

Faculty of Arts
Charles University
Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

-Ms. Yaren Gezer

-“Notes for the House of Sleep: Reading the Hieroglyphs of Night-Language in Anais Nin, H.D., and Anna Kavan”

-MA Thesis

-Opponent’s Report

Brief summary of subject:

The thesis explores the role of dreams and the unconscious in prose texts by Anais Nin, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) and Anna Kavan.

Methodology and structure:

The 84 pp. thesis contains an introduction, three principal chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography. It combines close reading with theoretical and contextual criticism.

Achievements:

The work underscores some crucial matters, such as the basic tension and functional operation of her three target writers in relation to the institution of psychoanalysis, both with respect to their life narratives and so individual psychic systems, and with regard to their compositional work. We also get broader bigger picture concerns covered, such as when we read, “Modernism thus transforms the theological search for God into a search of self, the great modernist invention which Freud explored extensively through psychoanalysis” (7). As such, psychoanalysis teaches us to know that it is itself an epiphenomenon of larger historical processes. Also we discover, “Psychoanalytic therapy itself alone signifies the birth of the individual, for its major aim is to discover and display the layers and powers of the self, more so than it has ever been done before” (7). This gives a sense of the genealogy of the self in various cultures and historical underpinnings.

Regarding the psychic meaning of dreams we learn interestingly that “the works of Anna Kavan, Anais Nin and H.D., which treat daydreams, nighttime dreams, and phantasies as their starting points, possess some essentially modernist aspects” (10). Not only this, but we also are taught of Freud’s “interpolative” (22) way of interpreting dreams, and how dreams are for Freud “egoistic” (25). A notable mention is made to something Anais Nin writes, namely, “we need to create a center of strength and resistance to disappointments and failures” (41).

Importantly with respect to Anna Kavan we learn that, “All factors that contributed to her depression which no treatment helped are connected to her bereft and isolated childhood that formed her character” (56). A key insight occurs when the candidate writes, “Another significant point concerning Kavan’s depiction of soldier patients is the motif of the divided self, the tormenting double and enemy that is [60] actually a part of oneself” (59–60). Yet another notable contribution from the candidate occurs when we read, “In her short story, “A Changed Situation”, Kavan describes a house that has turned into a monster hunting her,

which could be read as what it would be like to live in the conscious space instead of the unconscious one [where] she resides” (65). These are strikingly perceptive observations in a thesis that is very solid through and through.

Shortcomings:

As noted in the next section, the language contains some glitches. In addition, some more recent figures might have been engaged in the theoretical psychoanalytic literature and tradition—such as for example, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva or Slavoj Žižek—but are not.

Formal features (e.g., language & style, referencing, bibliography, formatting, abstracts):

The language contains some errors: e.g. page 18 paragraph 1 there is a syntax issue, “alter” should be “altering” (20), “renown” should be “renowned” (32), “compared to” should be “compared with” (33), “di verted” should be “diverted” (40), “to revealing to revealing” should be “to revealing” (42), quote on p. 45 contains “fatter-patterns” should be “father-patterns”, “rises” should be “raises” (46), “who sometimes so close” should be “who sometimes is so close” (60), from a quote it would seem that “individuals” should be “individual’s” (61). The other formal aspects are very good.

Questions:

The candidate writes, “Freud was clearly not of the opinion that dreams predict [the] future or that they are supernatural messengers” (18). All the same, what does the candidate think of the idea from Walter Benjamin that “Every epoch, in fact, not only dreams the one to follow, but in dreaming, precipitates its awakening”? Second question: concerning general trends or critical propensities in dream studies research *vis-à-vis* imaginative prose of the kind that the present diploma thesis explores, what does the candidate see emerging on the horizon such as just for instance, in terms of questions of cultural sensibility, of some leading edge questions, or even just of the general ideological climate?

Conclusion:

I recommend the thesis for defense and propose a preliminary grade of 1.

Seattle, 21 viii 23
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