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Encounters of a Dreamy Kind: Dreams as Spaces for Intergenerational Play and Healing in Dutch Children's Literature

Abstract

Dreams can function in children's books as a means to connect young characters and older figures in the story. This article presents three methods to study intergenerational encounters in and through dreams in a selection of contemporary Dutch children's books. First, a digital analysis of a corpus of 81 books shows that the older the characters are, the less they are described as dreaming. A close reading of intergenerational dreams lays bare, amongst others, the associations of dreaming with healing and death. Finally, a reader response study reveals that young children already understand some dream mechanisms and that older readers sometimes may draw on Freudian theory to interpret dreams, but that some also resist that.

Introduction

Dreams are spaces where characters in children's literature have some of the most impactful experiences of their lives. This chapter considers a selection of Dutch children's books in which dreams function as spheres where people of different generations can interact with each other in meaningful ways, in encounters that would not be possible in real life. These books fit into a long tradition of children's books in which the old and the young share a special connection, and more specifically, of books where dreams facilitate supernatural intergenerational bonding.¹ The most famous example is Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958). In this fantasy novel, the eponymous hero has to stay with his aunt and uncle for a longer period. There, he has regular dreams about

¹ * This article was written as part of the research project Constructing Age for Young Readers (CAFYR). This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC)

a girl called Hatty. At the end of the story, it is revealed that Hatty is Mrs Bartholomew, an old lady who lives in the house where Tom is staying. It appears that Tom and Mrs Bartholomew were dreaming together, providing friendship and comfort to each other. In David Almond's more recent *Kit's Wilderness*, a boy weaves elements from his grandfather's stories into his dreams, enabling a continued bond as the old man gets ill and eventually dies. In the Danish picture-book *Så blev farfar et spøgelse* (That's how grandpa became a ghost) by Kim Fupz Aakeson and Eva Eriksson (2004), a grandpa visits his grandson in his dreams after the old man has died. They realize that he has some unfinished business on earth and try to find out what it was. As their recollection testifies to their close bond, it is revealed that they never truly said goodbye and that they need to do so before the grandfather can find peace.

In the research project Constructing Age for Young Readers (CAFYR) that I currently lead at the University of Antwerp, we are interested in these kinds of productive intergenerational encounters, whether they occur in dreams, in fiction, or in conversations about fiction.² This project combines various methods, three of which I will apply in this chapter to reflect on age and dreams in the Dutch books in our corpus.³ First, I will zoom in on the use of digital tools for distant reading, and consider how this method can inform us about dreams in children's literature. Next, I will present an analysis of three books through close reading dream scenes, and finally, I will discuss the results of an empirical study in which we had readers of different ages reflect on an intergenerational dream scene.

Digital analyses

In CAFYR, researchers practice what Franco Moretti calls »distant reading«, a reading method that is based on the distribution of tasks over several individuals and/or computer programmes. For this project, Lindsey Geybels, Wouter Haverals, a group of interns and I digitized 800 titles by authors who predominantly write children's books.⁴ The period under study runs from 1970 to 2020

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2 More information about this project, as well as related publications can be found on the website: <https://cafyr.uantwerpen.be/>

3 The corpus is bilingual and also consists of books in English.

4 The names of the interns who have contributed to CAFYR can be found here: <https://cafyr.uantwerpen.be/team/>

and comprises of oeuvres of authors who have won important literary awards and are also widely read by children and/or adolescents. For Dutch, it includes works by Guus Kuijer, Bart Moeyaert and Anna Woltz.

By the time I did the research for this chapter, we had annotated 200 titles in our corpus, 81 of which are in Dutch.⁵ The annotation process involves that we scan the books, correct the OCR-ed text and turn them into xml files.⁶ In these xml texts, we add information to passages that can give us more information about the construction of age in the book. Amongst others, we put tags around all the characters' names and pronouns that refer to characters. We label all of these with a so-called character id, that we can match with a spreadsheet in which we collect information about the characters, such as their age, gender, race, and role in the story. In addition, we also assign all the direct speech in the book to the right characters, so that we can trace who says what. The annotations are done by the researchers in our team, as well as by interns who receive a training for it. The code that I use for the analysis was developed by team members Lindsey Geybels and Wouter Haverals, with the support of Mike Kestemont and Pieter Fivez (TextUA).

For the analysis that follows, I worked with the 81 Dutch books from our corpus that have already been annotated. The questions with which I approached this set were the following:

- (1) Who dreams in the children's books? Is there a bias with regard to age? Do adults and older characters also dream?
- (2) What features are associated with the dreams, and does that tell us anything about age?

We used a grammatical parser that is able to link adjectives, adverbs, verbs and possessions with their subjects or antecedents. From the annotated books, we drew all the passages in which the word »dream« occurred, whether it was as a noun (een droom, dromen), as part of a composite noun (e. g. »droombeeld« / dream image), as a verb in all its forms (droom, dromen, droomt, droomde, droomden, gedroomd) and as an adjective or adverb (»dromerig« / dreamy or dreamily).

Various meanings of the word »dream« are caught in the expressions that are pulled out of the books. Some rank under the most common meaning listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: a dream as »a series of images, thoughts, and emotions, often with a story-like quality, generated by mental activity during sleep«. But equally common are the meanings of dream as »illusion«, »vision or

5 For a detailed description of our method, see Vanessa Joosen: Research in action. Constructing age for young readers. In: *International Research in Children's Literature 14* (2021). H. 3. P. 252–268.

6 In this process, the page numbers are lost. When I refer to extracts from the digitized books in this article, no page numbers will be included.

hope for the future« and »daze«. In some cases, these different meanings are also conflated. What you see in your sleep, for example, may relate to what you hope for the future.

A grammatical parser can identify the grammatical function of words and can match them with related words in a sentence. With this tool, researchers can derive which character the nouns and verbs were linked to. Since the CAFYR annotators also assigned an age or life stage to each character, we could see which age group is described as dreaming. The result is a table in which we record the title of the book, the status of the word linked to dream (verb/adjective/possession), the speaker and its age, the age of the person who dreams and the quote in which dreaming is mentioned.

If we simply count all these mentions, a clear tendency can be discerned. The older the characters, the less they are described as dreaming:

Child: 60

Adolescent (12–17): 57

Adult: 51

Old adult: 9

With the typical focus of children's books on young characters, it was expected that their dreams get more prominence than those of adults and older adults. But if we look at the citations, we see that some of these explicitly connect dreams to a young age. In Guus Kuijer's *Krassen in het tafelblad* (1978, Scratches in the table leaf), a shopkeeper talks to the girl protagonist, Madelief, about her deceased grandmother. She says: »She was still a girl then. Had too many dreams in her head, you know. But later, both legs firmly on the ground and working hard. Grandma was good at that!«⁷ Here, »dreams« refers to illusions and aspirations more than to the images that you see in your sleep. They are presented as something that young people are allowed to have, but that older people are expected to exchange for a more realistic approach to life. The idea that children dream more and better than adults in their sleep also pops up in books that are not part of the CAFYR corpus, such as Isabelle Hoving's *De gevleugelde kat* (2002, *The Dream Merchant*). There, children are recruited by a company that wants to exploit people's dreams to sell them things. In this book, it is claimed that the children can navigate dreams more easily than adults.

Citations from other books suggest, however, that older characters in children's books do dream. Sometimes it signals a lack of alertness: »He [granpa] stares dazily, as if he is dreaming« (Kuijer, *Krassen in het tafelblad*).⁸ At other

7 My translation. Original text: »Toen was 't nog een meissie. Had te veel dromen d'r kop hèn. Maar láter, beide benen stevig op de grond en wérken hoor. Dát kon oma!«

8 »Hij [opa] kijkt wazig voor zich uit, alsof hij droomt.«

times, the dream refers to a state of bliss, as for Guus Kuijer's old dog Olle, who thinks »I am just happily going to lie down in my dream house« (Kuijer, *Olle*).⁹ Such bliss can be caused by an intense longing for the past that cannot be realized in life, but only recreated in dreams. A man who has lost his wife after 37 years of marriage, muses in Guus Kuijer's *Tin Toeval in de onderwereld* (Tin Toeval in the Underworld):

I dream such beautiful dreams, I do. Then she [Maud] is with me again and then she sings for me. That makes me happy, because in my dreams, I'm not deaf, you know. I hear her voice clearly, as if she is sitting next to me. It's delightful, really.¹⁰

This citation seems to suggest that older people live in the past, which would be an ageist stereotype. However, another citation from Edward van de Vendel's *De dagen van de bluegrassliefde* (1999, The days of bluegrass love) suggests that older people also have future-oriented dreams:

The Little World Organization had started in the pink dreams of a little grandma. She dreamt of skipping children from all countries who glowed with joy and only thought of play. Who, when they had grown into adults and ministers, ambassadors or sergeant-mayors would interrupt their daily jobs from time to time and think back to think of their old friends. And of peace.¹¹

Moreover, the repeated references to dreams in *Tin Toeval en het geheim van Tweebeens-eiland* (Kuijer 1987, Tin Toeval and the secret of the Two-legged Island) make clear that older people can also fall in love:

The captain looks dreamily at grandma. He taps his hat with his finger. [...] Oma looks weird. It's as if she is dreaming. She smiles like a Christmas angel.

The captain then calls her: »Mathilde, woman of my dreams«. ¹² Taken together, all these quotes show that older characters frequently dream in children's books,

9 »Ik ga lekker in mijn droomwoning liggen«.

10 »ik droom zulke mooie dromen hè. Dan is ze [Maud] weer bij me en dan zingt ze voor me. Daar word ik blij van, want in mijn dromen ben ik niet doof weet u? Ik hoor haar stem helder, alsof ze naast me zit. Dat is heerlijk hoor«.

11 »De Little World Organization was begonnen in de roze dromen van een omaatje. Ze droomde van huppelende kinderen uit alle landen die glommen van plezier en alleen nog maar aan spelen dachten. Die, als ze volwassen zouden zijn en minister, ambassadrice of sergeant-majoor, hun dagelijkse werk zo af en toe eens onderbraken om aan hun vroegere vriendinnetjes en vriendjes terug te denken. En aan vrede«.

12 »De kapitein kijkt dromerig naar oma. Hij tikt met zijn vinger tegen zijn pet. [...] Oma kijkt raar. Het is net of ze droomt. Ze glimlacht als een kerstengeltje«. »Mathilde, vrouw van mijn dromen«.

whether literally in their beds, or metaphorically in their minds. These dreams can take them back to elements from their past that they miss and want to relive, or let them imagine a future for themselves which has not yet been achieved.

It has to be stressed that the digital tools give us only a limited and potentially distorted view of the function of dreams in the corpus. Some books, such as Guus Kuijer's *The Book of Everything*, offer several dream scenes, but these titles were not included if they did not explicitly feature the word »dream« but if the dreams were only signaled with words like »sleep« or »bed«. Moreover, the results that we did find isolate sentences from the broader context. This is why the CAFYR project does not take the results of the digital analyses for granted, but uses them to raise hypotheses and questions for close reading. From the small sample that I have discussed, two hypotheses derive:

- (1) The older the characters, the less often they dream in children's literature
- (2) Child characters are more prone to have nightmares, which are rare in adults and older adults in children's books.

The second observation derives from my reading of the quotations that were extracted from the annotated books. When we then specifically looked for the word »nightmare«, we found eight mentions. One was related to an eighteen-year-old, who described a situation in prison as a nightmare, another to a thirteen-year-old and the other six to children. Given that older characters are often constructed according to the image of the wise old mentor,¹³ it can perhaps be expected that they are not featured as having nightmares in children's books: this image presupposes that the old are without stress, fear or other intense emotions – the very stuff of nightmares.¹⁴ Again, I want to stress that these results derive from a relatively small sample of 81 annotated books, but they may lead to interesting questions or hypotheses about dreams in children's literature more broadly.

Close reading

The observations described above prompted me to look for the exceptions to these hypotheses, that is the occasions where older people are shown to be dreaming and even to have nightmares. In this second part of my chapter, I discuss analyses of three children's books that feature intergenerational dreaming. The

¹³ Sylvia Henneberg: *Moms Do Badly, But Grandma's Do Worse: The Nexus of Sexism and Ageism in Children's Classics*. In: *Journal of Aging Studies* 24 (2010). P. 125–34.

¹⁴ Kathleen Woodward: *Against Wisdom: The Social Politics of Anger and Aging*. In: *Cultural Critique* 51 (2002). P. 186–218.

second question of the previous section will inform this analysis: »What features are associated with the dreams, and does that tell us anything about age?« This time, I focus specifically on the intergenerational encounters that occur in and through these dreams. How are they constructed and to what effect?

I discuss three texts in which such dreams occur. One comes from the CAFYR corpus, Marjolijn Hof's *Mijn opa en ik en het varken oma* (*My grandpa and me and the pig called grandma*). In addition, I discuss Paul Biegel's *Wie je droomt ben je zelf* and Dolf Verroen and Charlotte Dematon's *Droomopa* (*Dream Grandpa*). All three also feature an important element that the digital analysis did not catch: illustrations.

Biegel's text is a retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood* first published in 1977. I have discussed it in detail in my book *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales*, where I studied the interaction between fairy-tale criticism and rewritings. Biegel's preface offers an introduction to Freudian dream theory for children, adapting the register and technical terms? It appears as a »Freud light« introduction for young readers:

Dreams happen in your innermost self. That is the place where you feel something without being able to say where it is: happiness, sadness, anxiety, fear. [...] Your innermost self is full. There is much more there than what comes out: memories and fantasy images and longings which somehow remain hidden and which you don't know yourself. But every once in a while something comes up; then you know all of sudden what you didn't know before. If you dream, something from inside of you also comes up. Sometimes exactly those things that are hidden. But they don't come openly; they dress up and perform a story like a play.¹⁵

The short story begins with the grandmother lying in bed, while she is waiting to die and remembers the happy moments in her life. She is not fooled for a moment when the wolf enters, but accepts that death has arrived at last. Once the wolf has eaten the grandmother and Little Red Riding Hood, he falls asleep and all three of them start to have nightmares. What follows is a rather bizarre sequence of events that shifts rapidly from one character to the next and leaves a lot for readers to interpret.

The grandmother dreams that she becomes death in the form of a dark woman, scaring people, dancing with a black priest to then return home. When she looks into the mirror, she greets herself by saying »hello death« and is revived. »The wolf, that is your own fear«,¹⁶ the grandmother later explains to the huntsman. Her awakening is described as a rebirth: »I dreamt that I was dead,

¹⁵ Paul Biegel: *Wie je droomt ben je zelf*. Illustrated by Carl Hollander. Haarlem: Holland, 1977. P. 5–6, my translation.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* P. 62.

then came the light, and now I can finally start living«, is the grandmother's reaction when she is released.¹⁷ Little Red Riding Hood dreams that she is transformed into the wolf and also feels that she can finally be human after being released. The confrontation with their worst fears in their dreams has proven to be healing. In contrast to the huntsman, who is trembling in the face of the wolf, the grandmother and Red Riding Hood have accepted the presence of the wolf and their own mortality, and they are at peace with it. When in the final lines of the tale, the wolf knocks at the door, the grandmother is by no means surprised and offers him a drink. *Wie je droomt ben je zelf* is a postmodern tale in which nothing appears as it seems. What can be distilled from the fragmented and ambivalent dream scenes is that people can only truly live when they confront their worst fears. Intergenerational dreaming in this story provides a space do so, one in which the grandmother does not die, but starts a new phase in life. This is the kind of progress narrative that age scholars find so rare, and so crucial for older characters.

By comparison, *Droomopa* offers a more linear and conventional view on older characters in children's books. A nine-year-old boy is staying with his grandparents when the grandfather unexpectedly dies in his sleep. While his grandmother takes care of the practical arrangements, she does not want the boy to see the body of the dead man because she believes that death only belongs to old people and that children should be shielded from it. By addressing death in a children's book, Dolf Verroen and illustrator Charlotte Dematons show that they disagree with this point of view. Children can be confronted with the death of loved ones, and need coping mechanism to deal with it. Not only does the boy feel that he is not taken seriously, he is also left alone with his grief, as the grandmother shows no emotions. The boy visits the grandfather's body despite being told not to, and realises to his shock that his grandfather no longer dreams. As the preparations for the funeral proceed, he remembers the dreams that his grandfather shared with him while being alive. Like Biegel's preface, Verroen's text offers the reader an explanation of what dreams do, this time through the characters in the book. The grandfather teaches the boy how dreams work and what they can mean:

›Most people think that dreams are lies. That's not true. Dreams carry meaning. Always‹.
›Even if you're old?‹ I asked.
›Especially if you're old. What I dreamt last night...‹¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid. P. 54.

¹⁸ Dolf Verroen: *Droomopa*. Illustrated by Charlotte Dematons. Amsterdam: Leopold 2018: P. 10. My translation. Original text: »›De meeste mensen denken dat dromen bedrog zijn. Dat is niet waar. Dromen hebben een betekenis. Altijd‹. ›Ook als je oud bent?‹ vroeg ik. ›Juist als je oud bent. Wat ik vannacht gedroomd heb...‹«

In the first dream, the grandfather flies in a helicopter in New York. He then falls down from a skyscraper and lands in his own kitchen with his grandmother and some coffee. The meaning, according to him is simple: »that I feel at home everywhere and want a big mug of coffee«. ¹⁹ This is a happy dream, that is also reassuring: if the grandfather feels at home everywhere, he may also feel well in death. But the grandfather also has nightmares, for instance that he is a child again and has to fart in a room full of fancy people. He also dreams that he wants to be a dove but cannot manage to fly, and in another dream that he can fly through the clouds and that he grows so big that he reaches the clouds.

Droomopa uses dreams to evoke what Marah Gubar calls the »kinship« between childhood and adulthood: a shared domain of human feelings and characteristics that generations can have in common and that may form the basis of empathy and collaboration. ²⁰ After all, the desire to fly is one of the traits that Jerry Griswold associates with childhood in *Feeling like a kid* and that is illustrated in classics such as *Peter Pan*. ²¹ It is a feature of the grandfather that children may be able to identify with. Vice versa, the grandfather shows that he sympathizes with children, reliving in his dream what it feels like to be intimidated as a boy in a room full of grownups. His grandson remembers the grandfather telling him about this nightmare at a moment when he feels disempowered and lonely himself. Via dreams and memories their bond is strengthened.

The images by Charlotte Dematons further connect the boy and the old man. They do so through a red item of clothing: a red hat for the boy and a red scarf for the grandfather. Moreover, when the grandfather remembers how he felt as a child, he looks exactly like his grandson, a connection that literally highlights their »kinship«, in the sense of their biological connection. The illustrations also support the impression that dreams form a crucial way for the boy to heal after his loss. The final dream uses full and bright colours to provide a hopeful message of reunion and farewell, as well as the comfort that the grandfather will be doing in death what he liked best: flying. The grandfather's image is fading away as he rises up in the sky in a hot-air balloon. The grandson seems to be briefly lifted from the ground to bid him farewell, and since he sits in a hot-air balloon, the old man doesn't have to be afraid of falling down anymore. The final image on the endpapers shows the boy looking at the stars – it is a common form of consolation for children to say that the deceased have become stars. He is now wearing his grandfather's red scarf as well as his own hat. This shows that he treasures the memories of the old man, and the same anticipates on him growing older as well and perhaps one day passing on these items to a member

¹⁹ Ibid. P. 10. Original text: »dat ik me overal thuis voel en dat ik een grote bak koffie wil«.

²⁰ Marah Gubar: *Risky Business: Talking about Children in Children's Literature*. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 38 (2013). H. 4. P. 450–57.

²¹ Jerry Griswold. *Feeling Like a Kid: Childhood and Children's Literature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 2006.

of a future generation. His recollections of his grandfather's dreams as well as his own dreams have played a crucial part in highlighting the kinship with his grandfather and coming to terms with death.

Marjolijn Hof's *Mijn opa en ik en het varken* (engl. *My grandpa and me and the pig called grandma*) takes a more parodic perspective on the romanticized idea of the young and old dreaming together. Dreaming together is one of the many adventures that the protagonists, an unnamed girl and her grandfather, share. »Tonight I want to dream about you«, the girl tells her grandfather, »You get the main part«. She also plans it carefully, instructing the old man: »It's better if you stay downstairs. Then I will feel lonely up there and think of you down here. And then my dream begins«. ²² As they carry out this plan, she dreams about her grandfather indeed, but it's a very boring dream: he simply reads the newspaper, makes coco and eats a waffle. The next morning, she tells him to be a bit more adventurous in her dream. This time he becomes a native American and makes coco for a bear. For the third dream, she provides a script, one that's even more spectacular, as the grandfather almost gets eaten by the bear. This makes him want to quit: »In this house there will be no more dreaming about me. [...] One second later and I would have been killed«. ²³ As the granddaughter is pleading for another exciting dream, the grandfather now demands that he can invent it. But since the grandfather mainly describes the activities that they do on a daily basis, she is still not happy: »all those things you have made up can also happen in real life. [...] I don't need a dream for those«. ²⁴ For this girl, dreams have to go beyond reality. She doesn't want comfort, but excitement, even though she chooses to stay at a safe distance while her grandfather faces the danger. The compromise is that he tells her gripping story in which a cowboy is involved in a gripping fight with a bear. »I had never heard such an exciting story. No dream could compete with that«. ²⁵ The storytelling distributes the agency in a way that both feel comfortable with. Hof's book parodies the kind of romantic intergenerational dreaming that *Droomopa* evokes, with the girl delighting in the excitement that her grandfather's predicament brings. At the same time, it also highlighting aspects of dreams that can be uncomfortable: the loss of control.

A few trends occur in all three books that I have discussed here. First of all, they highlight the importance of intergenerational ties for all three older peo-

22 Marjolijn Hof: *Mijn opa en ik en het varken* oma. Illustrated by Judith Ten Bosch. Amsterdam: Querido 2011: P. 95. My translation. Original text: »Vanavond wil ik over je dromen«/ »Je krijgt de hoofdrol«. »Het is beter als je beneden blijft. Dan voel ik me eenzaam daarboven en ik denk aan jou hier beneden. En dan begint mijn droom«.

23 Hof, *Mijn opa*: P. 98–99. Original text: »Er wordt in dit huis niet meer over mij gedroomd. [...] Eén tel later en ik was er geweest«.

24 Hof, *Mijn opa*: P. 100. Original text: »al die dingen die je hebt verzonnen kunnen in het echt ook. [...] Daar heb ik geen droom voor nodig«.

25 Hof, *Mijn opa*: P. 101. »Ik had nog nooit zo'n spannend verhaal gehoord. Daar kon geen droom tegenop«.

ple. Their connection with their grandchildren especially is important to them in real life and in their dreams, and they dream together with them. Like in many stories that connect young and old characters, the generation in between is left out of this special connection. No mothers or fathers appear in these dreams: the dream world is the exclusive domain of the children and the old characters. The aforementioned Danish picturebook *Så blev farfar et spøgelse* (engl. *That's how grandpa became a ghost*) by Kim Fupz Aakeson and Eva Eriksson is an exception: here the boy and his grandfather meet in his dreams, but the parents, who sleep next door, tell in the morning that they also sensed his presence in their dreams. This intergenerational dreaming includes all generations. Second, all three stories that I have discussed here, as well as *Så blev farfar et spøgelse*, connect the grandparents' nightmares with death. In Biegel's book, the grandmother confronts her fear of death in her dreams. In *Droomopa*, the boy is faced with the real death of a grandfather and seeks comfort in a joint dream, while in *Mijn opa en ik en het varken oma*, the girl uses the potential death of her grandfather as a way of making her dreams more exciting. All these stories are rooted in the same idea though: that children fear losing their grandparents and that dreams provide a way of dealing with that anxiety, whether it is to produce comfort or excitement. Finally, the books teach children about dreams in a »Freud light« class on the subconscious, the function of dreams and the idea of Tagesrest.²⁶ They do so explicitly, in a preface or explanation in the story, as well as implicitly, by showing the effect that the dream has: while some of the dreams are disturbing, the young characters leave them happy and with a sense of fulfillment and connection to the older generation.

Interviews

After approaching age and dreams through distant and close reading, I briefly want to approach dreams and intergenerational encounters in the reading process. For this I draw on research in the CAFYR project that is carried out by Leander Duthoy.²⁷ In order to find out what role the age of the reader plays in the construction of age in children's books, he has readers from various stages in life read the same book and then interviews them about it. One of the books he uses in his study features dream scene and he asked his participants about it: Joke

26 Cp.: Sigmund Freud: *Die Traumdeutung* [1900]. 12. Edit. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer 2005. See also the contribution by Maren Scheurer in this volume.

27 A description of his method and some preliminary results can be found in: Leander Duthoy: »I Became Much Wiser over Time«. Readers' Use of Innocence and Wisdom as Age Norms in Responses to Children's Literature. In: *International Research in Children's Literature* 15 (2022). H. 3. P. 280–294.

van Leeuwen's *Iep!* There, a couple adopts Viegeltje, a birdlike girl or girl-like bird, depending on your perspective. Viegeltje flies away from them and encounters various characters, including a girl called Loetje. Her father is very busy and has little attention for her, and after an argument, they part without saying goodbye. Later in the book, after she has met Viegeltje, Loetje has a dream about her dad, which partly consists of this image and of a scene in which Loetje is sitting on an egg that holds her father. The story provides another intergenerational encounter in a dream, although there is no indication that the father is dreaming along with Loetje. How did readers of different ages make sense of this dream?

First of all, the youngest and oldest participants did not feel inclined to interpret it all. Nine-year-old Louise (a pseudonym) said that Loetje dreams about her father because she misses him but does not go into Duthoy's invitation to reflect further on the meaning of the egg: »That's just a dream, I think. [...] It doesn't have to make sense for me«. ²⁸ Similarly, nine-year-old Ella thinks that Loetje misses her dad but simply says that she has no idea what the rest of the dream means. 75-year-old Fieke plainly refuses to make sense of the dream, which she found very strange: »I cannot say anything sensible about that«. ²⁹ And when she does briefly speculate that the dream might mean that Loetje wants her dad, she says: »No, that's too far-fetched, I think«. ³⁰

What is perhaps more relevant is that all the other participants in Duthoy's research did try to make sense of the dream and that many of them worked with the idea of »Tagesrest« – Freud's idea that dreams contain residues from your day. ³¹ *Iep!* plays into that theory by linking elements from Loetje's encounter with Viegeltje to her father. 11-year-old Agamemnon uses this connection to interpret Loetje's dream. 14-year-old Janne understands that Loetje regrets not having said goodbye to her dad and understands the idea of Tagesrest: »I often have scary dreams too about what happened that day or the day before«. She also interprets the symbolic function of the father in the egg: »something came out of it that she loves very much« – her dad. ³² Two readers went further in interpreting the dream. 19-year-old Fons started analysing it in detail. He picks up that the father in the dream says that he is cold: »maybe that father also feels lonely«. ³³ Moreover, Fons also identifies a feeling of parentification in the dream scene, with Loetje caring for the father while she still needs care herself. A

28 My translation. Original text: »Dat is gewoon een droom, denk ik. [...] Het hoeft niet logisch te zijn voor mij«.

29 »Ik kan daar niks zinnigs over zeggen«.

30 »Nee, dat is te ver gezocht, denk ik«.

31 Cp.: Sigmund Freud: *Die Traumdeutung*.

32 »[I]k heb ook vaak nare dromen over wat er die dag of die dag daarvoor is gebeurd.« »kwam daar eigenlijk iets uit dat zij heel graag heeft«.

33 »[M]isschien is die vader ook wel eenzaam«.

49-year-old female participant in Duthoy's research was the most explicit in using Freudian theory in making sense of the dream, explaining that »in her subconscious she maybe thinks that she also needs to care for her father a little bit«. ³⁴

Based on the small size of this sample and due to the inevitable messiness and fuzziness of the results of this kind of qualitative empirical research, it is impossible to draw general conclusions about a clear relationship between the participants' age and the interpretation of the dream. What does become apparent, however, is that already the youngest children in the experiment understand that the dream was a way for Loetje to deal with her feelings of longing. The idea of Tagesrest was already understood and rephrased by some of the children as well, even if nobody used this term for the concept. Moreover, the dream offered an opportunity for readers of all ages to reflect on Loetjes inner feelings – whether it was the more obvious fact that she misses her dad or the more complex ideas of regret and parentification. Some also spontaneously used it to reflect on her father's precarious situation, gaining a bit more sympathy for a character who was disliked by many of the participants. While there were other moments in the book do so, the dreams' bizarre nature drew readers' attention, with several going into detail to make sense of it. In a follow-up study, it would be interesting to bring readers of different ages together to interpret the dream together. Duthoy did so for other passages in the book, where this led to an interesting exchange of points of view, with the children surprising the adults with their nuanced understanding of age stages and characters.

Conclusion

Combining the findings from the distant and close reading with the small empirical sample from Leander Duthoy's research that I have discussed, it is apparent dreams in children's literature offer interesting opportunities for intergenerational understanding and dialogue. They often represent spectacular or puzzling passages in a story, with characters voicing their fears and hopes, dreaming of flying or coming as a surprise out of an egg. Given that already young children understand that dreams in books are an invitation to reflect on characters' inner and unvoiced feelings, they provide opportunities for deeper character understanding as well as for young readers to talk about their own feelings, perhaps even about their own dreams. The results that I presented from the distant reading of the CAFYR corpus suggests that adult and older adults' dreams are less

34 »[I]n haar onderbewuste denkt zij misschien ook dat ze voor haar papa een beetje moet zorgen«.

often represented in children's books. While that may be a trend that deserves further investigation, it was possible to find books in which older characters dream too. It is limiting that the three books that I found with older characters dreaming all construct them as pre- or even post death. However, they help readers understand and imagine what dreams can accomplish, stressing their healing properties and chances for adventures, as well as their potentially more frightful qualities. As the empirical research by Leander Duthoy shows, such fictional and intergenerational dreams provide opportunities for readers of different ages to think and talk about what preoccupies them and to imagine how characters of other ages feel, as well as to indulge of course in the stories themselves.

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