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The Uncanny in "A Dream of Armageddon" by H.G. Wells

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Abstract: Freud studies the different ways of provoking fear that are repressed in the subconscious and only come to the surface when they are encountered later. He refers to this as the "uncanny," which comes from the German word *unheimlich*. The operation of the uncanny first manifests itself in the strange or the ambiguous, but the uncanny also has to do with the familiar. The uncanny is a form of anxiety because of its relationship with death and repression. This study will focus on the emergence of the uncanny in "A Dream of Armageddon" by H.G. Wells.

Keywords: H.G. Wells, "A Dream of Armageddon", Freud, uncanny, *unheimlich*, anxiety, ambiguity, familiarity

H.G. Wells'in "A Dream of Armageddon"unda Tekinsiz

Öz: Freud, bilinçaltında bastırılan ve ancak daha sonra karşılaşıldığında yüzeye çıkan korkunun farklı şekillerde ortaya çıkmasını inceler. Bunu, Almanca *unheimlich* kelimesinden gelen "tekinsizlik" olarak adlandırır. Tekinsizin işleyişi ilk önce kendini garip veya muğlak olanda gösterir, ancak bilindik olanla da ilgisi vardır. Tekinsizlik, ölüm ve bastırma ile ilişkisi nedeniyle bir kaygı türüdür. Bu çalışma, H.G. Wells'in "A Dream of Armageddon"undakı tekinsiz'in ortaya çıkışına odaklanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: H.G. Wells, "A Dream of Armageddon", Freud, tekinsiz, *unheimlich*, kaygı, muğlaklık, bilindik

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I. Introduction

Freud analyzes types of provoking fear repressed in the subconscious and only rises to the surface when they come across later. He calls this the "uncanny," referring to the German word *unheimlich*. When he defines the uncanny, he first tries to offer the meaning of *heimlich* – the opposite of *unheimlich*. *Heimlich* means unambiguous, and so he suggests the meaning of *unheimlich* as ambiguity. According to Freud, the uncanny is experienced when the known and familiar experience becomes potentially alien and threatening. Freud defines the term in his essay "The Uncanny" in this way: "...for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression.... the uncanny

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something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light." (Freud 1917, 220)

An uncanny effect can be easily achieved in science-fiction. Terrifying events from supernatural or alien forces are the common fears of science-fictions (SF). These fears can also be called as uncanny. Jörg Hienger makes a connection between science-fiction and uncanny and explains this situation in his essay "The Uncanny and Science-fiction": *"Although the fantastic and, in the majority of cases, thrilling events described in SF are presented as natural occurrences, some SF stories play with the fear of the supernatural-a supernatural which is, to be sure, outside and not above all reason, and which is thus felt to be uncanny rather than divine or holy."*(Hienger, 1979: 144).

When someone loses the distinction between imagination and reality, he or she can easily have the feeling of uncanny. Additionally, if one cannot easily distinguish his or her dreams from real life, the uncanny is felt. Freud mentions this situation by saying an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced (Masschelein, 2011: 22).

As an example of science fiction "A Dream of Armageddon" by H.G. Wells depicts a war that happens in the frightening future world. In this story, a dream becomes a vivid reality for one man who cannot choose between a woman's love and the political life he tries desperately to leave behind. In this dilemma, he either would be with his love or save the world from total war. Wells predicted the absurdity and terror of modern war, as he foresaw the airplanes and the bombs years before these technologies have been introduced. The man tells this story as if he would experience it before, and his fear rises to the surface when he comes across a man reading a book about dreams. So, he experiences the uncanny. Besides, in this short story, the man cannot distinguish his dreams from reality, which is another uncanny aspect. In this study, the ambiguous, blurred distinctions of the man's dilemma will be analyzed in light of Freud's concept of the uncanny.

II. The Uncanny

The uncanny is closely linked with frightening and strange experiences that awaken dread and horror. Uncanny events can create a sense of dread because they are at once strange and familiar. There has been a modern scholarship tendency to conclude that the uncanny is frightening because it is unfamiliar. However, Freud suggests that the word *Heimlich* has a double meaning: On one hand, it suggests familiarity. On the other hand, it also means concealed. Although at first glance the uncanny can be understood as strange or ambiguous, when it is analyzed in the light of linguistic approach, it can be seen that in addition to its frightening property, the uncanny also has familiar or agreeable aspects that are hidden or concealed. By analyzing its historical options, Freud shows the ambivalence of the uncanny in psychological studies. So, he concludes that the reappearance of the repressed feelings characterizes the uncanny. Maria M. Tatar rightly states that:

For Freud, the uncanny is connected to the reappearance of something familiar from the childhood of an individual or humankind. He sees the uncanny

to reiterate as "something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged by the process of repression." Freud's definition of the uncanny rests on several subtle psychological and meta-psychological premises. However, that definition in the abbreviated form "something familiar made strange by the repression of knowledge" can prove fruitful for a literary analysis of uncanny events (Tatar, 1981: 169).

The uncanny also has another important aspect, which is closely related to the fear of death. For Freud, death is closely linked with birth, so the mother has an essential role in our dealings with death. He posited that ideas about death are first collected from our mother when we are still children. He argued that he had learnt of the death at the hands of her mother: "When I was six years old and was given my first lessons by my mother, I was expected to believe that we were all made of earth and must therefore return to earth. This did not suit me, and I expressed doubts of the doctrine." (Jonte, 1996: 61-68). Freud tries to explain the connection between death and the mother in the essay "The Theme of the Three Caskets". Here, Freud describes the motif of a hero, who chooses among three caskets. If he selects the correct casket, he can win a bride; if not, he will face death. By tracing a double reversal of destiny, Freud shows that since death is our final destiny, the hero has a choice that does not exist. The choice can become a gift or death.

Freud links the uncanny with birth and death. The beginning of life is inseparably linked with the ending of life. Birth gives us the idea of the origin of us, while death gives us an uncanny feeling of alienation and return. Perhaps because of this orientation towards death, the uncanny produces the feeling of anxiety. Freud states that the uncanny is a kind of anxiety. According to him, we can get the impression that the uncanny is a form of anxiety because of its relationship with death and repression. This impression is heightened as repression creates feelings of anxiety when repressed emotions come to the surface. In contrast, Freud sees anxiety as the cause of repression, not the effect of repression. He explains the place of anxiety in the uncanny, saying: "In the first place if the psycho-analytic theory is correct in maintaining that every effect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed into anxiety, then among instances of frightening things, there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which recurs." (Freud, 166).

Anneleen Masschelein claims that according to Freud, anxiety occurs in the ego rather than the id. The ego produces anxiety as a signal of danger that stems from reality. On the other hand, neurotic anxiety comes from reality. During the mechanism of repression, the id helps the ego in order to overcome the harmful contents and impulses of repression. When the ego detects that the unconscious contents and impulses produce fear, it gives the signal of danger in anxiety and renews the repression (2011: 42).

Freud's problematic treatment of the uncanny can be regarded as an excellent means for analyzing the fantastic effects on readers. Freud links the fantastic themes and motifs between the uncanny and literary text. The uncanny has an important role in the fantastic and science-fiction. Because of these genres' nature, they can easily produce the effect

of alienation and fear, which are the most recognizable features of the uncanny. A fantastic or science-fiction text can be easily analyzed in the light of the uncanny. According to Jörg Hienger, there are three aspects that signal the uncanny's presence in science fiction. First, a fantastic happening must, for a shorter or longer period of time, remain incomprehensible to all those affected. Second, the viewpoint of the narrator must be identical to that of his characters, or one of the characters must be the narrator. Third, the unexplained occurrence must awaken a doubt as to its fundamental explicability (1979: 146).

The supernatural is an important part of the literature evoking the fantastic. Supernatural occurrences or beings also easily create the uncanny effect. When we analyze the fantastic alongside the concept of the supernatural, we see that the supernatural has three functions: first, it creates suspense; secondly, it signifies nothing other than itself and, thirdly, the supernatural syntactically determines the course of a narrative because intrusions disturb the initial equilibrium and stimulate action (Masschelein, 88).

III. The Uncanny and “A Dream of Armageddon” by H.G. Wells

H.G. Wells' “A Dream of Armageddon” begins when a man enters the carriage and sits next to a passenger. The passenger's book about dreams attracts the man's attention. The man starts to ask questions about dreams and later tells his own story of a dream. When he tells the story, he cannot distinguish it from reality. He describes his consecutive dreams that go on night after night. He also says that he lives a different life in each dream. He mentions that he sees the same dream every night, and that is more than a dream. According to his dream or story, he would live in the future, perhaps three thousand years later. He tells of a war that includes military airplanes. He also tells the story takes place in a fantastic place called Capri. When the passenger says he has been there before, the man believes that its story does not take place in dreams and wants to make sure it is real: “*Ah!*” said the man with the white face; “*then perhaps you can tell me--you will know if this is indeed Capri. For in this life, I have never been there. Let me describe it.*” (Wells, 1952: 1018).

Here we see an uncanny effect, when the passenger mentions he had been Capri before, the man's ideas about Capri revives, the picture in his mind becomes more vivid. Moreover, the man describes his feelings about Capri's dream as frightening, which is one of the significant characteristics of the uncanny.

The man says that at the beginning of the dream, he is with his darling and is very happy. They are in a joyful place in which they spend time cheerfully. The atmosphere is described as: “*The air was full of music, full of harmonious scents, full of the rhythm of beautiful motions. Thousands of beautiful people swarmed about the hall, crowded the galleries, sat in a myriad recesses.*” (Wells: 1020). After the first war, airplanes were seen in the sky and everything changed, and the joyful Capri is replaced with a gloomy atmosphere of war: “*No one living, you know, knew what war was; no one could imagine, with all these new inventions, what horror war might bring. I believe most people still believed it would be a matter of bright uniforms and shouting charges and triumphs and*

flags and bands." (Wells, 1026). It can be said that the war has an uncanny effect on people. When they face the war's danger, their feelings about the destructive side of the war arise. People carry the anxiety of war, which brings death, destructions, suffer and pain. Freud develops his hypothesis of death drive after the World War I and states that war has an effect of uncanny since war carries fear to the human's inner world. As Masschelin asserts that "*The Uncanny*" is a recurrent reference in trauma theory because it offers a valid model of dealing with trauma in terms of shock, event, and repetition, rather than in terms of narrative representation." (2011: 138).

When "A Dream of Armageddon" is analyzed in respect to its supernatural atmosphere, it can easily be seen that the murky narration creates suspense in the readers' minds. Throughout the story, the reader cannot be sure whether the man is telling his dreams or telling his real experiences in the future. The man tells vivid details about his story, so the reader is convinced that it is more than a dream. Furthermore, the man insistently underlines that these stories are not dreams. This stress on reality can be seen clearly in this passage.

The vision was so real, you must understand, so utterly unlike a dream that I kept perpetually recalling little irrelevant details; even the ornament of the book-cover that lay on my wife's sewing machine in the breakfast-room recalled with the utmost vividness the gilt line that ran about the seat in the alcove where I had talked with the messenger from my deserted party. Have you ever heard of a dream that had a quality like that? (Wells, 1022)

Furthermore, it can be said that the confluence of dreams and reality is a key indicator of the uncanny in a text and produces ambiguity in the reader's mind.

One of the most striking aspects of the uncanny in "A Dream of Armageddon" is that the man cannot determine reality. He does not know whether he is dreaming or he is experiencing it. Sometimes he is sure the story that he tells is just a dream: "*Something of that intense reality of conviction vanished. I began to feel sure it was a dream. And then it came again.*" (Wells, 1023) At other moments, he insistently depicts his story with minute details as if it is real and he lives in the future. Finally, he sometimes talks ambiguously about his story: "*Only for a time, I could not believe that all these vivid moments had been no more than the substance of a dream. In truth, I could not believe it a dream for all the sobering reality of things about me.*" (Wells, 1022) As Freud mentions, losing connection between reality and the dream is an effect of the uncanny. Moreover, Freud states that someone's dreams become more vivid in the uncanny, and his reality becomes more effaced. It can be clearly seen in the story that the man's reality is extremely abolished, and his dreams and his comprehension of the reality are intermingled.

Another aspect of the uncanny in the story is that the familiarity. Although there is a misconception that the uncanny is frightening because it is unfamiliar, Freud claims that the uncanny can be frightening because of familiarity. According to him, uncanny has the meaning of both unfamiliarity and familiarity. In the uncanniness, familiarity has a

role in causing the fear. In the story, the familiarity can be seen clearly. The man recalls a girl from his dream. The girl's face is very familiar to the man: "*I have lived three-and-fifty years in this World. I have had mother, sisters, friends, wife, and daughters--all their faces, the play of their faces, I know. However, the face of this girl--it is much more real to me. I can bring it back into memory so that I see it again--I could draw it or paint it.*" (Wells, 1016). In addition to the girl's face, Capri, in which events occur, has a familiar effect on man. He can straightforwardly depict Capri because it is familiar to him: "*Eastward was a great cliff--a thousand feet high perhaps--coldly gray except for one bright edge of gold and beyond it the Isle of the Sirens, and a falling coast that faded and passed into the hot sunrise. Moreover, when one turned to the west, distinct and near was a little bay, a little beach still in shadow.*" (Wells, 1018). The final familiar thing which the man has is his life in the future. He can give information about his position in society. "*I had been a master man away there in the north, with influence and property and a great reputation, but none of it had seemed worth having beside her.*" (Wells, 1016). As Freud mentions about the double meaning of the uncanny, on the other hand, there is unfamiliarity that causes anxiety in the story. The airplanes are the unfamiliar objects in the story. They are unfamiliar and create anxiety and fear: "*And these flying war machines, you know, were only one sort of the endless war contrivances that had been invented and had fallen into abeyance during the long peace. There were all sorts of these things that people were routing out and furbishing up; infernal things, silly things; things that had never been tried; big engines, terrible explosives, great guns.*" (Wells, 1025).

At the end of the story, the man describes his story as a nightmare that reflects anxiety and fear. Before the man loses his darling, who is shot by an airplane, his anxiety rises. He feels anxious about the girl: "*Chiefly, I was thinking of my lady. An aching distress filled me. For the first time, she had owned herself beaten and had fallen a-weeping.*" (Wells, 1031). The anxiety is an extension of uncanny. As Freud says, anxiety is an inseparable part of the uncanny. He clearly marks the uncanny as a specific type of anxiety. When the uncanny is experienced, the feeling of anxiety rises. The uncanny's position in the theory of anxiety can be derived from the fact that Freud characterizes the uncanny as one of the "subdued, emotional impulses which, inhibited in their aims and dependent on a host of concurrent factors, usually furnish the material for the study of aesthetics (Masschelein, 42). Furthermore, he makes a close connection between anxiety and repression. He sees the repression as the cause of the anxiety. When the man tells the story, he experiences anxiety and repression. Furthermore, the man's anxiety can be clearly seen by the passenger, and throughout their train journey, he plays with his fingers, the strap of the window and is usually described as vacant. These physical appearances show the existence of anxiety.

IV. Conclusion

As a result, H.G. Wells' "A Dream of Armageddon" is a science-fiction story that has an uncanny effect on the reader. The repressed can cause the uncanny effect when it is encountered in a later phase of life. In the story the reality is blurred with the dream. The reader cannot understand where the dream begins and reality ends. Depending on the

uncanny effect it creates, it produces a strange feeling that can be resulted from the fact that the familiar turns to unfamiliar and the unfamiliar breeds fear, both of which cause anxiety.

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