



UNVEILING THE FACADE OF HORROR: A PSYCHOANALYTIC READING OF *BEFORE I WAKE*

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Abstract: The 2016 horror film *Before I Wake*, directed by Mike Flanagan, is an example of how fear can be used to reveal the deepest parts of the human heart. This topic is called "Unveiling the Facade of Horror: A Psychoanalytic Reading of *Before I Wake*", starring Jesse Hobson, attempts to present the narrative as a journey into the mother's unconscious, rethinking the horror genre. It is an undercover psychoanalysis movie disguised as Mike Flanagan's horror adventure, packed with a good story that is thought-provoking and surprising in its content. It looks like a dark dream that mixes a bit of horror with intense drama. When we delve deeper into the film, it becomes clear that the film is a desire for destruction and a time warp. In the era of stress, anxiety and depression, the horror genre could be used to uncover the dark side of human consciousness and helps to search for the causes and offer solutions.

Keywords: unveil, facade, horror, psychoanalysis, *Before I Wake*

INTRODUCTION

'*Before I Wake*' establishes and sustains a disorienting, depressing vibe; the laments and grieving are relevant to the story. Death looms large over the entire film, serving as a gyre around which all these happenings revolve. The effects of death on various individuals and how it alters their equilibrium of life and how people deal with it, different strategies to go back on the path of existence. This provides room for a deeper examination of the field of psychoanalysis. The mind conjures these images following a devastating loss. Another issue is being able to discriminate between reality and delusion. Dreams and their interpretation offer a solid foundation upon which to build the true interpretation. That may be founded on the deciphering of Freud's dreams to clear up any ambiguity.

This paper aims to interpret *Before I Wake* as a psychoanalytical movie rather than a fantasy or horror movie by unravelling the narrative through the subconscious mind of the female character, Jessie Hobson, and interpretation of Cody's dreams. It is an attempt to delve more into the extra layers of dream like aspects in the film through the lens of Freud's psychoanalysis. Through the detailed analysis of Cody and Jessie, we interpret how traumatic incidents affect people and their present life. This paper aims to understand the narrative through an analysis of the subconscious and the sequencing of dreams. This movie is a visual treat which indeed contributes added meanings. The symbols and images used in this movie are highly suggestive.

In the era of stress, anxiety and depression, the horror genre could be used to uncover the dark side of human consciousness and helps to search for the causes and offer solutions. This paper is structured as follows: second section "Traumatic Trails" focuses on the impact of trauma in the lives of Jessie Hobson and Cody Morgan. This section attempts to examine how traumatic effects affect the present life of the characters. The third section "Decoding Dreams" attempts to analyse the dreams and interpret symbolic

images which form an integrated part of the movie in synthesising meaning. It attempts to find how past traumatic experiences get imprinted in his mind and interpreted in his dreams. The mystery of Cody's Canker Man monster is resolved and the true meaning of that creation is discovered using Freud's dream interpretation. The fourth section titled "Unbolting Fantasies" attempts to present the narrative as the subconscious mind of Jessie Hobson. It is an endeavour to disentangle the events of the horror narrative as a psychological experience. The post traumatic illusions, their effects on their present life and a deeper analysis into the narrative to disclose the hidden meanings through the application of Freud's psychoanalysis are dealt with in this chapter. This is an attempt to re-conceive the supernatural narrative as a journey through the subconscious mind of Jessie Hobson.

TRAUMATIC TRAILS

Trauma studies examine the psychological, rhetorical, and cultural significance of trauma in literature and society. Traumatic experiences challenge language limits, fragment the psyche, and rupture meaning. Deaths are considered traumatic if they occur without warning, untimely, involve violence, damage to the loved one's body, were caused by a perpetrator with intent to harm, were perceived as preventable, believed the loved one suffered, or were unfair and unjust. The characters in the film *Cody and the Hobsons* suffer from traumatic loss, and their grief is always present throughout the narrative. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder can be diagnosed in those who have experienced a child's violent or unexpected death. Trauma is the response to a deeply distressing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, cause feelings of helplessness, and diminish their sense of self. Traumatic experiences can initiate strong emotions and physical reactions that persist long after the event. Traumatic neurosis is marked by the "compulsion to repeat" the painful event with the hopes of mastering the unpleasant feelings.

Both Cody and the Hobsons are suffering from traumatic loss and the way that loss affect them powers the narrative every step of the way. Sometimes it is like right into the face, and other times it is much more subtle, but the characters' grief is always there, moving the story forward, and the film uses it to convey a deep message about this important emotion.

The death of a child, especially a violent or unexpected death, can be considered traumatic for the parent. If one has lost one's child this way and are struggling months after to resume normal functioning, and if one has other symptoms like intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and a depressed mood and outlook, one could be diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Prior to the events of *Before I Wake*, the Hobsons lost their young son Sean in a drowning accident, and when the movie begins, Jessie belongs to a grief support group to help her cope with the loss. They can't have any more children, so to help fill the hole in their hearts; they decide to take in a foster child, Cody. Soon after they bring him into their home, he sees a picture of Sean and dreams about him, and Mark and Jessie get to see their beloved son one more time.

At first, that seems like a nice reprieve for a grieving couple, but it soon takes a dark turn. Once the Hobsons discover Cody's secret, Jessie begins to take advantage of him to help ease her pain. She shows him a home video of their son opening presents on Christmas morning, and then she hangs up a bunch of pictures of Sean to subtly push Cody into dreaming about him as often as possible. This causes a small rift between her and Mark, as Mark recognizes that she's using the child for her own emotional comfort, but Jessie insists that she's simply allowing Cody to help her heal. It gets even worse from there. Sometime later, Jessie gets her doctor to prescribe sleeping pills, and she secretly gives them to Cody so she can have even more time with her son. With this part of the story, *Before I Wake* captures an important truth about grief: it can seriously mess with our heads and cause us to mistreat the people around us. Jessie was so caught up in her own pain that she treated Cody like a tool for her own emotional comfort when she should have loved him unconditionally, just like every child deserves. Jessie's grief is front and centre throughout almost the entirety of *Before I Wake*, but Cody's pain is only revealed to us towards the end. Since he's an orphan, we know that he lost his parents at a very young age, but he doesn't seem terribly affected by it. He says that the Canker Man ate his mother. He eventually forgot what really happened, and his mind combined his mispronunciation of the word "cancer" with his vague memories of his mother's withered condition before her death to create the monster that haunted his dreams. After discovering all this, Jessie goes to the orphanage where Cody is being kept, and she finds that his nightmares have completely run amok. Finally, Jessie brings Cody home with her, and the next day she tells him the truth about his past.

DECODING DREAMS

Our feelings, motives and decisions are powerfully influenced by our past experiences and stored in the unconscious. Dream interpretation makes effort to discover the unconscious thing. If we transfer our conception from a single element to the entire dream, we find that the dream is a distorted substitute for something else, something unconscious. Flanagan has created something which not only speaks of his highly creative and cinematically inclined mind but also something that is highly artistic and technically sound. The movie is thoroughly impressive by the depth and intricacies of the plot. One of the most complex ideas that the film digs into is using its heavy focus on dreams to provide a commentary upon memory and how memory can pervert reality. There is a rich mythos going on with Cody's situation that the film only scratches the surface of it. Dreams and its interpretations provide a strong lead to reach the actual intended meaning. The implications of Cody's dream creations are huge. The Canker Man in the movie is the embodiment of all of Cody Morgan's fears, insecurities, and trauma. It stalks and kills relentlessly, as Cody imagines it to be a remorseless and evil entity that kills mothers and children and wraps their bodies into nightmarish monsters. However, it is a part of Cody's subconscious, so it does react and perceive the world as he does, even remembering Cody's old toys and memories. Cody's dreams are horrific, but the boy himself is charming and upbeat. The Canker Man monster that appears in Cody's dreams could be interpreted to create meanings. When we analyse his dreams, the monster represents aspects of himself that he finds repulsive or ugly. He possesses some fears or some repressed emotions. The monster in Cody's dream represents his mother's image during her last days. To turn his mother into a monster in his dream suggests that she is becoming someone whom he is ashamed of or someone he no longer recognizes. Here, for Cody, it is his long-lost mother. The monster developed in Cody's dreams is a nice, new sort of horror. A monster that can assemble himself through butterflies and still be menacing is a real feat. He is like a literal cankerous growth, a terrifying bit of nightmare oozing out of Cody's mind. His mouth and eyes, or a lack thereof, is chilling. He is the best visual way of representing what grief, repressed memory, sorrow do when wrap up inside instead of being let out and dealt with properly. The fact that this threat is played by dream logic makes him even more unpredictable and frightening, especially when he is inhabiting and distorting the memory of Mark and Jessie's dead son. The movie's final act goes the furthest with this and there are some really disturbing images that Cody's dreams bombard us with.

At the end, the movie reveals the mystery of Cody's nightmare. The monster in Cody's nightmare turned out to be his mother. We also learned more about Cody's mother. His mother loved Cody very much but she was sick and eventually died when Cody was very young. It was a very traumatic experience for young Cody. And the monster is based on his fear of losing his mother. His mind imprints his cancer-stricken mother's image during her last days and the word cancer which was mistaken as canker by Cody. This appears as his dreams and he believes it to be a monster which constantly follows him and attacks people around him. The truth behind this dream of a monster is deciphered through an investigation of his past life and incidents. Omission, modification and regrouping of material are the effects of the dream censor and the devices of dream distortion. Modification and rearrangement are accustomed to displacement. The constant relationship between a dream element and its interpretation is symbolic. The dream element itself is a symbol of the unconscious dream thought. The things we see in our dreams do not always represent what they stand for. Jessie used to have dreams and illusions where she sees a white bathtub. It does not stand for the actual bathtub, instead it suggests the need for self-renewal and escape from everyday problems. Likewise, the lighted Christmas tree that Jessie saw in her waking dream may represent her experience of some anxiety or stress in her domestic life. The loss of her child and her strained relation with her husband aptly represent this. This also signifies a passage of time, self-development, and spiritual enlightenment.

CONCLUSION

The movie "Before I Wake" appears to be a horror film with monsters and violence, it delves into psychological elements and the workings of the subconscious mind. The narrative can be seen as the imagination of the main character, Jessie, who is struggling with post-traumatic experiences. Illusions and delusions play a significant role in the story, particularly as Jessie grapples with the loss of her son and her husband. The revelation is made that the "Canker Man," who consumes people, is a representation of Cody's mother during her battle with cancer. The missing people mentioned in the film are implied to have

died in some way, adding to the depth of grief and healing explored in the movie. Overall, "Before I Wake" is described as an underrated horror film that explores these themes in a unique way.

The events depicted in the film are essentially the result of an individual's imagination after experiencing a traumatic event. This movie presents a captivating concept that skilfully explores the realms of imagination. Jessie, the protagonist, follows the familiar path of a horror movie, delving into medical records and conducting interviews to uncover fragments of a dreadful tale encompassing sorrow and suffering. Through this journey, Jessie finds herself caught between the realms of dreams and reality.

The horror elements in the movie serve as a façade, symbolizing how painful memories can turn into consuming monsters. While the blending of genres may slightly compromise the purity of the horror genre, it provides an excellent opportunity to portray the psychological scars of Jessie, Mark, and Cody in a more captivating manner than strict realism could achieve. Amongst the material that is more touching than conventionally terrifying, Flanagan successfully delves into the depths of human emotions, creating a narrative that is bolder and more intriguing than most of the conventional horrors one might encounter.

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