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Spring 2014: Literary Theory

Exam #2: Freud's Interpretation of Dreams → "Total Eclipse of the Heart" music video

The dream sequence has long been entertainment's most popular tradition for expressing people's true thoughts and desires. It allows filmmakers and authors the extra freedom to pack their works with a multitude of symbols, from the very obvious to the deeply hidden. The creators of the music video for Bonnie Tyler's '80s hit "Total Eclipse of the Heart" employed this method to reveal the leading lady's taboo inner desire. However, in accordance with Freud's process and theory for dream interpretation, the dream ultimately fails to completely fulfill her wish and thus leaves the character haunted by her "anxiety dream".

In his groundbreaking book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud explains his theory of "wish-fulfilment" and employs it to delve further into the more specific "anxiety-dream". In the first few chapters, he analyzes a number of real dreams and concludes that "wish-fulfilment" is in some form the meaning behind all of them. He states that dreams "represent a certain state of affairs as being as one would wish it to be". In dreams we are able to express what we truly want to happen, to own, to be without as many limitations and judgments as we face in reality. No dream is wasted without meaning, and the meaning of each can be analyzed to an extent with uncensored recollection and proper interpretation that takes into account the dreamer's past, day, and unfiltered emotions towards those things. He states that in most, if not all, cases, dreams have an "ulterior motive", a wish that is something other than what it appears to be on the surface. However, when the dreamer's exact wish is not fulfilled during the events of the dream, the wish still exists and has been exposed, but consequently the dreamer will be left frustrated. Freud expresses that when the "wish-fulfilling tendency of dreams is frustrated", often the

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"anxiety [in dreams] that corresponds to repressed libido". Even more specifically, Freud relates the repressed sex drive to the relations between parents and their children beginning at a very young age. He states that the "sexual selection soon makes its appearance in the parent; it is a natural tendency for the father to spoil his little daughters, and for the mother to take the part of the sons, while both, so long as the glamour of sex does not prejudice their judgment, are strict in training the children". While here he does not say that parents are necessarily attracted to their children or vice versa, he makes note of the repressed primal nature that nonetheless exists in the unconscious of all humans. In addition, he makes clear that these repressions, when brought to the surface in a person's dreams, are "experienced with feelings of aversion, so the content of the fable must include terror and self-chastisement". This intense resistance for the wish does not however negate the existence of the wish but rather provides an explanation for the failure to fulfill it even in a dream. These specific qualities of Freud's method for interpreting dreams are relevant for the analysis of Tyler's dark, seemingly twisted music video.

For a person who had never seen the video for "Total Eclipse of the Heart", the song would seem to just be about a desperate woman trapped in an intense, forbidden romance. The extent of the forbidden nature of the desire is not fully realized until one sees the accompanying video, which immediately reveals young school boys as the subjects of the woman's fantasies. The concept for both the song and the video were conceived simultaneously by Jim Steinman, who therefore acted deliberately in terms of the creative decisions for both. He consciously composed the lyrics and music of the song with the storyboard of the video in mind, making every symbol incorporated into it highly

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calculated (Hernandez). The video itself features the singer Tyler as a lovelorn woman who sings about her desire for who is soon revealed to be her young male students in a boarding school. The erotic fantasies displayed in the video expose the leading lady's repressed wish to have sexual and perhaps romantic relations with the boys. Throughout the dream, Tyler grows increasingly desperate for the boys, who are shown in a number of ways to represent some of the different archetypes of boys and men. Although each second of the video and every lyric is packed with symbols, going through each would be futile without a preliminary examination of the woman's life. However, one could achieve a general Freudian interpretation of the dream and ultimately conclude that Tyler's wish fails to come true even in the realm of her dream.

The video can be split into four main parts by certain musical and visual moments that change the pace of the story. The beginning introduces Tyler dressed completely in white, singing dramatically out a window of the boarding school when a white dove flies into the room. White is the color of purity and innocence, often in a sexual sense, and its use here represents Tyler's sexual purity at this point in the video. Doves are a symbol of love and peace and here shows the entrance of love in Tyler's life. The lyrics express her feelings of loneliness and nervousness at the idea that "the best of all the years have gone by". Because the objects of her affection are young boys, this line expresses her worry that waning of her own youth would come in the way of their "love". The first boy then appears before her with literal "bright eyes" that emphasize his youth and are in reference to the much repeated line echoed in the song. The second part of the video is then marked by an unusual key change down and the simultaneous blowing of a red curtain in a bedroom

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doorway. The red here implies the shedding of purity, or Tyler's virginal state, as she descends with the song's key further into her fantasy of the boys in school uniforms, swimsuits, ninja/karate-wear, and suits, which represent the schoolboy, the athlete, the fighter, and the classed-up man, essentially all different "types" of the young male. The third and most erotic part is marked by the breaking of wineglasses by the boys in suits and the fuller instrumental sound brought by the first chorus. The shattering glasses and break into louder sound imply Tyler's mental freeing from her sexual repression. In the lyrics "And we'll only be making it right/ 'cause we'll never be wrong" Tyler acknowledges the forbidden nature of her desire. The most notable elements of this part are the use of stairs and Tyler's physical position. Stairs and the levels they produce have long been used in cinema to symbolize characters' physical, social, or mental states. As the boys climb up the stairs towards where Tyler is at the top, they are stripped of their sense of "ordinary decency" and "social belonging" in their approach to the "exuding seductiveness" of the "darkest of human impulses"*. Tyler's position at the top of the stairs establishes her under Hollywood's tradition of the "oppressive dominion of a malignant force, of human destructiveness, the 'overseeing' catalyst of moral instability"*. In addition, the way beams of light shine from behind her here refers to the "eclipse" in the title of the song, which in turn emphasizes the fact that this desire she possesses must be kept in the dark, like a "shadow on [her] all of the time". The final part of the video, which consists of the end of the dream sequence and the next morning, is marked by the slowing down of the song in the line beginning "Once upon a time". Although we see that Tyler never succeeded in having explicitly sexual relations with the boys, this line reaffirms this fact that her wish

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remains a wish, a fairy tale that did not and cannot come true. In the morning, Tyler is fully awake and being introduced perhaps as the boys' new headmaster. The fact that the one literally bright-eyed boy is a haunting of her imagination further emphasizes the wish-
"un"fulfilment, for Tyler did not achieve the satisfaction even through her dreams.

Although this particular dream is a work of fiction, the creators of the music video produced a plausible depiction of a repressed desire brought to light in a dream. Implementing Freud's theories of wish-fulfilment in dreams and the "anxiety-dream" revealed the extent of the leading lady's self and societal repression in Tyler's song and video. Had her desires come to fruition by some intercourse or relationship with one of the young men in the dream, the wish would have too easily been fulfilled to express that very extent of repression and only resulted in a partial eclipse of the heart.

*this source did not provide sufficient information on its website to create a proper citation
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