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Hypnosis, Utopia and Dreaming

An Insight in How Hypnosis Paired With
Dreaming Can Create a Utopia

Bachelor's thesis in Language Studies with Teacher Education -
Master's Programme

Supervisor: Cowan, Yuri

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Sammendrag

Hypnose, utopi og drømmer, tre vidt forskjellige felt som flettes sammen med et mål om å oppnå et perfekt samfunn. Hvordan kan disse tre feltene henge sammen og hva er egentlig hypnose, utopi og drømmer? I denne teksten er feltene forklart hver for seg for å gi et godt innblikk i hvordan de kan henge sammen, denne sammenhengen utforskes ved bruk av Ursula K. Le Guins bok *The Lathe Of Heaven*, hvor hovedpersonen har drømmer som forandrer på virkeligheten. Disse drømmene viser oss at det er mulig å finne en sammenheng mellom disse tre forskjellige feltene. Vi får se at ved hjelp av drømmer kan man skape sine egne utopier som kun begrenses av vår egen fantasi.

Abstract

Hypnosis, utopia, and dreams, three disparate ideas that come together with the goal of accomplishing the perfect society. How does these three fields belong together and what exactly is hypnosis, utopia, and dreams? Throughout this text the three disparate fields are explained in turn with the intent of showing how they can be connected. The connection between these three fields is explored with the help of Ursula K. Le Guin's book *The Lathe of Heaven*, where the main character has dreams that alter reality. These dreams show us that it is possible to connect the three disparate ideas of hypnosis, utopia, and dreams. We learn that through the help of dreams, one can create one's own personal utopia that is limited only by the imagination.

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An insight in how hypnosis paired with dreaming can create a utopia.

Introduction

Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* is a science fiction novel where we get to explore a world of interesting power dynamics, mind control, hypnosis, utopia, and the loss of power. This is the base for this paper where I will explore mainly the power of hypnosis, utopia and dream-sleep as well as the connection between these three, and how they affect the different aspects of the protagonist George Orr's life. Throughout this text you will see that despite hypnosis, dream-sleep and utopia being three completely independent ideas *The Lathe of Heaven* (Le Guin), connects these disparate ideas through the protagonists' adventures during the course of a court mandated treatment administered by the antagonist, whose goal with the treatment is to create a utopia rather than to treat George's issues. Despite the fact that hypnosis, dream-sleep and utopia are three separate fields, it is interesting to explore how these fields are connected, and in this case, how they are connected through the main character in Le Guin's book, *The Lathe of Heaven*. How Le Guin has made the connection between hypnosis, dream-sleep and utopia through her main character, George Orr, is the baseline of my analysis and exploration of the connection itself.

Utopia is the first concept that will be discussed and explained from the help of two books and an article. Traditionally utopia is viewed as harmonic and safe place that we imagine, often as an image of how the world would be better for oneself (James 227). However, after looking at how utopia has been defined our views and opinions of the idea of a utopia might change as there is a debate on whether utopia is all that harmonic and safe. Utopia is as mentioned connected to hypnosis in the *Lathe of Heaven* through George Orr, this is due to his dreams that happen while he is in a hypnotic state (Le Guin). Hypnosis is a highly debated theme for psychiatrist, as the research on hypnosis as a tool to treat mental illness is not vast enough, and therefore lacking in good reliable sources. As we look at what hypnosis is we will see that there is even a disagreement on how they define this technique (Lynn, Kirsch and Terhune 1253). Regardless of the disagreement between the psychiatrists, looking at how they define and use it helps us connect hypnosis to both utopia and dream-sleep. Sleep is the part of day where we dream, and dream-sleep is important for the purpose of connecting hypnosis to utopia, because of this importance we will look at REM-sleep which is the sleep-stage that one typically dreams in. While looking at REM-sleep we will get an understanding of the abbreviation "REM" as well as an insight into what happen both in our minds and in our bodies during sleep (Blumberg, Lesku and Libourel 38).

Defining utopia while looking at the interpretation of utopia

Throughout the novel, Dr. Haber is trying to create the perfect world through George's dreams. His search for utopia is based on his subjective perception of the world, as he knows it to be an overcrowded and abused one. For Haber creating a utopia is the goal. However, "a basic limitation of utopias is that they are not real; and in fact may never be realized" (Leeuwen, Verkoren and Boedeltje 294). This description of a utopia does not cross Dr. Haber's mind and he continues to work towards a utopia instead of opting for the opposite, a heterotopia. According to Leeuwen et al, a heterotopia is described as "disturbing, but real places that demonstrate the frictions of and the grains of multiple alternatives to neoliberalist peacebuilding" (292). My interpretation of this quotation is that a heterotopia is more realistic due to its content including both conflicts and disagreements, as well as differences between people. In order to exist, a heterotopia must have alternatives and one can not have alternatives without conflicts between either institutions or individuals as their opinion might differ in what alternative they would choose. Sadly Dr. Haber does not realise that a perfect world cannot be obtained, and he continues to work towards a traditional utopia, "traditional utopia is about envisioning ways in which human society might be reorganized on earth. Its mechanisms are legislation, education or institutional changes, occasionally changes in technology or environmental management." (James 227).

As Dr. Haber throughout the novel works on creating a utopia, by making changes to both the technology, and the environment, he reveals that his mind wishes something other than what the words he utters convey. In most of his conversations where the world is the main point, he speaks of how it is corrupt, broken and abused by the humans living there. However, when it comes to the changes he makes to the world while George is dreaming, Dr. Haber's position is altered, he goes from being a one of many psychiatrists to one of the few with government funding. In other words, he is inadvertently creating his own utopia, as changes are made to both his education, the technology he has access to through work as well as both the social and ecological environment around him, eventually giving him a higher position in society along with more power. This indicates that when he instructs George on what to dream, he is sneaking in parts of his deeper wishes for satisfaction in his own life, meaning that his subconscious mind is interfering with the world altering dreams George has. Creating a utopia is for Dr. Haber the solution to heal a broken world as a "Utopia is conceived as a perfect society" (Woodcock 20-21). Although this is the goal for Dr. Haber, Woodcock states further in this quotation that "anything perfect has automatically ceased

growing” (21), further supporting the implication that a heterotopia should be the goal as it is not perfect and will continue to evolve and develop.

While Dr. Haber wants to and think that it is a man’s purpose to create a utopia, in order to heal what he thinks is a broken world, George Orr does not want to be responsible for altering the world as the responsibility that comes with this task is too much for him. Even though George does not see the world as a good place, as he finds it to be overcrowded and in desperate need of reshaping (Le Guin 58). George states this clearly in a conversation between the two where Dr. Haber questions him, “isn’t that man’s very purpose on earth – to do things, change things, run things, make a better world?” “No”, George replies, “/ Things don’t have purposes.” (Le Guin 81). Here he states clearly that he does not think that things have a purpose, thereby shooting down Dr. Haber’s suggestion that it is human responsibility to improve the world. Despite this, George does not hide his wishes for a better life, but these wishes do not correlate to the description of a utopia where “human society might be reorganized on earth.” (James 227), his wishes relate more to those of a daydreamer. For him the improvements are mainly small changes that only affect him, such as an increase of income or a better living situation (a bigger apartment). These are all improvements that happens to his life that while he dreams in hypnosis at Dr. Haber’s office. This suggest that his subconscious mind is working to protect him and that it might be helpful to rely on it to create a better world. George’s subconscious mind interferes with his world-altering dreams and implements small elements of his deeper wishes into a bigger picture where the world is the main point.

Despite there being a discussion on whether or not a utopia is physically possible, as some people claim that it is not a natural composition of the world, as it is breaking the laws of nature, we are for this purpose viewing utopia as an idealistic world. When I state that it is for this purpose viewed as an idealistic world, I highlight that it represents a world where anything is possible, and the laws of nature does not apply. It will be our imagination that limits our utopias and therefore a utopia is a subjective thing belonging to the person imagining and/or dreaming about it. Because there is no solution to how a utopia must look and what it should contain, a utopia is complete when the one developing and imagining it, is satisfied with the result of their imagination and/or dreaming. This means that the perfect world could be a clear ocean and that humans exist in the form of jellyfish simply floating along in the stream, never bothering each other with one’s presence (Le Guin 1), as our main character suggests early on in the book.

Hypnosis – a debated practice

In order for Dr. Haber to create a utopia that he categorizes as the perfect world through George's dreams, he hypnotizes him. "Hypnosis engenders marked and sometimes profound changes in cognition, perception, memory, emotions, and behavior." (Lynn, Kirsch and Terhune 1253), this explanation of hypnosis fits into the book perfectly as George becomes susceptible to suggestions and outright commandoes. The changes George experiences in memory, emotion and perception all help Dr. Haber control what George is going to dream about. Throughout the book we see that Dr. Haber is somewhat successful in controlling what George is dreaming about, but there are elements that Dr. Haber has not intended for, and this suggests that something within George is working at the same time as Dr. Haber to create a utopia/reality that appeals to George.

The reason why hypnosis is such a successful tool for psychiatrist in treating various diagnosis, might be that "the majority of individuals are responsive to at least some suggestions," (Elkins, Barbasz and Council 4-5). As George's "perception, memory, emotions, and behavior" (Lynn, Kirsch and Terhune 1253), are affected when hypnotized, Dr. Haber gets as previously stated, the power to influence and control what George is going to dream about. While hypnotized his perception and emotions are affected meaning that when Dr. Haber says "let's talk about what kind of dream you are going to dream, George, / Last time / we were talking about / your work / You feel as if you had no elbow room, as if you weren't free." (Le Guin 58), George's dreams are likely to include a change in the amount of space available. This shows clearly that the global problem of overpopulation is something that Dr. Haber feels the need to deal with. However, Dr. Haber is abusing his position as a psychiatrist and clearly suggesting that in his dream George is going to solve the problem of overpopulation. Due to the suggestive conversation with Dr. Haber, George is more likely to have a dream where space and the amount of space he has is going to be affected. This is clearly supported as Dr. Haber goes on to say, "the patient, who was always taciturn in hypnosis, at last responded merely: "overpopulation"." (Le Guin 58).

Changes accomplished while hypnotized affect us after the hypnotic session/procedure is done. For George and Dr. Haber collectively the impact is mostly physical as the world they know is forever changed after this dream where he seeks to solve overpopulation. For George alone, the impact is on both his circadian rhythm and his cognition and memory, as he does not know what Dr. Haber has talked about while hypnotized. At the beginning of the novel George is sent to Dr. Haber to help him deal with his mental health issues and as hypnosis is mainly a therapeutic tool used to treat people struggling with mental health

(Elkins, Barbasz and Council 4-5), the use of hypnosis as a tool, is a perfectly acceptable proposition from Dr. Haber. However, the changes that are accomplished is part of what makes the procedure a highly discussed topic and has created a divide between psychiatrist all over the world (Elkins, Barbasz and Council 4-5). This might be one of the reasons that George does not trust Dr. Haber he does not know how he affects him while he is hypnotized and when he wakes up from a dream, he does not remember anything that is said or done while hypnotized by Dr. Haber (Le Guin 80-82). In the novel there is a description of the steps before George is hypnotized “he reached out and placed his right hand on Orr’s throat, almost casually. Orr flinched from the contact as if he had never been hypnotized. / Once he had the man under, he put on a tape he had cut himself, of all the boring repetition of deepening trance and posthypnotic suggestion for rehypnotizing.” (Le Guin 57). Here we read that George is hypnotized and based on how it is written in the book, it is reasonable to conclude that hypnosis may both in fantasy and reality “include spontaneous shifts in consciousness that include hypnotic-like or “trance-like” experiences such as absorbed attention and altered somatic experiences” (Green, Barabasz and Barrett 262).

As hypnosis has proven to be a controversial practice in the medical field where experts are still disagreeing on whether or not the practice should be accepted as a form of treatment (Lynn, Kirsch and Terhune 1253), it is difficult to conclude with a clearly supported sentence. To summarize, based on the findings in this text, I experience hypnosis as an effective way of entering the subconscious mind without disturbing the brains natural activity, or the body’s reaction to the occurrence of memories that one might not even remember properly (Lynn, Kirsch and Terhune 1253). This is supported by the book, where several changes are added to the world in George’s dreams without them having been suggested by Dr. Haber in the session. Due to the somatic changes already brought up (Green, Barabasz and Barrett 262), I experience hypnosis to be a kind way to lead the body and mind through a journey through the subconscious mind. This is an experience that can be both joyous and frightening as the goal of hypnosis seems to be a reward in the form of a better mental health for the subject undergoing this treatment (Elkins, Barbasz and Council 4-5).

Dreams and dream-sleep (REM-sleep)

The somatic experiences would in this novel be what George experiences while dreaming during hypnosis. After being hypnotized and having entered a trance-like state, George falls asleep and eventually enters the deepest stage of sleep, REM-sleep. «See his eyes move, under the lids? That’s how they first caught this whole phenomenon of dreaming sleep, back in the 1930’s they called it rapid-eye-movement sleep, REM. / It’s a hell of a lot more than that, though. / Cortical, subcortical, hippocampal, and midbrain areas are all as active as in waking.” (Le Guin 60). Even though “REM stands for rapid eye movement” (WebMD Editorial Contributors), our eyes do not collect any visual data during this period as most people sleep with their eyes closed. (WebMD Editorial Contributors). As Dr. Haber makes a point to explain what REM-sleep is to Heather Lelache, a lawyer that George has hired to help advocate for his rights, it becomes clear that this state of sleep is a complex and intriguing one. When one is in this state of sleep, the body’s main functions such as breath and pulse is as active while awake but relaxed (Blumberg, Lesku and Libourel 38). REM-sleep “Rapid eye movement (REM) sleep is many things. It is a behavioral state, a brain state, a dream state, and a paradoxical state.” (Blumberg, Lesku and Libourel 38), and in *The Lathe of Heaven*, it is an important part of the plot as it is only possible for George to have effective dreams while in this dream-sleep. Based on this it is reasonable to assume that Dr. Haber is aware of what he is doing when he intentionally lets George fall into the REM-stage of sleep. In a conversation between the two, Dr. Haber says, “some dreams are all right – safe.” (Le Guin 14). This suggests that Dr. Haber assumes that George only has effective dream while he is in the REM-stage of sleep. As George is entering the REM-sleep stage, he has already been subjected to suggestions and commands from Dr. Haber, meaning that his dreams are going to consist of what he has been told or suggested to dream about. We looked at an example of this earlier when we saw that George dreamt a dream that obliterated six billion people from the world.

A dream is “stories and images that our mind creates while we sleep” (Marks). Despite the fact that George is only able to have effective dreams in the REM-stage of sleep “Dreams can happen at any time during sleep.” (Marks). Based on the statement that; “you have your most vivid dreams during a phase called REM (rapid eye movement) sleep” (Marks), it is likely that the memory focuses on REM-sleep, making you remember only your most vivid dreams. This is connected to our subconscious minds as we can dream of events that have happened or events that we wish would happen. Our subconscious minds are implementing bits and pieces of our memory when we dream and working to create dreaming

experiences that entice us both positively and negatively. Steve Paulson states that dreaming “while certainly fascinating, is not as real as our waking state: it’s a distorted version of reality.” (Paulson, Barrett and Bulkeley 29), meaning that while sleeping we can dream about anything, and it is just our imagination that stops us. As a comment to this Kelly Bulkeley states that “Dreaming is a kind of play.” (Paulson, Barrett and Bulkeley 29). When she states this, she refers to the fact that our subconscious minds are simply preparing us for adulthood or what comes next in life (Paulson, Barrett and Bulkeley 29). When stating this, she also argues that dreaming is “a different kind of reality.” (Paulson, Barrett and Bulkeley), going against the statement from Paulson. According to her definition of dreaming, our dreams are the result of our experiences and anticipations expressed through the use of our imagination paired with pieces from the reality we know. When children play, they often pretend to do actions or activities that they are either going to face in life or would like to experience, perhaps it is fair to compare our dreams to an extension of our childhood. If we look at George and his dreams it is possible that he grew up with little and that his dreams alter reality in such a way that he gets more than what he ever imagined possible as a child, because his subconscious mind is interfering and somewhat dictating his dreams in addition to the commandoes from Dr. Haber.

For the purpose of the discussion on whether or not our subconscious minds are part of our wish to create a utopia, dreams are both an extension of our imagination and childhood as well as an expression of our minds resting needs and abilities in the dream-sleep stage. This interpretation means that the dreams that occur while sleeping, extends our subconscious minds into pictures and images that we are able to interpret due to our own, experiences, wishes and expectations. Dreams are short-lived utopias created by individuals during their dream-sleep meant to promote growth, development and improvement for themselves, and as previously stated our dreams can be accessed through hypnosis as the trance-like experience brings our minds into the subconscious granting us the ability to experience our wishes both psychologically and physically.

Can our subconscious minds through dreaming create a utopia?

Based on how the book portrays dreaming as well as hypnosis as a means to create a utopia, it is clearly connecting the three disparate ideas of hypnosis, dream-sleep and utopia, as one does not occur without the other. When George is hypnotized, he is dreaming, when he is dreaming, he is imagining a utopia based on the instructions given by Dr. Haber. In the book we see that George alters reality in his dreams, but does he really create a utopian world when there are clearly elements of excessive destruction, injustice, abuse of power and unfair conditions for the people? The destruction of six billion people through a plague is not likely something that would be a part of a utopia (Le Guin 56-64), it is very much possible that it might be part of the way to a utopia, but it is not a utopian thing itself. For instance, it would be logical to assume that a large portion of the population that is left, either struggles economically or emotionally as they are likely to have lost either a source of income to the household or a loved one. Which in turn is not a particularly nice feeling to inflict on someone. Even though they might not remember clearly, they are still subject to the power abuse carried out by Dr. Haber, in his eyes humans are simply pawns in a game where he is God.

As previously stated, George's dreams are most likely a result of his deepest hopes and wishes where he imagines a reality much kinder than the reality, he was living in. This is apparent both with regards to his living situation, his social status, and the local society around him. Throughout countless sessions with Dr. Haber, George is constantly subjected to the suggestions and commands of a man looking for a better world, but despite constant commands on what to dream about, none of the dreams he has goes according to Dr. Haber's wishes. George's own subconscious mind is constantly working while he sleeps to imagine a different world. George creates his own utopia, a heterotopia, focusing on the parts that will directly affect him. Due to George's subconscious mind constantly working in his dreams, he is adding bits and pieces of himself that he either longs for or has experienced, into the utopian world Dr. Haber has asked him to create. This is probably the reason for several of the world altering dreams having some less desired outcomes as he is unable to dream about everything clearly. His mind is focused on what affects him personally, and due to this split focus, he is subconsciously implementing pieces of despair, panic, and chaos into the world.

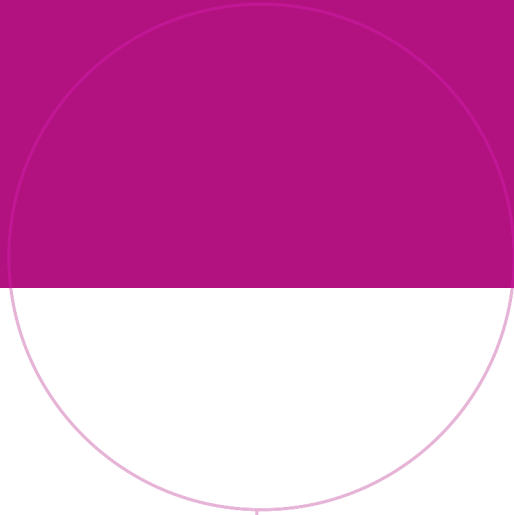
Even though George is hypnotized, he is somewhat aware of what is happening in the sessions. This is evident as George early in the sessions is questioning the methods that Dr. Haber uses. Because he is hypnotized, he cannot trust his memory to recall what happens in the sessions. George feels unsafe as he realises that he is not going to be able to control what

happens or to break free from the hands of his psychiatrist. Dr. Haber manipulates George through hypnosis and enters his mind creating dreams that are meant to improve the world. Even though the book ends with the destruction of the world, it is possible to conclude that through his dreams in an attempt to create the perfect world, George has created several utopias that he was continuously developing further in the next dream. This is because George's dream is not what eliminates the world, Dr. Haber's dream is. This suggests that George has most likely created heterotopias, real but disturbing places, as his dreams constantly leads to a world where there is still conflict and improvements to be made as it is not perfect. Dr. Haber's obsession with creating a utopia is what killed him, suggesting that even though it is possible to create a utopia through dreaming, it might not be the best alternative.

As we have seen through the exploring of the different fields, they are not only complex on their own but add to the content and complexity of the book by being naturally disparate. It is imperative to summarize that although disparate, the three themes utopia, hypnosis and dream-sleep is combined perfectly in the book by Ursula Le Guin. Here she has created not only an intriguing masterpiece of science fiction but also given ground for sparks of imagination on how the world we live in is connected through our dreams of the utopia that we imagine ourselves living in. Although I must point out that creating a better life might be a good thing it is important to remember that even though "Utopia is conceived as a perfect society" (Woodcock 20-21), a heterotopia is as stated previously a more realistic expectation as "anything perfect has automatically ceased growing" (Woodcock 20-21), with reference to the implosion of the world for Dr. Haber. Perfection is therefore not a realistic goal to accomplish but rather a motivational dream that keep us pushing forward to make improvements to not only our own lives but also to the world.

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