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СИМВОЛИ НА НЕСЪЗНАВАНТОТО В „ЛЕКАТА ПРИНЦЕСА“ НА ДЖОРДЖ МАКДОНАЛД

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SYMBOLS OF THE UNCONSCIOUS IN GEORGE MACDONALD'S “THE LIGHT PRINCESS”

The article explores some of the aspects of George MacDonald's fairy tale “The Light Princess”, related to the sphere of the unconscious. Using Freudian psychoanalytical theory as a basis, I demonstrate that the author's words tell us more than they were meant to and that some of them are symbols which, more than thirty years after the publication of the fairy tale, Freud recognised as messengers of the repressed. I first give a brief outline of Freud's ideas concerning the unconscious; then I discuss in detail the implications of the symbol of *falling* in “The Light Princess”; lastly, I give several examples of repression as they appear in the fairy tale.

Keywords: *George MacDonald; psychoanalysis; Freud; unconscious; repression.*

Статията разглежда някои аспекти на приказката на Джордж Макдоналд „Леката принцеса“, свързани с несъзнаваното. С помощта на теорията на Фройд за психоанализата демонстрирам, че авторът казва повече, отколкото е възнамерявал, и че някои от думите представляват символи, които тридесет и няколко години след публикуването на произведението Фройд разпознава като пратеници на изтласканото. В началото правя бърз преглед на идеите на Фройд за несъзнаваното. След това подробно обсъждам импликациите на символа, който представлява „падането“ в „Леката принцеса“. Накрая давам няколко примера за изтласкване, които се появяват в приказката.

Ключови думи: *Джордж Макдоналд; психоанализа; Фройд; несъзнавано; изтласкване.*

In his essay “The Fantastic Imagination” George MacDonald wrote: “One difference between God's work and man's is, that, while God's work cannot mean more than he meant, man's must mean more than he meant... so many are the relations involved in every figure, so many the facts hinted in every symbol” (1895, 320). He did not know that his words were relevant in a sphere which at the time was not yet explored – that of psychoanalysis. At the dawn of the 20th century Freud and other intellectuals proved that the understanding of human psyche and the process of creative writing could be facilitated by a psychoanalytical approach. Applying this approach to George MacDonald's fairy tales would help us understand some of the messages, half-concealed to the author himself but inevitably perceived, be it unconsciously, by his readers.

This article explores some of the aspects of MacDonald's fairy tale “The Light Princess”, related to the sphere of the unconscious. Using Freudian psychoanalytical theory as a basis, I demonstrate that the author's words tell us more than they were meant to and that some of them are symbols which, more than thirty years after the publication of the fairy tale, Freud recognised as messengers of the repressed.

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I will first give a short outline of Freud's ideas concerning the unconscious and the symbolic way in which it attempts to make itself visible. I will then discuss in detail the implications of the symbol of *falling* in "The Light Princess" and some of the symbols related to it, such as *water* and *rescue*. Lastly, I will mention several examples of repression, discussing how they are betrayed as such.

I.

To Freud, the human mind is 'divided' into two parts – the *conscious* and the *unconscious*. The conscious consists of our daily thoughts, impressions, feelings and memories, of which we are aware and about which we can consciously think. Certain feelings, wishes and memories, however, do not fit in the social context in which we live. To our waking thoughts they are intolerable. Influenced by very old and enduring traditions of stigmatising, they cannot remain in our conscious mind without causing us severe social discomfort and even a serious mental illness. For this reason, they are usually *repressed* and become unconscious. The unconscious consists of all these repressed thoughts, desires and memories. Freud insists that the majority of them are sexually related and almost invariably go back to the years of early infancy. Our various complexes, such as the Oedipus complex, are repressed in the same way. "Now let us call 'conscious' the conception which is present to our consciousness and of which we are aware... As for latent conceptions... let them be denoted by the term 'unconscious'" (Freud 1958: 260).

The unconscious content of our mind is not passive. It struggles constantly to become conscious. In *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* Freud calls this phenomenon 'unconscious protest' (258). The repressed struggles to become unrepressed again but it cannot normally achieve this because there is a reliable barrier between the two spheres, which prevents the unconscious from intruding into our consciousness and causing us discomfort. Instead, the unconscious finds other ways of expressing itself and one of them is appearing in our dreams. When we sleep the barrier is inactive and the unconscious uses that to attempt to appear in front of us. However, certain censorship is always active and the unconscious cannot enter our dreams unchanged.

"Nothing, it would seem, can reach consciousness from the first system without passing the second agency; and the second agency allows nothing to pass without exercising its rights and making such modifications as it thinks fit in the thought which is seeking admission to consciousness" (Freud 1953:144). Thus, the unconscious enters the manifest content of the dream changed and distorted. What we remember of a particular dream is not what the dream wants to 'tell' us. The real meaning of what actually appears in it can only be revealed through psychoanalysis. No dream is without a deeper significance, related to the sphere of sexuality. A key point in Freud's theory is that a dream is always an imaginary fulfilment of an unconscious wish, which cannot be fulfilled or even confessed in real life because it clashes with social norms and is usually considered dirty and inappropriate.

Dreams, however, are not the only option. Sometimes the unconscious uses other means of becoming visible. One such way is creative writing and George MacDonald's fairy tale "The Light Princess" demonstrates this.

Freud discusses the similar natures of dreams and creative writing in his lecture "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" (1908). He develops the argument that daydreaming and dreams have the same source – our repressed desires and memories, and emphasises the connection between fantasizing and dreaming.

I cannot pass over the relation of phantasies to dreams. Our dreams at night are nothing else than phantasies like these, as we can demonstrate from the interpretation of dreams. Language... long ago decided the question of the essential nature of dreams by giving the name of 'day-dreams' to the airy creations of phantasy. (1954: 148)

In his view, psychoanalysis reveals the fact that dreaming and fantasizing are, in their origin, the same thing – wish fulfilment in different forms. In the second part of his lecture Freud underlines the similarities between fantasising and creative writing and points out that writing fiction and dreaming have important common features, the chief one being that they reveal elements of the repressed unconscious in much the same way as in dreams, using the same 'techniques'.

In the light of these arguments, George MacDonald's fairy tales seem quite suitable for psychoanalytical interpretation, as it is described in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud's arguments give us grounds to work on the assumption that dream interpretation of works of fiction is not at all absurd. This is especially the case with George MacDonald, in whose fairy tales the atmosphere is extremely dream-like. The unconscious material in his children's fiction is in such abundance that it simply calls for a psychoanalytical approach.

In *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981) Rosemary Jackson writes that '... It seems rather absurd to try to understand [the] significance [of fantasy] without some reference to psychoanalysis...' (40). According to Cusick "The centrality of the unconscious in MacDonald's fantasy in particular is now also acknowledged." (Reaper 57) He also points out that dream, the product of the unconscious, is crucially important to MacDonald's fantasy (57). W. H. Auden writes the following about Macdonald: "But his great gift is... his dream realism, his exact and profound knowledge of dream causality, dream logic, dream change, dream morality: ... the illusion of participating in a real dream is perfect..." (Reis 104).

The use of symbols in dreams and works of fiction is one of the most common ways of concealing the repressed thought by giving it a new form. In Freudian theory a symbol is something that stands for a certain object or a concept and in a distorted way performs the functions of what it symbolises. Symbols very seldom change their meaning and usually one symbol stands for the same concept in the unconscious minds of most people. In his paper "On Dreams" Freud writes: "It has been noticed that dreamers speaking the same language make use of the same symbols, and that in some cases, indeed, the use of the same symbols extends beyond the use of the same language" (1955: 683). The majority of the symbols in George MacDonald's fairy tales appear to have a meaning, very similar to the one that Freud usually revealed in the process of his psychoanalytical practice.

II.

There are several Freudian symbols in "The Light Princess". Probably the most important one is that of falling. It appears in the beginning of the story in a seemingly innocent context and becomes a strong leitmotif, recurring with a steady regularity in key moments. The swimming scenes in the middle of the fairy tale make it quite clear that MacDonald uses the word 'fall' with a biblical meaning, rather than with a literal one, and the jump into the lake is more than a mere jump but a representation of the sexual attraction between the light princess and the prince.

"Don't you like falling in then?" said the prince.

"It is the most delightful fun I ever had in my life," answered she. "I never fell before. I wish I could learn. To think I am the only person in my father's kingdom that can't fall!" (34)¹

The double meaning here is so suggestive that it is this particular moment that receives all the critical attention and it is not always mentioned that the author uses the symbol of the fall long before the first swimming scene – in fact, at the very beginning of the fairy tale. Scandalising as it was for his contemporaries, MacDonald's description of sexual attraction serves to conceal another, deeper, more scandalising aspect of the word 'fall', related to Freud's theory of infantile sexuality. Freud pays considerable attention to the psychoanalytical symbol of falling and discusses it on several occasions. He insists that, as is the case with many other symbols, it acts as a disguised messenger, sent by our unconscious to tell us something about our repressed desires and forbidden impulses. In his opinion the system of psychoanalytical symbols is barely changeable and each symbol almost invariably expresses, or enacts, the same idea (Freud 1955: 683). Thus we can understand the meaning of a dream, or a piece of fiction, without having to resort to the dreamer's free associations, so the dreamer can remain unaware of the hidden content of his/her own dream (683). We can apply this formula to literature since, to Freud, dreaming and creative writing are different results of the same psychic mechanisms. In "Psychopathology of Everyday Life", discussing falling and slipping, he writes: "The double meaning that language attaches to these

¹ All subsequent references are to the Penguin Books edition of George MacDonald's *Complete Fairy Tales*, 1999.

expressions are enough to indicate the kind of phantasies involved...” (1960: 174). Later in the same passage he reports cases of women with hysterical symptoms, which had appeared after ‘accidentally’ falling down: “The fall was already a product of the neurosis and expressed the same unconscious phantasies with a sexual content... Is not the same thing meant by a proverb which runs: ‘When a girl falls she falls on her back’?” (1960: 175).

In this case Freud does not discuss dreams or works of fiction, but real accidents, to show that the symbols produced by the unconscious operate on different levels and that they affect our waking life as well as our sleep. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) Freud claims that women’s dreams of falling are very easy for interpretation and that they usually mean a surrender to an erotic temptation. He also relates the resulting pleasurable feeling to infantile memories, when the child has been taken into bed with his/her mother or nurse, after having fallen from the cot (1953: 394–395). Freud indirectly acknowledges that the interpretation of the symbol of falling has one of its roots in the Bible. In his opinion, “If a woman dreams of falling, it almost invariably has a sexual sense: she is imagining herself as a ‘fallen woman’” (202). It is this relation between the symbol and Christianity that MacDonald consciously resorts to in the swimming scenes but his other uses of the same symbol invoke quite different Freudian associations, of which MacDonald himself, being a pre-Freudian writer, was apparently unaware.

In “The Light Princess” the notion of the fall appears for the first time on page 20: “And she was so nice to play at ball with! There was positively no danger of letting her fall” (20). MacDonald’s use of the verb ‘fall’ here is suggestive but, given the cunning context in which it is put, not very conspicuous. If at this point not taking the hint is excusable, three pages later a careful reader cannot fail to notice the second appearance of the verb, which now looks very suspicious, be it only because its use is strangely paradoxical. “She reached the age of seventeen, without having fallen into any worse scrape than a chimney” (23). This sounds as if the princess is likely to fall dangerously. The paradox is obvious. If the princess has no weight, she cannot possibly fall anywhere. She could fly up the chimney if given a push but certainly not *fall*.

The next time the symbol of the fall appears is in the scene where the light princess wants to go and kiss her father but kisses the page instead. “Now when she wanted to run alone, her custom was to catch up a stone in each hand, so that she might come down again after a bound (23). The author does not use the word ‘fall’ but this is exactly what the princess wants to achieve – she wishes to fall down after each of a succession of bounds. To begin with, her way of walking is suggestive. In his dream book Freud reports that in the language of the symbols of the unconscious *going up and down* is to be translated as sexual intercourse (1953: 355). Although neither MacDonald, nor the pre-Freudian reader could have known this, the human unconscious registers all such symbols and does not fail to produce a certain – usually unconscious – effect on the reader. The stones that the princess holds in her hands have their concealed meaning as well. In his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* Freud writes that rocks are a symbol of the male sexuality (1961: 158).

The symbol of falling appears again in the beginning of chapter 8, this time used by the author to create a contradiction. “Perhaps the best thing for the princess would have been to fall in love. But how a princess who had no gravity could fall into anything is a difficulty – perhaps *the* difficulty” (28). MacDonald’s famous love for the paradox finds an expression here. He argues that it is almost impossible for the princess to fall into anything, just after describing a situation, where she performs an exemplary symbolic fall (kissing the page). Since psychoanalysis can hardly provide us with an explanation here, we can probably assume that the author wanted to challenge his readers’ thinking by using a pun, offering a statement contradicting some of the earlier events.

In chapter 9 MacDonald uses the symbol of falling very intensively, especially in the swimming scenes with the newly arrived prince. This is the moment critics usually pay special attention to. Some of MacDonald’s contemporaries, such as Ruskin, were taken aback by this particular chapter and insisted it would be seriously harmful to children (Knoepflmacher xiii). The sexual tension in these scenes is so obvious that the reader hardly needs any psychoanalytical knowledge to register it. “No one had ever succeeded in putting her into a passion before” (33). This sentence is seemingly referring to the prin-

cess's anger but it is not difficult to perceive the double meaning with which the phrase is charged. The passion she feels is of a different nature. To understand both the double meaning here and the underlying content of the two protagonists' actions and conversations later, we need to discuss the light princess's first contact with the prince – when he sees her bathing – and temporarily turn our attention to another important symbol in the Freudian system: the one of *rescue*.

...In an instant, he had torn off his tunic, kicked off his sandals, and plunged in. He soon reached the white object, and found that it was a woman... He brought her to shore in a fashion ignominious to a swimmer, and more nearly drowned than she had ever expected to be. (32)

The symbol of rescue appears in Freud's works repeatedly. He insists that its meaning is related to either giving birth or participating in a sexual intercourse. In his "Contributions to the Psychology of Love" he writes:

Under the laws governing the expression of unconscious thoughts, the meaning of rescuing may vary, depending on whether the author of the phantasy is a man or a woman. It can equally mean (in a man) making a child, i.e. causing it to be born, or (in a woman) giving birth oneself to a child. These various meanings of rescuing in dreams and phantasies can be recognised particularly clearly when they are found in connection with water. A man rescuing a woman from the water in a dream means that he makes her a mother. (1957: 174)

The correspondence with MacDonald's text is evident. The relationship between the two young people has a sexual character from the very beginning. The prince 'rescues' the princess, thus symbolically making her his lover – the girl "falls" even before their later jump from the cliff. MacDonald's unconscious thoughts again find a means of expression. The use of such a symbol by a pre-Freudian writer is extremely significant, since with later authors we could always suspect they had some psycho-analytical knowledge and were making unannounced use of it. Naturally, with George MacDonald we cannot suspect knowledge of this kind – the Freudian symbols he uses are nothing but the result of his unconscious mind's activity and as such prove to a considerable degree Freud's theory of symbols.

The development of the symbolic sexual relationship between the prince and the princess continues to develop after she orders him to put her back in the water:

...Catching her up in his arms, he sprang with her from the rock. The princess had just time to give one delighted shriek of laughter before the water closed over them. When they came to the surface, she found that, for a moment or two, she could not even laugh, for she had gone down with such a rush, that it was with difficulty she recovered her breath. (34)

There can be no doubt that Freud would have seen in these lines an obvious description of a sexual act, stage by stage. It is not clear whether MacDonald was aware of this obvious interpretation of his own words but the strong sexual nature of this episode is a fact: the prince "catch[es] her up in his arms" and jumps, which symbolises the beginning of the sexual act. The "delighted shriek of laughter" between the jump and the contact with the water represents the build-up of passion, the water closing over them stands for the climax and at the end, having come to the surface, they are trying to recover their breath after coming down "with such a rush".

The conversation that follows confirms this impression:

"How do you like falling in?" said the prince.

After some effort the princess panted out,--

"Is that what you call *falling in*?"

"Yes," answered the prince, "I should think it a very tolerable specimen." (34)

In this episode MacDonald uses a pun once again, which this time points in the same direction as the hidden meaning displayed by the symbols so far.

"How do *you* like falling in?" said the princess.

"Beyond everything," answered he; "for I have fallen in with the only perfect creature I ever saw." (34)

Up to this point the author has already used four different meanings of "fall": 1. Literal (fall from the cliff); 2. Emotional (fall in love); 3. Biblical; 4. Freudian. It will be interesting to see which meanings

are used (consciously) by the characters and which – directly by MacDonald. The princess uses only the literal meaning and even rejects the emotional one, changing the subject or laughing “dreadfully” (38) every time the prince starts talking about love. The underlying meaning of her use of the word, however, is not the Biblical but the Freudian, as was shown above. It is the author who makes the reader find a Christian angle in her use of the symbol.

The prince plays with the word “fall” throughout the scene but even *he* does not consciously apply more than two meanings – the literal and the emotional, sometimes simultaneously, to make a harmless pun: “...I have fallen in with the only perfect creature I ever saw” (34). Curiously, the Biblical aspect is again absent from the concealed meaning, or at any rate is eclipsed by the Freudian one. The “falling” the prince mentions here refers to their symbolic surrender to sexual passion, which, as was mentioned above, is a psychoanalytical idea.

MacDonald consciously uses three of the four meanings: the literal, the emotional, and, unlike his protagonists, the Biblical one. He uses the Christian meaning of “fall” to make a point, related to his own strong religious beliefs, but does not mention it directly and does not sermonize. Instead, he lets the princess do it: “I never fell before. I wish I could learn. To think I am the only person in my father’s kingdom that can’t fall!” (34). The princess’s words are obviously meant to invoke Biblical associations but their real meaning, underlying all other meanings, is, as we saw, Freudian. It appears that the symbolic psychoanalytical significance of “fall” underlines the words of both characters and, therefore, of MacDonald himself. Although it always remains hidden to the consciousness of the pre-Freudian reader, it is the real meaning of the symbol, pointing to repressed memories and wishes existing in everyone’s mind.

Another episode with a strong sexual charge, involving the symbol of falling, is the moment when the prince and the princess meet for a second time on the following night, and the princess asks him to take her up to the top of the cliff so they can fall again.

The prince took off his scarf, then his sword-belt, then his tunic, and tied them all together, and let them down. But the line was far too short. He unwound his turban, and added it to the rest, when it was all but long enough; and his purse completed it. The princess just managed to lay hold of the knot of money, and was beside him in a moment. This rock was much higher than the other, and the splash and the dive were tremendous. The princess was in ecstasies of delight, and their swim was delicious. (38)

The act of undressing, which the prince performs is in itself significant, especially having in mind the implications of the first swimming scene: another symbolic sexual act is about to occur. At this point, as if to strengthen the impression, appears another important psychoanalytical symbol – the rope which the prince makes from his own clothes. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* and in various other works Freud argues that elongated objects, including snakes, neckties and ropes symbolise the male sexuality (1953: 356). There can be little doubt that, combined with the strong sexual symbol of “falling”, the rope the prince makes fits perfectly in the sexual context of the whole scene. Finally, the princess is taken up to the top and the two young people engage in a second symbolic intercourse, finishing “in ecstasies of delight”.

From this point on MacDonald stops using the symbol of falling, replacing it with other, equally significant and unconscious Freudian symbols. Towards the end of the story the “fall” appears again but this time deprived of its strong symbolic meaning: “Hearing her fall, her old nurse uttered a yell of delight, and ran to her, screaming, – “My darling child! she’s found her gravity!” (52) and several lines later: “She was always falling down and hurting herself” (52). It seems that these last uses of “fall” are not meant to be of great importance. They sound as a distant echo and a humorous reminder of what the symbol stood for earlier in the fairy tale.

III.

As was mentioned above, according to Freudian psychoanalytical theory, the repressed thoughts, memories and desires, imprisoned in one’s unconscious, are in a constant process of struggling to become conscious. Although this is almost impossible to achieve when the person is awake, sometimes tiny elements of the repressed find a way of penetrating one’s waking thoughts through associations, suggestive slips of the tongue, jokes and puns (Freud 1956). In such cases human consciousness does not

remain passive but tries to protect itself, offering a strong resistance. “Experience shows us that this path leading through the preconscious to consciousness is barred to the dream-thoughts during the daytime by the censorship imposed by resistance” (Freud 1953: 542).

As result, we either repress our betraying associations, or “fail” to understand the meaning of a joke, or express indifference, and even irritation, towards puns and the people who make them. Resistance, however, is likely to be punished. If a certain part of the repressed keeps appearing and is continuously repressed, it often causes the appearance of neurotic symptoms or hysteria.

One such instance of punished resistance is the king’s constant forgetfulness and his intolerance of puns, apparently caused by unconscious motives. The fairy tale begins with a double forgetting: the king forgets to invite his sister to his daughter’s christening but when she comes anyway, he forgets that he forgot. His forgetting is not a matter of chance, as the narrator himself implies: “But poor relations don’t do anything to keep you in mind of them. Why don’t they? The king could not see into the garret she lived in, could he?” (16). The king probably did not fail to invite her on purpose but he certainly forgot her on purpose. In Schenke’s words, “The sister he has forgotten is the right-hand half of his brain, as it were. By refusing the multiplicity and ambivalence of existence he closes himself off against the complexity of mind and soul” (Manlove 29).

More interesting from a psychoanalytical point of view, however, is the king’s attitude to puns. According to Freud, jokes are composed in much the same way as the dream-work composes a dream. They often relate to the unconscious. Jokes are a vent for the repressed and as such have a special significance for our unconscious perceptions – in a more or less safe way they remind us of things we cannot bring to our waking thoughts. The intolerance of jokes or puns marks a strong resistance to the influence of the unconscious and can be a sign of neurosis. The narrator points out several times that the king hates puns:

But it was not this reflection on his hair that arrested him; it was the double use of the word light. For the king hated all witticisms, and punning especially. (21)

...Duplicity of any sort is exceedingly objectionable between married people of any rank...; and the most objectionable form duplicity can assume is that of punning. (22)

In this way the king denies his unconscious any kind of expression, refuses to recognise either the power of punning or the autonomy of language. Consequently, the unconscious punishes him with forgetfulness which, in turn, punishes him with a weightless daughter. It is not clear why the king should reject this particular pun for, unlike with symbols, the hidden meaning of puns and jokes is often strongly individual and the only way of revealing it is through the person’s own free-associating.

The source of the next pun seems a little clearer. It appears in chapter 7, when the king and the queen decide to consult the two metaphysicians Hum-Drum and Kopy-Keck about their daughter’s problem: “[The king] requested them to consult together as to what might be the cause and probable cure of her INFIRMITY. The king laid stress upon the word, but failed to discover his own pun” (26). The reason why the king should remain oblivious of his own pun is probably related to his inability, or, rather, unwillingness to come to terms with reality. He obviously wishes to refer to the ailment, or weakness, of the princess, but as Knoepfmacher points out, his unconscious reason for using this particular word “stems from her literal lack of fixity in *terra firma*” (Knoepfmacher xv). So far, the fairy tale has made it clear that he does not like to face unpleasant facts and tries to evade them, pretending they do not exist (like the existence of his poor sister). Consequently, he uses every opportunity to repress the thought of his daughter being so different from other people, and thus hurting his royal dignity. His thoughts, however, cannot remain concealed from his unconscious and find a means of “getting out” through an expression resembling *terra firma*, being unable at the same time to penetrate the king’s consciousness as he rejects his own association and remains unaware of the pun. It is because of his inability to cope with reality that the king constantly displays neurotic symptoms. Unlike him, the queen laughs at the pun because, as usual, she is far quicker than her husband in accepting facts as they are. If we compare the two characters, we will notice that the queen’s reactions are much more adequate and she always orientates her husband in moments of crisis.

The king’s inadequacy towards reality gradually develops, grows stronger and towards the end of the fairy tale takes a sinister form. He becomes a grotesque figure. His exchange with the young prince,

offering to sacrifice himself for the sake of the whole kingdom illustrates his inability to grasp facts or, even worse, to make correct moral judgements. At this moment the “light-mindedness” of the princess seems minor, compared to her father’s rapidly deteriorating judgement. The king’s absurdity reaches its climax when the prince is preparing to die and the princess is sitting beside him in her boat.

...He resolved to abide his fate, and turning to the people, said, –
“Now you can go.”

The king had already gone home to dinner. (47)

The king’s going home to dinner at such an important moment speaks for itself. It is not clear, however, whether we can relate it to the unconscious. On the one hand, a psychoanalytical explanation seems quite inviting. The king can be viewed as the victim of a hysterical inability to face a certain type of situation, just like Emma in Freud’s *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895). Emma was suffering from a severe neurosis – she was unable to enter one particular shop because she was afraid the shopkeeper might laugh at her clothes as they had done several weeks ago. Freud’s detailed psychoanalysis revealed that the real reason for Emma’s hysteria was a traumatic experience in her childhood, when she had been sexually abused by the same shopkeeper. Later Emma repressed this memory, it became unconscious and, awakened by the shopkeeper’s laugh several weeks before, it became the agent of formation of her hysteric inability to return to the same place.

To see the similarities between Emma’s case and the king’s reaction to the prince’s feat, we will have to return to Freud’s observations about water as a symbol. To him getting into the water or out of it means birth. He writes: “Birth is regularly expressed in dreams by some connection with water: one falls into the water or one comes out of the water – one gives birth or one is born” (1955: 160). He notes, however, that the process might be reversed.

When princess Makemnoit puts the lake under a spell and the water starts to disappear, it seems that the light princess’s life will come to an end too. “She could not bear to swim in it any more, and began to pine away. Her life seemed bound up with it; and ever as the lake sank, she pined. People said she would not live an hour after the lake was gone” (39–40). This strange, almost uncanny link between the level of the lake and the princess’s life shows that she is in a special relation to water. When the prince puts his legs into the hole and the water begins to rise, she begins to revive. The salvation of the lake will be like a second birth for her. She will be able to go into the water again, which symbolises birth, or, in this case, re-birth. As was mentioned above, the princess’s “illness” is painful to the king’s ego. To a certain extent her whole existence has become a burden for him and he tries, as in the case with his instructions to the metaphysicians, to push the idea of her condition into the background. The beginning of this condition goes back to her christening, which, in turn, is close to the day of her birth. For this reason, her birth is very likely to be viewed by the king as a prelude to the ensuing disaster. To his unconscious, the expected re-birth of his daughter is liable to bring about a disaster, similar to the one following her real birth, or at least to preserve the unbearable situation for an indefinite period. He is doing his paternal duty and he does his best to find a person who would volunteer to die for his daughter and his kingdom but deep inside, in his unconscious, he is afraid of the likely outcome, should anyone offer himself/herself for a saviour. The hostility and despise he expresses towards the prince, even after he has realised that the young man is the wanted volunteer, show the resistance of his unconscious to the idea of the light princess being re-born. “‘Oh!’ said he at last, putting up his sword with difficulty, it was so long; ‘I am obliged to you, you young fool!’” (45) and several lines later: “‘You wretch! I will have you put in a sack, and stuck in the hole.’ ... ‘Condition again!’ roared the king, once more drawing his sword. ‘Begone! Somebody else will be glad enough to take the honour off your shoulders’” (46).

They both know all too well that a dead body cannot save the lake and that another volunteer is unlikely to be found, yet the king threatens to stick the prince’s body in the hole or to find another person. It becomes apparent his unconscious does not welcome the idea of the problem being solved and life resuming its previous course. He does not realise that, however, because his reluctance is repressed. When the critical moment comes and the prince sits on the stone with his legs in the hole, the king leaves the site, unconsciously unable to cope with the prospect of the princess’s resuming her light-bodied and light-minded ways.

The king is not the only one who displays signs of repression. The princess herself does that on several occasions. One such moment is when she is called by her parents to discuss “the painful subject”. As usual, the princess giggles all the time and simply refuses to be serious.

“Now be serious, my dear, for once,” said the queen.

“No, thank you, mamma; I had rather not.”

This flat refusal can mean only one thing: the truth is too painful for the girl to bear seriously. She pretends to herself to be happy all the time, laughs ceaselessly and does her best to repress the deep unhappiness, resulting from not being like other people.

The two aspects of the unconscious in “The Light Princess” I have discussed (symbolism and repression) show that there is much more to the text of the fairy tale than what the reader might perceive at first glance. As was made clear, some of the hidden messages were probably concealed from the author himself. Nevertheless, these messages are there and they are not encoded in the text by chance but are the product of MacDonald’s unconscious. The reader cannot fail to register those messages, either consciously, if he/she has been acquainted with psychoanalytical theory, or unconsciously. Either way, the message is conveyed. The application of the psychoanalytical approach to the analysis of “The Light Princess” helps us uncover the hidden meaning and the way it is conveyed to the reader through the mechanisms of unconscious encoding.

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