Dreams to Reality

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It isn’t often that imagination and memory clash together. In *Autumn* by Ali Smith, Daniel Gluck is a 101-year-old man in a care center who phases in and out of his lucid dreams as he slowly approaches the end of his life. He struggles to come to terms with some events of his past that still torment him to this day. The lucid dreams Daniel experiences allow him to cope with those memories while also using his imagination. It may seem like Daniel moves randomly within this combination of his imagination infused with the memories of his life, causing those dreams to feel disjointed. However, Daniel has the capacity to morph back and forth between historical and imaginative thoughts, allowing him to reflect on his own self by coming to terms with his troubled past. He needs to grapple with his old memories in order to free himself and thinking through ways to act. He is able to move through the lessons he has learned through life in order to help his current state of being. Therefore, Daniel’s lucid dreaming allows for him to reflect on the past freely by discerning the few remaining ways in which he is active in the current world.

Daniel has always looked for purpose, and his ability to dream allows for him to feel unrestricted. He oftentimes finds comfort in relating to an inanimate object, sometimes wanting to simply relax. Daniel analyzes the versatility of a grain of sand and its usefulness: “I’m ground so small, but in the end I’m all, I’m softer if I’m underneath you when you fall, in sun I glitter, wind heaps me over litter, put a message in a bottle, throw the bottle in the sea, the bottle’s made of me, I’m the hardest grain to harvest…” (Smith 3). As Daniel imagines himself as a grain of sand, he desires independence and absolute freedom, the qualities of the sand he is visualizing. The sand grain’s unrestricted nature is a feeling that Daniel so greatly desires and aims for in his dreams. He is able to reflect by imagining himself as something as versatile as a grain of sand.
This versatility creates a space that frees his previously restricted frame of mind, which in turn allows for a certain ability to reconcile with those old traumatic memories that used to haunt him.

Studies have shown that the ability to reflect on dreams allows for a greater understanding of the world. Dan Denis and Giulia L. Poerio, professors in the Department of Psychology at the University of Sheffield and New York University, respectively, studied the similarities and differences of lucid dreaming and waking life experiences. Together, they write about the power of reflection of dreams: “reflective of a continuation of greater imaginative capacity and positive relationship with imagery in waking states” (Denis and Poerio Discussion Paragraph 4). Studies show that reflecting on memories through dreams allows for a more encouraging ability to reconcile with past events. This study not only shows that Daniel is able to reflect on his dreams, but that ability to reflect allows for him to come to terms with his past and move forward. Though this is something that he struggles to do, he finds virtue in imagining himself as something as versatile as a grain of sand. Him being able to imagine himself as a grain of sand, showing his desire of freedom, lets him to acknowledge this notion. Though he still has trouble progressing, his unique ability to lucid dream allows for a greater understanding of himself and his surroundings.

Through his dreams, Daniel does not always have happy thoughts, and shows that lucid dreaming is not always an enjoyable experience. As Daniel imagines himself as a grain of sand, he triggers an old memory of dead bodies on a beach. He visualizes dead people on one side of the beach, while there are others partying on the opposite side: “The world’s sadness. Definitely still in the world” (Smith 13). Daniel has a unique ability to realize he is in a dream by recognizing the events that transpired at the location that inspired his dream in the first place. His ability to see what has occurred in the past allows for him to come to terms with his troubled
past, as those older experiences sway his dreams mightily. Not only is he able to reflect on the past, but he is also able to live in the present, which together fuse into a dream. He can see both sides of the beach when he observes and looks at the whole view altogether. As he visualizes himself gazing upon the beach of dead people as well as people having a good time, he is reminded of his status as a refugee, his struggles, and the neglect that he still feels. Those traumatic events have still not left his memory and continue to influence his dreams. His ability to look at this experience from an objective perspective shows his increasing ability to cope with his past and improve his mental state.

Science has shown how Daniel has been able to maintain an increase in mental positivity by lucid dreaming. Harry Hunt, a professor in the Department of Psychology at Brock University, discusses a study that illuminates the positive effects lucid dreaming has. The article he writes explains this phenomenon: “lucid dreaming… indicate[s] that this dimension of self-reflectiveness is something in its own right, open to some degree of influence by various training techniques. Its maximum development leads to… forms of enhanced self-awareness” (Hunt2 119). Scientists have proven that lucid dreaming has had a positive effect on sleepers, increasing their ability to reflect on themselves. Daniel’s ability to lucid dream allows for him to have an augmented sense of self because of the reflections he participates in. By imagining the beach along with the dead bodies, he can come to terms with the past and finally come to terms with the old traumatic remembrances. Hunt’s study shows that not only that Daniel can reflect on his memories, but that he is actually improving his mental state in doing so.

Daniel can free himself by grappling with his old memories and influencing his dreams. As one of Daniel’s caregivers sprays Pine sol in his room, Daniel is immediately influenced in his dreaming state. He begins to think about a Scots pine tree as soon as he smells the Pine sol
and imagines himself as one of those trees: “Straight and tall, because this is the kind of tree good for telegraph poles, for the props that pit builders used in the days when industry relied on people working in pits and pits relied on pitprops to hold the ceilings of the tunnels up safely over their heads” (Smith 89). Daniel’s desires are simply to be useful in life. As he smells the Scots pine tree, he immediately desires to be a Scots pine, realizing he has endless possibilities of usefulness he possesses if he becomes the tree. In his eyes, a Scots pine has no autonomy and still wields the ability to be useful to society. The versatility of the tree fascinates him, allowing him to be free, as well as incredibly useful. Daniel mentioning the absolute necessity for the Scots pine shows him longing to be something more useful than he is now. This increased freedom that he gains by dreaming about the pine, once working through his memories, grants a more comfortable mental state for Daniel, as he finally comes to terms with the traumatic events that shape him.

The ability for Daniel to work through his dreams so fluidly is rather unique. Common knowledge is that dreams are random and disjointed. However, Harry Hunt himself once again shows that dreams actually do not change scenes quickly, but instead have very calculated trajectories. Hunt explains this theory that is not popularly believed, though it is true: “For instance, consider the sudden changes of scene that are held to be so characteristic of dreaming. I found them in only 20% of home recall dreams,” (Hunt1 216) [86]. Though Daniel may state his dreams in a disjointed manner, they do not actually play out that way. Hunt’s studies here show his ability to work through his memories along with his imagination within his dreams. Daniel is actually organized in his thought process during his dreams which reflect many of his previous experiences. This shows that Daniel really thinks through each and every dream in order to gain
full clarity. These crossovers with his imaginative side create an atmosphere in which he is able to cope with his past better than he otherwise would be able to do in a woke state.

Daniel comes to terms with his old traumatic memories by traversing within his dreams between historical events and imaginative thoughts. He smells scotch pine as one of his caretakers sprays pine sol in his room, and it influences his dream: “inside something remarkably like the trunk of a Scots pine” (Smith 89). Daniel’s ability to bring in outside elements into his dreams shows his ability to work through the real and the imagined quite well. This ability he gains through little acts like this allow him to further cope with previous traumatic events in his life, even it being as little as imagining himself as a Scots pine tree. His ability to work through his old memories because something that happened in real life influenced his dreams is rather remarkable. This ability he wields allows him to handle those memories with more ease because his current surroundings provide him a sense of comfort. Daniel being able to do this permits a freedom that was unachievable before he began to lucid dream.

Daniel can shift between his dreams and connect with his own memories in a more connected fashion than anticipated. This connection is created by Daniel himself, as it is not coincidental. His dreams provide him the ability cope with those older traumatic memories easily: “It is possible that dreaming results as the ephemera derived from the complex processing or fluctuations between possible states of the mind during sleep,” (Strongman 196). Daniel’s capability to move through his dreams fluidly helps him cope with his current state and ability to live with his current self. It is still possible, however, to shift between thoughts during the process of dreaming. This shows that the dreams Daniel is having are not actually disjointed, but that they are instead connected. This connection allows for a greater coping ability for Daniel.
The science supports the notion that the reality in which one resides has a heavy impact on those dreams, and this in turn allows for a greater freedom when in reflection.

Elisabeth, Daniel’s much younger friend, is unable to help Daniel in coping with his dreams, as he has to talk to others instead of his good friend. As he finally passes away, the nurse that was working with Daniel shared his thoughts with Elisabeth: “Family for you, the care assistant says. Easier to talk to someone you don’t know. He and I had many a chat, before he went off. One day he said a very fair thing. When the state is not kind… [t]hen the people are fodder, he said. Wise man, your grandad. Clever man” (Smith 171). Elisabeth realizes she actually does not know much about Daniel at all, and in fact has shown us that she is not trustworthy. While the nurse creates a reason for Daniel not sharing these life lessons with Elisabeth, Daniel not involving Elisabeth shows that he was not able to have confidence in Elisabeth’s ability to hold valuable information. Unfortunately, Daniel has to use the nurse as an outlet because of Elisabeth’s lack of responsibility earlier in the novel and her life, and he needed to progress through his thoughts to help his situation with Elisabeth. This does, however, show Daniel’s growth of knowledge and improvement in recognizing his surroundings and their relative safety. He being able to share his experiences with others is certainly a step that he had not taken in the past.

Denis and Poerio once again illustrate that Daniel being able to reflect on the woke state while in a dream is majorly beneficial for him. They discuss how that comfortable mental state which Daniel desires can be improved: “lucid dreaming frequency were predicted positively by a positive constructive daydreaming style, which reflects a positive and playful attitude towards waking imagery” (Denis and Poerio Discussion Paragraph 2). The lucid dreaming that Daniel uses has the ability to allow him to work through those old memories of his and aid his recovery.
The studies that Denis and Poerio have completed support this notion and allow for a greater understanding of the positive effects of lucid dreaming. As shown by the science as well as the novel, Daniel progressively exhibits a more positive attitude towards his surroundings. He can help his trauma issues more than he could before because of this ability he has. The lucid dreaming that Daniel has allows for a greater understanding of lessons that he has learned throughout his life as well as an enhanced state of being.

Daniel’s ability to lucid dream permits him to look at his life from an objective lens, creating an opportunity for him to improve his mental state as well as make peace with the events that previously tormented him. He was able to come to terms with his troubled past by working through both his memories and his dreams while maintaining a solid ethical basis. Daniel was then able to grasp these thoughts and free himself from the restraining factors of his traumatic memories. He can aid his mental state by traversing through these traumatic memories, imaginative thoughts, and lessons that he has learned throughout his life. All of these factors together culminate to Daniel being able to reflect freely on his past as well as himself to stay as active as he can in his current world.
Works Cited


