

9. Dream Narratives and How They Frame the Cancer Experience

When examining the relationship between secondary and primary genres (see Chapters 1, 4 and 6) I noticed that, in cancer patients' narratives, dreams and dream-like images become interpreted as having particular significance. In chapter four, I suggested that dreams and dream narratives form a particular milieu within the narratives for expressing suppressed thoughts and fears. Furthermore, in some cases dreams and dream-like images frame the whole illness experience. Within the 672 pathographies under the study, I found 57 descriptions of patients' dream and dream-like experiences, which means that more than 8% of all participants shared some dream related data. The real number of different narratives about the dream experiences of patients and their relatives and friends is almost twice as large. Quite obviously, people who experience dreams and omens have more than one story to tell.

Before moving to theoretical issues concerning cancer patients' dream imagery, it is important to note that dream narratives, in a similar way to the use of metaphoric expressions in particular contexts, are spontaneous accounts within cancer narratives. The announcement for the writing competition did not encourage participants to talk about dreams. Respondents who composed their stories and entered their dream accounts, obviously did so because they already felt that dreams had become significant during their illness process.

In the cancer narratives dreams and dream-like images become interpreted as events that take meaning from everyday life, particularly

when they are connected with the illness process. Thus, dreams have significant meaning and position within the cancer narratives. Dream narratives are positioned either at the very beginning, or in the final chapter of cancer narratives. I argue that, in doing so, participants are emphasising the special character of dream events in comparison to those of waking life. Furthermore, sometimes dream imagery permeates the whole cancer narrative.

Several researchers have pointed out that in Western societies, discussing dreams in everyday communication is problematic (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 2000, 33; Tedlock 1992, 4). In my opinion, the great amount of spontaneous dream narratives within cancer narratives indicates the general attitude towards composing a thematic narrative based on individual experience. I suggest that in composing their cancer narratives, respondents were delivering a private soliloquy, creating an intimate situation that allowed the discussion of issues that would be considered marginal – according to linguistic ideology or culturally defined discourse – in other speech situations. Bearing in mind the fact that the whole process of communicating cancer-related issues is understood as marginal, it would be useful to analyse the function and meaning of dream accounts in cancer patients' narratives. My main interest lies in questions of why and how dreams and images, as presumably uncontrollable events, received meaning within the context of a culturally marked situation such as having cancer. In other words, I wanted to observe how cancer patients interpret their dreams and associated imagery, and how these interpretations were integrated into the cancer narratives.

Dreams and dream-like images as events

Dreams consist of heterogeneous elements and are often thought of as uniquely characteristic to human beings. According to popular understanding, dreams and dream-like images are defined as spontaneously occurring events. Spontaneous in that, in general, people are not able to control their dream imagery. Despite the fact that, in several cultures, we find specialists, such as shamans and healers, who are trained to produce and control dreams (Siikala 2002, 254–255; Price-Williams 1992, 247–249), in Western societies, controlling dreams is considered rather unusual. Therefore, dreams may be characterised as spontaneous events that occur under unintended circumstances.

Dreams reconnect us with the imagination, which is experienced throughout all modalities. In general, dreams and feelings are connected with the human ability to see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Dreaming is foremost a bodily experience that takes place in the brain. Very often, within this kind of experience there are all kinds of visual and auditory images. In Finnish, unlike English, people talk and write about *seeing* a dream or associated imagery (*näin unen*), rather than *having* one.

According to the cancer narratives, people may be awake or sleeping when dreams and dream-like images occur. Sometimes such imagery occurs shortly after going to bed or just before waking. Often people are not sure if they were actually dreaming or just daydreaming:

En malta olla kertomatta sädehoidon loppuvaiheessa. Olinhan jo toipumassa sytostaattien vaikutuksesta, kun eräänä iltana mennessäni nukkumaan, koin erikoista. Olin kerennyt juuri petilleni ja vielä valveilla, mutta silmät kiinni. Koin, että silmämykiöissäni alkoi valkoinen piste laajeta. Ihmettelin, että mitäs nyt on tapahtumassa. En halunnut avata kuitenkaan silmiäni vaan annoin "tapahtua". Hetken päästä olin kuin ison valkoisen olotilan (pallon) sisässä. Kuitenkin "näin", että oli vielä valkoisempaa: pieniä ristipistokoristeita kauttaaltaan sitä vaaleampaa tilaa koristamassa. Samassa näin kuin oikealla silmälläni soikean, poikkileikkaukseltaan hieman munan muotoisen putken. Se oli pinnastaan vihertävän harmaa ja kuin ristikudoskankaasta tehty. Putken sisään virtasi näkymätöntä nestettä, ikään kuin vettä, olematta silti sitä. Erehdyttävästi se muistutti väreilevää ilmaa. En halunnut avata silmiäni heti. Se oli ihmeellistä seurattavaa. Sitten se vain katosi ja tunsin silmissäni luonnollisen pimeyden. Avasin sen jälkeen silmäni ja totesin, etten ainakaan unta voinut nähdä. Sain kuitenkin unen helposti sen jälkeen. Seuraavana aamuna en puhunut vaimolleni "näystäni" mitään. Tuli ilta ja menimme jälleen levolle. Suljettua silmäni, alkoi taas tapahtua se sama kuin edellisenä iltanakin. Olin katselemassa samanlaista valoisa koristeellista tyhjyyttä. Yhtäkkiä näin nyt kuin molemmilla silmilläni, että näkökentän keskelle ilmestyi hiljaa pieni valkoinen pehmeä rengas: kuin jotain untuvaa tai senkaltaista. Se oli edessäni ja pysyen "tyhjässä". Sitten siitä alkoi tuikkia valkoisia "purkauksia", kuin auringon pinnassa tapahtuu, sillä erotuksella, että nämä tuikkivat rauhallisesti. Niitä oli useissa kohtaa rengasta ja ne työntyivät ulospäin ja vetäytyivät taas takaisin. Huomasin, että ne "suihkut" osoittivat hoidettavana olevaa aluetta kohden. Näkemäni ei kestänyt nytkään pitkään ja hetken päästä oli samanlaista kuin eilisiltana. Avasin taas silmäni ja ihmettelin. Sain hyvän unen sen jälkeen.

En vieläkään kertonut vaimolleni kokemastani. Kolmas iltayö alkoi samoin, kuin kaksi edellistäkin. Suljettuani silmäni, olin hetken päästä taas valkoisessa olotilassa katselijana. Nyt tuli kuin vasemman silmän puolelta nähtävää. Hiljaa näkökenttään ilmestyi kuin järven pintaa, mutta se ei ollut nytkään vettä, vaan sitä hiljalleen keinuva näkymätöntä väreilyä. Erikoista oli se, että siinä keinuivat hiljalleen kuin lumeenkukat, mutta väreiltään ne muistuttivat teräksenharmailta. Se oli kolmas perättäinen näkemäni ja ihmettelin niiden merkitystä. Nukahdin nytkin oikein pian. En kertonut vieläkään vaimolleni, vaan mietiskelin usean päivän ajan näkemistäni. Ne eivät nimitäin uusiutuneet enää. Tutkin kirjahyllystäämme hallusinaatiosta ym harhakuvista, josko löytyisi jotain selvitystä näkyihin. En mielestäni ollut sen "mielisairaampi" kuin koko elämäni aikana. Jotain muuta sen täytyy olla... Sitten aloin muistaa tapahtumia enne sairauteni ilmenemistä. Sairastuin löydettyäni 1989 oikeasta kaulavarrestani kyhmyä. Olin edellisen vuoden aikana, pitkin vuotta "nähtynyt" oikean silmäni yläkulmassa ties kuinka monta kertaa kuin tumman pilven. Se ilmestyi ajoittain, olipa silmäni auki tai kiinni. Silloin ajattelin, että tietääköhän se jotain sairautta... Kului kuukausia ja sitten tuo tumma pilvi muuttui molempien silmien nähtäväksi. Sain ikään kuin katsella suoraan, kuinka edessäni oli kuin sammakon kutua: harmahtavassa massassa näkyi mustia pisteitä. Nyt vasta palautui monien viikkojen jälkeen nämäkin. Olivatko ne enteitä tulevista tapahtumista? Siinä minulle olikin pohdittavaa. Sädehoidotkin olivat päättyneet toiseltakin erää. Sain luvan opetella uudestaan normaalia elämää... Sen jälkeen en ole nähnyt enää mitään, vaikka joskus olen ihan kuvittelut, että tuleekohan vielä jotain... Kaikki ne ovat kuitenkin pysyneet poissa.

I cannot resist saying that at the end of my X-ray treatment, as I was recovering from the impact of cytostatic drugs. One night before going to sleep, I sensed something odd. I was in my bed and still awake, but with my eyes closed. I sensed that some white dot began to grow in front of my eyes. I wondered what was happening. I did not want to open my eyes and let the thing 'happen'. After a second, I felt that I was inside a big white ball. However, I saw that there was something even whiter: little cross-shaped decorations decorating the light space. At the same time I saw with my right eye something oval; something like an egg shape cut into two halves like a pipe. It was greenish-grey on top and made from strips of cloth woven together. Inside, the pipe was dripping invisible liquid, like water but not water. It reminded me a lot of a shimmery air. I did not want to open my eyes at once. It was amazing to follow. Then it just disappeared and I felt in my eyes a natural darkness. I opened my eyes and was sure I could not be dreaming. Afterwards, I fell asleep easily. Next morning I did not say anything to

my wife about my 'vision'. The evening came and we went again to rest. When I closed my eyes, the same thing began again. I was watching a similarly decorated emptiness. At once I saw with both eyes that a little soft, white, circle appeared quietly: like a feather or similar. It was in front of me standing in the 'emptiness'. Then little flashes appeared like the 'explosions' that take place on the sun, with a difference that these flashes were calm. These occurred in many spots on that circle and they came out and pulled back again. I noticed that these 'bursts' were pointing to the direction that was being treated. The vision did not last long and after a short while it was as the night before. I opened my eyes and wondered. Then I had a good sleep again. I still did not tell to my wife about my vision. The third night began in the same way as the other two nights. When I closed my eyes I was again in the white surrounding as an observer. Now the vision came from the left side. Slowly something like a lake appeared in my view, although it was not water but this kind of slowly moving shimmer. It was interesting that inside of it was like snowflakes, but their colour was steel-gray. It was my third vision and I wondered, what was their meaning. I fell asleep again. I still did not let my wife know, but I wondered for several days what I had seen. These images did not come back anymore. I studied our bookshelves to find something about hallucinations and daydreams, to find some explanation. I felt myself to be no more 'mentally ill' than I had been during my whole life. It had to be something else... Then I remembered the times before the illness came into my life. I fell ill in 1989 when I found a bump on the right side of my neck. The year before I had had 'visions' who knows how many times, throughout the entire year, about a dark cloud above my right eye. It came sometimes, either my eye was open or closed. Then I thought if it could mean some kind of illness... It took months and then this dark cloud came into both eyes. I could see straight into something that reminded me of frog's spawn: I saw gray stuff with black spots. Now several weeks afterwards I remembered those again. Were these omens about forthcoming events? There I had something to think about. The second X-ray treatment circle was over. I had got the right to learn how to live the normal life... After this I have seen nothing anymore, even if sometimes I have even imagined that if there is something still appearing again... All these have stayed away however. (100)

Characteristic of dream events is that they are experienced mentally and physically, although the role of participant as sleeper, dreamer, or simply receiver, is passive within the unintended event.

Why dream events occur, or where they come from, is not apparent. Dreams may be defined as imagery created by an unknown source

within the human brain. Adriëne Heijnen, an anthropologist and dream-researcher from Iceland, has suggested that dreams give insight into a world already present, but hidden from the waking person (Heijnen 2005). What I understand from this statement is that significant dreams appear first as hints within the background of dream imagery and later become connected to daily events.

Either consciously or subconsciously, people desire connections between dream events and waking life and through these connections to find out what some irrational events mean. Dream events receive their particular position in the flow of daily events via the interpretation process. People work through remembered dreams and perceived feelings while awake. Thus, dreams receive their meaning through an interpretation that is affected by the inner renegotiation process, lived experience and everyday communication. Accordingly, any conscious production of images is connected to the tradition of verbal expression. In this sense, it is essential that composed dream accounts (narratives) are not dreams (events), and neither narrating nor enacting dreams can ever recover the dream experience (Tedlock 1991, 162). In a wider sense, Barbara Tedlock's statement concerns any possible event that takes place in reality and its verbalised and interpreted narrative-reference.

Making connections

The dreams and images that occur in the pathographies are presented as meaningful and significant references connected to personal life. Some dreams and images become interpreted as ameliorating and beautiful; others are distressing and even bizarre (Knudson 2001, 172–175). The psychoanalytical approach suggests that critical situations and social conflicts increase the amount of physical or emotional distress that will be transmitted into dreams (Wegner, Wentzlaff & Kozak 2004, 232–236). Therefore, dreams and other dream-like sensations should not be studied separately from the wider context. In this sense, the dream narratives that appear in the cancer narratives are a particularly good source with which to detect the function and meaning of dreams. Further, it is possible to follow the general concerns in respondents' minds and study connections arising in certain situations. We may learn that the prevailing concerns of cancer patients are illness and possible death, since cancer patients' dreams and feelings

are tightly linked with illness and images of dying. Accordingly, the dominant emotions arising from dream events are connected with amusement, hope, confusion, distress and fear, all relating to the illness process and death.

Within any culturally agreed context, some people accept the role of active dreamer, while others feel themselves less able to perceive and remember dreams. The majority of cancer patients who describe their dreams, admit that they behave differently as dreamers in comparison to other people (066, 401, 411, 446, 520, 545, 563, 566, 582, etc.). These participants had discovered their ability to memorise dreams and make connections before they fell ill: "*Olen unennäkijä ja tiedän ja uskon että joskus niitten välityksellä viestiteään asioita ja tapahtumia*", "I have dreams and I believe that sometimes via dreams messages and things come though" (317). However, the cancer narratives also contain accounts in which the writer admits that dreams and dream-like imagery appeared as meaningful for the first time in his or her life at the time of the cancer experience. The following dream narrative exemplifies the fact that in a shared discourse, all people, both dreamers and non-dreamers, recognise the idea that dreams make connections:

Olen pienestä pitäen nähnyt enneunia. Hyvin usein ne ovat toteutuneet. [---] Nyt aloinkin nähdä unia entisistä tiheämmin ja tiesin, ettei mieheni lähtöön ollut enää paljon aikaa. Ihme kyllä, kun nyt miehenikin alkoi nähdä unia, vaikka ennen hän sanoi minulle, ettei hän nukkumiselta jouda unia katselemaan. Eräänä lauantai-aamuna hän aivan tyyneästi kertoi, että hänelle oli unessa sanottu, ettei häntä oikeastaan ole enää olemassakaan! [---]

Mieheni alkoi kertoa: "Mikä oli sen homman nimi? Makasin suurella laverilla, kukkien ympäröimänä. Huone oli kuin ravintola. Pöydät peitettyinä valkoisilla liinoilla, katettu ruokailuvälineillä. Myös kynttilöitä ja kukkia oli pöydillä. Siellä oli paljon ihmisiä, joita kaikkia en tuntenut tai en muista. Sinut ja lapset erotin joukosta. Tarjolla oli ruokaa ja kahvia. Tilaisuus oli juhlava. Siellä oli nuori miespappi, joka kävi täälläkin. Hän oli koko ajan minun lähettyvilläni..." Mieheni kertomus sai meidät yhä enemmän hämmilemme, minkä vuoksi kyselin häneltä asioita tarkalleen. "Muistatko sinä papin käynnistä?" kysyin. "Muistan. Hänhän kävi äsken," mieheni vastasi. "Ei hän äsken käynyt, hän kävi aamulla aikaisin ja myöhemmin aamupäivällä toisen kerran," sanoin miehelleni. "Mikähän tilanne se sitten oli?" mieheni mietti ja jatkoi: "Se vaikutti niin aidolta." "Sinä nukuikit vähän aikaa sitkeästi. Olisitkohan sinä nähnyt unta?" sanoin hänelle. Mieheni myönsi siihen, että niin sen täytyy olla. [---]

Tytöt kertoivat lauantai aamuna, että isä oli nähnyt yöllä unia. Hän oli puhunut unissaan ja puhe oli ollut harvinaisen selkeä. "Minulla on kiire," mieheni oli sanonut. Tytöt olivat kysyneet, ette mihin hänelle on kiire? "Pelastamaan ihmisiä," mieheni oli vastannut. Herättyään mieheni oli kertonut, että jossain maan vyörymässä oli hänen alleen sortunut paljon ihmisiä ja hänen täytyi auttaa ne pois sieltä.

Toinen uni koski sairauksia. Unissaan mieheni oli puhunut arpa-jaisista. Tytöt olivat taas kysyneet, että mitä siellä arvottiin? Mieheni oli vastannut: "Sairauksia."

I have seen predictive dreams since I was a little girl. They have come true rather well. [---] Now I began to dream more than before and I knew that there was not much time left for my husband. I was amazed, as he began to dream as well, although before he told me that he had no time to dream when he sleeps. One Saturday morning he said quite calmly that he has been told in his dreams that he does not exist anymore! [---]

My husband began to say: "What was that? I slept on a big sleeping board surrounded by flowers. The room was like a restaurant. The tables were covered with white cloth and dishes. Candles and flowers were also on the table. There were lots of people, I did not know or remember many of them. There was some food and coffee. It was a very fine event. There was a young male priest, who was here as well. He was next to me all the time ..." My husband's story made us wonder, and therefore I asked him, if he remembered the priest's visit? "I remember he was here a minute ago," my husband answered. I said to my husband, "No, he was not here, he was here early in the morning for a second time." My husband wondered, "What was it then?" and continued. "It seemed so real." "You slept for a while deeply. Perhaps you had a dream?" I told him. My husband agreed with it. [---]

The girls told me on Saturday morning that father had had dreams in the night. He had been speaking in his sleep and the speech was seldom clear. "I am in a hurry," my husband had said. The girls had asked, where to? "To rescue people," husband had answered. As he woke up he had said that in some earthquake many people had been trapped underground and he had to help them out.

The other dream was about illnesses. When dreaming my husband had mentioned the lottery. The girls had again asked what was the dream about? And my husband had answered: "Illnesses." (157)

People experience dreams as events that may not be separated from the activities of everyday life. The interpretation of dreams is context dependent in the sense that dreams and images become interpreted as meaningful semantic or pragmatic references to everyday events (Tedlock 1991, 162). The interpretation process is based on individual

experience and a cultural set of traditional knowledge. So, if we discuss verbalised dreams, we deal with texts that interpret the individually experienced events that perceive a meaningful image, according to the social value within the linguistic conversation and within the world portrayed. During this process, the dream narrative or prediction becomes a coherent message that may be represented within a communicative act.

Cancer patients' dreams and dream-like images

Dreams and dream-like images cannot become narratives without meaningful references to individual experience and cognition. In contrast to other human experience, dreams and 'prophetic sensations' are defined as unintended events. When people perceive these unintended events something happens. Accordingly, in dream accounts people describe what happened. Because of the internal negotiation or contextualisation process, particular dreams become significant within the framework of personal life. As people notice the relevance of certain events, they form an appropriate narrative that represents the lived experience. These narratives are composed according to the intention of a single author, but the result will never be free of cultural context. In this sense composed dream narratives are not isolated because they fulfil cultural, moral and genre related expectations.

It is important to note that the dream narrative is not only about the received imagery. Typically, people describe unintended events in the introduction as the setting for the rest of the narrative. The complication includes references to events that occur while awake. In the conclusion, writers demonstrate how a dream event, or 'omen', came true either in real life or on the level of interpretation. As in the conclusion to any simple narrative, writers 'make their point' or evaluate the whole narrative.

Setting

Sitten näin unen, että oli joki jonka takana oli iso valkoinen rakennus. Joen yli johti kapea silta ja minä näin Saara serkkuni siellä sillan takana. Hän lähti siltaa pitkin luokseni ja minä lähdin häntä vastaan, mutta jostakin ilmestyi eteeni valkoisiin vaatteisiin puettu nainen ja sanoi: "Älä tule tämän

sillan yli, siellä on perhonen joka lentää sinuun ja silloin sairastut samaan tautiin kun serkkusikin.

Then I had a dream about a river and across this river was a white building. Crossing the river was a narrow bridge and my cousin Saara was on the other side. She came across the bridge towards me and I went to meet her. Suddenly a woman dressed in white appeared in front of me and told me: "Do not go there, there is a butterfly that will fly inside you and so you will get the same disease as your cousin."

Complication *Heräsin ja mietin sitä unta, enkä saanut sitä pois mielestäni.*
I woke up and thought about this dream. I could not get it out of my mind.

Solution *Neljän päivän päästä siitä unesta sain serkultani kirjeen, jossa hän kertoi olevansa Korpilahden kunnalliskodin sairaosastolla ja sairastavansa syöpää.*

Four days after this dream I received a letter from my cousin. She wrote to me that she is in N. N. hospital and has cancer.

Evaluation *Kirjoitin hänelle unestani ja hän kertoi, että se paikka on juuri sellainen kun olin unessa nähnyt.*

I wrote to her about my dream and she said that the place [where she was treated] looked exactly as I had imagined.
(105)

This narrative contains several familiar dream symbols: a white building, a narrow bridge, crossing a river, a woman in white and a butterfly (see dream symbols in Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1986). These dream symbols provide the framework for a dream narrative, as they represent culturally agreed dream symbols. Primarily, the dream symbol framework represents culturally accepted ideas adopted by the narrator.

As the dream image is so clear, the dreamer does not lose this dream but receives a vivid vision or other imagery that will be remembered and verbalised. Within the dream narrative, this imagery represents the dream events. As the story continues, it is possible to follow how the dream event receives its meaning and significance in waking life. Four days after this dream, the narrator receives a letter from her cousin, who reports that she has fallen ill with cancer. The respondent answers her and includes the dream imagery in her reply. Thus, interpretation of the dream continues and, as the dreamer hears that the place where her cousin is under treatment looks exactly as she had dreamed, it acquires new meaning.

As a matter of fact, the events described in this dream narrative took place in 1953. In 1994, when the writing competition took place, the

respondent was over 80 years old. Although her cousin had passed away several decades before, she still had the urge to recall this significant and meaningful dream when discussing her own cancer experience.

Dreams are events that, as any other lived experience, may affect our internal reasoning and understanding of reality. During the verbalisation process, events become interpreted as significant and meaningful. Interpretation may take place as an internal negotiation, or as part of social discourse. Barbara Tedlock has delineated the clear difference between dreams as private mental acts, and dream accounts as public social performances (Tedlock 1991, 161). Similarly, Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj reminds us that “the narrative is far from visual experience, as when written down it becomes edited according to the rules of literary communication, made more concise and possibly clearer” (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 2000, 34). Although countless dreams are never presented as public social performance (Heijnen 2005; Heikkinen 2000, 297–302), it is important to remember that the interpretation of dream events is an ongoing process.

Interpreted imagery in the cancer narratives

In the cancer narratives, some dream events are interpreted as prophetic, others as nightmares, while still others are attempts at solution seeking or amelioration. With the exception of omens (*enne, enneuni*) and nightmares (*painajainen*), dreams and images do not have specific names in Finnish. Although a distinction is often made between different types of dreams, such as realistic dreams (*realistinen uni*), predictive dreams (*selvänäköuni*), true dreams (*tosiuuni*), or love dreams (*rakkausuni*) (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 2000, 34–35), the significance of the dream is actually detectable only when observing what references are made in the wider, secondary, narrative. During the verbalisation process people do not need to classify their experiences: the meaning of the events becomes clear during the communicative act.

Typically, most cancer patients' dreams are interpreted as omens, nightmares (solution seeking), or soothing (ameliorating) imagery. These dream types represent the interpretative meaning of cancer patients' dreams and dream-like imagery, although they also embrace the dream narrative's position within the cancer narrative. Prophetic

dreams as omens are interpreted as catalysts for future events. Accordingly, narratives describing these images typically appear at the beginning of a narrative event chain:

Isälläni oli tapana sanoa: Joka niin usko, se varjoja pelkää. Sananlasku, jossa on tervettä järkeä. Unia en voi estää. Ne tulevat. Sama uni toistuu. Unissani on läsnä lapsi, pieni tyttö. Hän seisoo käsi ojossa. Vain oikea käsi on ojennettu. Koen olevani se lapsi, se tyttö. Unessa kuulen äänen. Kuka puhuu, mistä ääni tulee, millä kielellä sanat sanotaan? Siitä minulla ei ole aavistustakaan. Ehkä ääntä ei kuulukaan, ehkä vain tajan sanoman. Se on minulle tuttu. Afrikkalainen äiti opettaa lastaan jo pienestä pitäen kohteliaaseen käyttäytymiseen. Siihen kuuluu tapa ottaa vastaan lahja. Lahja on otettava vastaan molemmin käsin. Yhdellä kädellä vastaanottaminen merkitsee lahjan väheksymistä. Hiljaisella äänellä ikäänkuin taustalla äiti ohjaa lastaan: Mikono miwili, mwanangu. (Kaksin käsin, lapseni). En tiedä, näenkö pienen tytön, itseni, unessa vai olenko vielä valveilla. Ehkä olen niin unen ja valveen rajamailla, etten osaa tehdä eroa. Jos herään täyteen tietoisuuteen, kuvaa katoaa. Jos uni syvenee, kuva samoin katoa. Mikä on se lahja, jota olen vastaanottamassa epäkunnioittavasti, vain yhdellä kädellä? Onko se tämä sairaus, tämä elämäntilanne?

My father used to say: “Those who believe in dreams are afraid of their own shadows.” It is folk wisdom based on healthy reasoning. I cannot avoid my dreams. They come. The same dream repeats itself. There is a child, a little girl. She has raised her arm. Only the right arm is raised. I feel that I am this child, this girl. I can hear a voice. Who is speaking, in which language? I have no idea. Maybe there is no voice and I receive only the message. I know it. An African mother admonishes her child about proper behaviour. It is about accepting a present. You accept it by raising both hands. If you raise only one hand it lessens the value of the present. *Sotto voce*, as in the background, she admonishes her child: “Mikono miwili, mwanangu” (With two hands, my child). I do not know if I see a little child, myself, in a dream or am I still awake? Maybe I am between dreaming and waking, so I cannot tell the difference. When I wake to my full consciousness, the picture vanishes. When the dream becomes more intense, the picture vanishes. What is this present that I do not accept with full respect, with one hand? Is it this illness, this situation?” (330)

This dream account begins with the narrator’s representation of her background. She refers to her father’s rational wisdom. The father admonishes her for believing in dreams. However, despite the father’s words, dreams appear to the narrator and she cannot help it. In her interpretation the present becomes a symbol of her illness. Connecting

the dream event with reality helps her in the process of accepting the idea of having cancer.

It is apparent from cancer narratives that nightmares, or solution-seeking dreams, and feelings of fear, emerge (repeatedly) during the illness process. Usually these dreams and images represent ongoing and unsolved events. The same narrator continues:

Myöhemmin uneni muuttuu. Sekin toistuu. Kuljen kaupungin katuja. Maisema on oudon tuttu ja samalla oudon vieras. Se on aina afrikkalainen kaupunki. Siinä' on piirteitä vanhasta kaupungista Zanzibarin saarella. Korkeiden talojen reunustamia kapeita mutkikkaita katuja. Joskus taas luulen olevani sisämaassa Mbeyan kaupungissa. Kuljen vuoren rinteelle rakennetussa slummikaupungissa, joka on levinnyt hallitsemattomasti. Olen aina eksesyksissä. Kadut ovat sokkeloisia; ne saattavat päätyä umpikujaan. Joskus löydän torin. Lähdän liikkeelle torin varrelta. Pian huomaan kiertäneeni kehää ja palanneeni takaisin samaan paikkaan. Torin toisella laidalla saatan nähdä portin. Se on aina suljettu. Sen yläpuolella on jotain, jota en näe oikein tarkkaan. Se saattaa olla kirjoitettua tekstiä, jota en osaisi lukeakaan. Se voisi olla vaikka arabialaisia pitsikirjaimia. Kuljen aina yksin. Kaupunki on hiljainen, kuollut, täysin äänetön. Ketään ei näy, ei ihmisiä eikä eläimiä. Autius vallitsee kaikkialla. Edes linnut eivät laula. joskus joku ystäväistä tulee uneen. Kuulen äänen, näen hahmon seisomassa taivaanrantaan vasten. Hän sanoo ehkä: Tule, on jo aika mennä kotiin. Joskus taas: Tule, lähdetään. Joskus ei ole ketään. Ketään ei tule. Herään hätään ja turvattomuuteen: Minne kaikki on kadonnut?

Later my dreams change. This one also comes repeatedly. I wander around the streets in the city. The landscape is bizarrely familiar. It is always an African city. There are some aspects of an old city on the Zanzibar islands. Never-ending streets surrounded by high buildings. Sometimes I think I am in the city of Meyba. I stroll in the slum that is built on the hillside and spreads haphazardly. I am always lost. Sometimes I find the market place. I continue, but soon I notice that I have walked in circles and returned to the same place. On the other side of the market place I see a gate. It is always closed. Above it is written something that I cannot read. It could be something containing Arabic letters. I am always alone. The city is quiet, dead, motionless. I see no one, no people or animals. Everywhere is emptiness. Even the birds do not sing. I can see a person standing near the skyline. Sometimes he says: 'Come, it is time to go home'. Sometimes there is no one. No one comes. I wake up in confusion and fear: Where is everybody? (330)

The new dream with its events appears repeatedly. In this dream the narrator imagines herself being trapped in the labyrinth of streets. Illness creates the feeling that there is no way out. The daily fears the narrator has because of her illness materialise in this dream event. The dream occurs several times during the illness process, which indicates that in her mind she seeks a solution without yet knowing the outcome.

Narratives that respondents portray as ameliorating appear typically at the very end of the cancer narrative:

Unieni kuva torin takana olevasta portista tulee mieleen. Portin päällä on kirjoitusta, jota en osaa lukea. Jotenkin on kuitenkin tullut tajuntani, että se kirjoitus on sana "PARANEMINEN".

The picture of the market place gate comes into my mind. Above the gate is a sign that I cannot read. Somehow I subconsciously believe that the word 'RECOVERY' is written there. (330)

The narrator interprets the meaning of a sign she has observed in her previous dreams according to her situation in life. In the final dream connected to her illness process, a significant word, RECOVERY, appears. In her written dream narrative she writes the word out in capital letters.

As cancer narratives are not written only by cancer patients, but also by their relatives and friends, there are, at least seemingly, slight differences between the dream imagery. Although they need more careful examination, the processing type of dream or nightmare is more typically experienced by cancer patients. Prophetic or ameliorating dreams appear equally to cancer patients and their loved ones. This may be explained by the fact that every cancer patient goes through the illness process individually. Others must accept the role of observer regardless of how actively they take care of the patient and follow the illness process.

Dream narratives as paths for the expression of suppressed emotions and marginal themes

The cancer narratives show that, because of their cultural marginality, discussing issues relating to illness and death is in many ways a challenging communicative act. According to the reasoning expressed in pathographies, the process of having cancer has two solutions: re-

covery or death. Therefore, predictive dreams and images are received as omens of impending illness or death, whereas ameliorating dreams and feelings arise as omens of recovery or messages from ‘the other side’. In comparison, interpreted dreams presented as narratives do not provoke such uneasiness. My assumption is that telling a dream narrative is easier than sharing suppressed emotions on marginal themes, both for the storyteller and the listener.

Under normal circumstances people do not discuss topics relating to death and recovery openly with cancer patients, or at least the discussion occurs with a certain uneasiness. Therefore thoughts about death and recovery could be classified as suppressed emotions in the context of the personal illness experience. Psychologists Wegner, Wenzlaff and Kozak have suggested that, although dreams sometimes contain “day residue” – direct echoes of prior waking experience – they might be more likely to include residue of thoughts that have been intentionally suppressed (Wegner, Wenzlaff & Kozak, 2004, 232). Accordingly, in cancer patients’ dream imagery we may detect an opposition typical to the illness process relating to cancer.

People who go through emotionally difficult times may employ their significant dream experience repeatedly, in this manner opening a path by which to share their concerns. Cancer narratives demonstrate that dreams repeated in narrative form may help patients to go through an emotionally complicated period:

Koin samaan aikaan selittämättömän asian. Kun illalla kävin nukkumaan, tunsin koko sädehoidon ajan vuoteeni sivulla kuin korkean voimapatsaan. Olen aina tahtonutkin uskoa, että ihmistä ympäröivät hyvät voimat. Pitää vaan hiljentyä tunteakseen ne. Olen ikuisesti kiihollinen tästä kokemuksesta.

At the same time I experienced an unexplainable thing. Throughout the X-ray treatments, every evening when I went to sleep I felt a power-statue standing next to my bed. I have always wanted to believe that people are surrounded by good powers. One just has to calm down to feel these. I am really grateful for this experience. (217)

Sharing feeling and thoughts with loved ones is sometimes very difficult. It is possible to observe, in the cancer narratives, how people who remember dreams and perceive omens gain, through dreams, an additional path that allows them to express suppressed feelings. The ‘fixed’ form of the narrative somewhat lessens the emotional weight and marginality that suppressed emotions and illness themes otherwise carry for listeners (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 2003, 330–332). I suggest

that dream narratives are not taken so seriously by other parties, at least under normal circumstances. Thus, sharing dream and prophetic narratives is to some extent a subconscious way to process difficult feelings without placing other people in an uncomfortable position. Furthermore, I argue that in the context of marginal experiences, such as the traumas caused by illness and death, dream narratives function as valuable paths by which to express suppressed inner sensations and culturally marginal themes. In these circumstances it becomes significant that, when presented as narratives, the difficult emotions that emerge in dreams and are interpreted as dream narratives may be discussed and re-interpreted more than once in different situations.

The individual and cultural meaning of dreams

Above all dreams and dream imagery have individual value. When analysing dreams and dream telling traditions, Finnish folklorist Leea Virtanen has noted that dreams are not only important in social communication. Suggesting that people also have an 'inner mind' tradition, Virtanen proposes that people may analyse their dreams themselves, re-experience feelings, interpret these dreams based on various memories, and above all reorganise the events of illogical dreams into an appropriate textual form. At the same time, dreamers must constantly analyse and verbalise dreams in their minds in order to understand what the meaning of a dream symbol is. At the same time, the narration is also constructed (Virtanen 1980, 65). Dreams represented in pathographies show that people are interested in the meanings of their dreams. After presenting her dream account, about snakes that were searching for a way out through her fingertips, one participant continues:

Mietin monena päivänä unen merkitystä. Olen unennäkijä ja tiedän ja uskon että joskus niitten välityksellä viestitetään asioita ja tapahtumia. Tuota unta en saanut mielestäni, sillä se oli viesti jostakin. Eräänä päivänä "välähti". Se tarkoittaa sitä, että minulla on paljon noita pieniä käärmeitä elimistöissäni mutta minun "tarttee tehdä jotakin" itsekin, että saisin nujerrettua nuo virkeät nopeasti kasvavat syöpäläiset.

For several days I thought about the meaning of my dream. I have dreams and I know and believe that sometimes via dreams we get information and messages. I could not forget this dream as it was a

message about something. One day it suddenly became clear. It meant that I have lots of those little snakes inside of my body and I must do something to make myself well so that I could get rid of those fast growing carcinomas. (317)

Young children are also able to receive and verbalise their dreams and images:

Sinä syksynä kun A. samana kesänä sairastui hän tuli eräänä aamuna syliini ja sanoi nähneensä unta, jossa pappi yritti panna häntä arkkuun, mutta hän ei halunnut laittaa silmiä kiinni vaan tuli sieltä pois. Muistan kuinka lomaannuin enkä pystynyt puhumaan mitään. Sitten aloin miettimään, oliko tuo lapsi todella puhunut nuo asiat. Tuntui uskomattomalta, että 4-vuotias puhui tuollaisia asioita.

In the autumn after the summer when A. had fallen ill, she came to sit in my arms one morning and said that she had had a dream in which a priest had tried to put her into a coffin, but she did not want to close her eyes and so she left the place. I remember how I lost my senses and I could not react to her story. Then I began to wonder if this child had indeed told such a story. It seemed unbelievable that a four-year-old could relate such an experience. (548)

From a cultural perspective, dream and omen interpretations are usually given by grandmothers and mothers, although Leea Virtanen has proposed that in earlier times men have also been dreamers and dream interpreters (Virtanen 1980, 56). Because in Nordic countries dream interpretation books have been in use for several centuries (Bregenhøj 1992, 187–272), people are familiar with the routine of using them to explain significant dream symbols. After surgery a respondent with lung cancer experienced a recurring dream:

Näin monena yönä pikkulapsesta unta. Sanoinkin, että taas olin sen pikkuisen kanssa tekemässä jotakin. Unikirjasta selvitystä tähän hakiessani löysin vastausta: pikkulapsen näkeminen tarkoittaa: elämän iloa. Sekin tuntui ihan hyvältä, tässä vaiheessa. Sitähän tässä tarvitaan.

Several nights I had a dream about a small child. I also told others that I had something to do with the little one. As I searched for an explanation from a dream book, I found: seeing a small child signifies the joy of life. This felt very good at this stage. That was exactly what I needed. (302)

We also receive information about dreams and omens and their cultural interpretations through communication. References to a traditional set of dream and omen interpretations are as important as

personal experience-based explanations. People learn and experience new interpretations during their lives. This is a continuous process in which people are open to new experiences. Cultural, as well as scientific, dream explanation and interpretation is controversial, although dreams and images are not insignificant. Individuals employ all available interpretations, and re-interpret and verbalise dreams into forms appropriate to be used in connection with other events and experiences. This explains why dream events also become a part of the cancer experience.

Conclusions

(Discussing) having cancer is considered marginal from a cultural point of view. Foremost because it evokes strong emotions connected with illness and death. Therefore it is natural that the ideas regarding the illness process, recovery and death become suppressed in everyday communication. In this chapter I have pointed out the particular position of dream narratives within cancer narratives. I argue that pathographies form an excellent source from which to observe the spontaneous occurrence of dream narratives in connection with a particular discourse. Dream narratives begin with an event account but become interpreted in the wider context of daily events. This means that within the dream narrative the event appears only as the setting for the dream narrative. Under normal circumstances, people analyse their experience and verbalise it more than once. In this way it becomes an attempt to synthesise waking experience and dream experience into a significant whole.

Although cancer patients interpret their dreams according to individual understanding, it is possible to talk about three kinds of dreams. Firstly, respondents describe predictive dreams and omens, dreamt before falling ill or losing a loved one. Secondly, respondents write about dreams and feelings that may be described as solution seeking dreams. Thirdly, participants write about ameliorating dreams, which occur either shortly after the illness is cured or the cancer patient has passed away. The significance of such experience is revealed by participants as they place dream narratives at the very beginning, or in the final chapter, of cancer narratives. I argue that the interpretation of dreams is very important as it is a way in which people may interpret and share suppressed emotions and thoughts without being labelled.

WRITTEN CANCER NARRATIVES

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<http://www.folklore.ee/ri/pubte/ee/sator/sator10/>

ISBN 978-9949-490-31-8

Tartu 2012

Printed version: Piret Paal. Written Cancer Narratives.
An Ethnomedical Study of Cancer Patients' Thoughts, Emotions
and Experiences. SATOR 10.
Tartu & Helsinki 2010

Author: Piret Paal

Series editor: Mare Kõiva

Language editor: Daniel Edward Allen

Cover design: Tero Leponiemi

Layout: Liisa Vesik

HTML: Diana Kahre

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by due permission of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki in Arppeanum lecture-hall (Helsinki University Museum), on the 15th of January, 2011.

The publication is related to the target financed project SF0030181s08.

Electronic version editing is supported by ECRM04-29 Expansion of the sphere of use and introduction of the Estonian language, culture and folklore in electronic information carriers.

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Cover Tero Leponiemi