that her husband is dead. The baby reminded her of her husband and it is one of the reasons that she had turned indifferent toward her own child. On the unconscious level she does care about her child and loves him but it is just not known to her. As Munro describes in the story:

She had left her baby out overnight; she had forgotten about it. Left it exposed somewhere as if it was a doll she tired of. And perhaps it was not last night but a week or a month ago that she had done this. For a whole season or for many seasons she had left her baby out. [...] she went around looking under hedges and broad-leaved plants. She foresaw how the baby would be shrivelled up. It would be dead, shrivelled and brown, its head like a nut, and on its tiny shut-up face there would be an expression not of distress but of bereavement, an old patient grief. There would not be any accusation of her, its mother- just the look of patience and helplessness with which it waited for its rescue or its fate. (294)

Jill also suffers from pre-natal depression and the trauma that she has endured after the sudden death of her husband in the war in Europe. Both these mental problems also lead her to have such kind of dream. On one hand where dream acts as wish fulfilment of the person it also affects the psychical process of the individual. In the case of Jill, the intensity of these problems is not so extreme but still the impact of her trauma and pre-natal depression can be seen in the kind of dream that she has. Sometimes there is less negative and more neutral effect of the mental problem. People with depression are relative found to play passive roles in their dreams. As Munro mentions:

The sorrow that came to my mother was the sorrow of the baby's waiting and not knowing it waited for her, its only hope, when she had forgotten all about it. So small and new a baby that could not even turn away from the snow. She could hardly breathe her sorrow. There would never be any room in her for anything else. No room for anything but the realization of what she had done. [...] my mother, still thinking, no doubt about the snow and the cold that usually accompanies snow, pulled the blanket up to cover the baby's bare back and shoulders, its red-downed head. (295)

Enid on the other hand has spent most of her life caring for others and spending no time to look after herself. When she sleeps her dreams tend to reveal her unconscious or repressed thoughts and desires. Once she dreams that a man was wrapping his arms around her or embracing her. Her unconscious desire of finding love and attention is revealed in her dreams. Sometimes the dreams were of highly embarrassing nature where she would be embarrassed by herself only. Munro says, "These dreams made her thoughtful or a little sad but relieved in some way to know that such feelings were possible for her. They could be embarrassing but are nothing, nothing at all compared with the dreams that she was having now" (51). As Freud also says: "Properly speaking, the unconscious is the real psychic; its inner nature is just as unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is just as imperfectly reported to us through the data of consciousness as is the external world through the indications of our sensory organs" (97).

While analysing the nature of dreams, Freud said that “dream is predominantly the gracious fulfiller of wishes” (137). According to him, the desires and wishes that remain unsatiated in the real life are fulfilled in the dreams of an individual. He was able to formulate the notion that even in the condition of mental illness the dream acts as the fulfiller of wishes. He says:

To him who is tortured by physical and mental sufferings the dream accords what has been denied him by reality, to wit, physical well-being, and happiness; so, too the insane radiant images of happiness eminence and wealth. The supposed possession of estates and the imaginary fulfilment of wishes, the denial or destruction of which have actually been a psychic cause of the insanity, often form the main content of the delirium. The woman who has lost a dearly beloved child experiences in her delirium the joys of maternity; the man who has suffered reverses of fortune deems himself immensely wealthy; and the jilted girl sees herself tenderly beloved. (Freud 9).

Enid from *The Love of a Good Woman* is shown to be living a life in which she is mostly concerned about others. She has a very little time to think about herself and is only concerned about Mrs. Quinn. She does not remember ever falling in love with someone as or even being attracted to someone as she has no time. Girls of her age were either in love or getting married whereas all Enid could do was perform her duty of giving medicines on time to Mrs. Quinn. Her wish of having someone in her life with whom she could share her feelings is seen being fulfilled in the kind of dreams that she has been having lately.

In Freudian theory the ‘libido’ or the life force is often conceived as sexual in nature. The purpose of the dream is to gratify the repressed desire and wish of an individual and to free the individual of his desires. Freud was of the belief that the purpose of a dream is to allow or fulfil the disguised and repressed wish which might be sexual in nature and cannot be gratified directly in reality. Freud mentioned the presence of a psychic censor which does the work of disguising the sexual content of the wish or dream so that the dreamer is not awakened by the nature of the dream and the impulse of his or her own desires. This is how dream acts as the “guardian of the sleep.” It is by the interpretation of the dream objects at manifest content that the actual desire or wish is revealed. Sometimes the dream itself gives clues about its interpretation.

The nature of the dream may express which and what kind of instinct is being reflected in the dream of a person at the manifest content only. If such symbols are not present at the manifest content of the dream then a more subjective study and interpretation has to be done of the dream so as to reveal the psyche of the individual. The dreams of Enid which sometimes turn out to be sexual in nature is a result of her own instincts and repressed desires. Sometime she was herself embarrassed by the content of the dream. The fact that she sees someone embracing her who might even be a stranger is a revelation of her desires. She was herself so embarrassed of the dream that she thought that praying might rid her of such content. As Munro has explained in the novel:

They could be embarrassing, but were nothing, nothing at all compared with the dreams that she was having now. [...] she would set to work with roughness and with an attitude of evil pragmatism. She woke up unrepentant, sweaty and exhausted and like a carcass until her own self, her shame and disbelief, came pouring back into her. She lay there shivering in the warm night, with disgust and humiliation. If she were a catholic, she thought, was this the sort of thing that could come out at confession? It didn't seem like a thing she could even bring out in a private prayer. The filth in her mind was in her, and there was no point in dramatizing it and making it seem important. Surely not. It was nothing, just the mind's garbage. (51)

Same phenomenon of dream acting as the wish fulfilment is observed in the story *Bad Dreams* as well. The child who sees a dream that she has entered the epilogue of her favourite book fulfils her wish of changing the end of the story as she wanted it to be. She enters the world of her own and changes the end of the story as she did not like the original one. As she was so fascinated by the book that she read it over and over again her desire to change the end of the story became stronger. She did not want her favourite character to die as a result what she dreams is that she has entered a separate section of the book called epilogue and changes the end according to her.

According to Freud, the dreams of children are extremely different and at the same time similar to that of adults. The dreams of children are much more innocent in nature and they generally comprise of wish fulfilments only. As the instincts of children are not fully or highly developed like adults, their dreams comprise of much more innocent experiences and issues.

Conclusion

Dreams are the activity of the mind as the mind is always working upon different processes and choosing what to keep and what to discard especially the experiences. The objective of dream is to liberate the individual of his desires, emotion and guilt. As soon as a person sleeps the mind enters the unconscious part of

the brain and all the information that lies there is revealed in the dreams. Dreams are not to be considered as illusions or wild imaginings rather an extremely important psychological phenomenon. Dreams never trouble or bring any kind of disturbance in the sleeping state of a person they liberate the person of his worries and guilt.

As Freud claims:

Dreams are eliminations of thoughts nipped in the bud. A man deprived of the capacity of dreaming would in time become mentally unbalanced, because an immense number of unfinished and unsolved thoughts and superficial impressions would accumulate in his brain, under the pressure of which all that should be incorporated in the memory as a completed whole would be stifled. The dream acts as a safety-valve for the over-burdened brain. Dreams possess a healing and unburdening power. (85)

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