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With appreciation, Anna Thorley

## Abstract

The paradox about insomnia is that the "remedy" is to wake up, to the realities of an inner life. This calls upon homeopaths to work towards that understanding as well as prescribing remedies, if their work is to respect the psychological imperative for persons to become authentic individuals rather than only seeking to bring about "cure".

# SLEEPLESSNESS AND THE SACRED

**Anna Thorley**

Who looks outside, dreams;  
Who looks inside, awakens.  
C G Jung

All symptoms have their roots in problems that are unconscious and can only manifest through disease. C G Jung observed (1) that insomnia and indigestion are symptoms he experienced as particularly common in persons who related their problems to external situations rather than realizing their dilemmas mirrored an inner mindset that cried out for recognition and re-visioning. This is why, in cases involving sleeplessness, it is particularly relevant to be aware of what any individual needs as well as our offering a remedy. Shakespeare understood this. Archetypal in content and unremittingly dark in its themes, *The Scottish Play* can bring home to us the risks we take with any person's well-being when we do not pay attention to the psychological roots of sleeplessness.

Driven to murdering King Duncan to fulfil both his own ambition and that of his fiendish wife for him to gain the throne, Macbeth described his subsequent torment with eloquent anguish:

Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!  
Macbeth does murder sleep-the innocent sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

11.2.36-37.

Hearing voices is a symptom of psychosis, but it would be remiss to discount Macbeth's words as meaningless ravings. For his "case", viewed from both homeopathic and psychological perspectives, has a great deal to say about how we may approach the dilemma of sleeplessness when we meet it in our consulting rooms. That tormenting voice emanated from the unconscious, and in common with dreams faced him with the situation exactly as it was, and the ghastly truth of what he had done to betray his humanity, cutting himself off from his conscience and all tenderness of heart and therefore from the restorative embrace of sleep.

Matters went from bad to worse, culminating in the insanity and death of Lady Macbeth then the death of her husband. Its themes have a great deal to say to us about what we are challenged to take into account when persons seek our help through times of change in their lives, which is to examine the context of their suffering as they knit themselves together in new ways through any time of transition. For Shakespeare was not only master of the emotional, embodied word but also was "drawn to the epochal, to moments of profound shifts, of endings that were also beginnings... conveying what it means to live in the bewildering space between familiar past and murky future." (2)

Take the scene after Lady Macbeth completely lost her reason and also suffered a sleep problem, manifesting as sleep-walking, as she vainly endeavoured to wash the blood of her crimes from her hands. Macbeth pleaded with the doctor:

Cure her of that.  
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,  
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,  
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,

And with some sweet oblivious antidote  
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of the perilous stuff  
Which weighs upon the heart?

V.3.39-45.

The doctor wisely replied:

Therein the patient  
Must minister to himself.

V.3.46-47.

This merely earned the riposte:

Throw physic to the dogs! I'll have none of it!

V 3.48.

And:

Find her disease  
And purge it to a sound and pristine health.

V.3.51-52.

With these words Macbeth sealed his fate, cut off from any genuine emotional involvement with what was happening and in complete denial about the necessity for remorse. Crucially, it was Macbeth who could only see the situation allopathically, whereas the doctor recognized the dangers of seeking only to cure her condition. This exchange highlights the call to homeopaths to extend their wise attitude towards the risks of suppression into a psychological dimension, recognizing when a peremptory search for cure is psychologically suppressive. I have always felt particularly disconcerted to read of cases in which persons have been "cured" of nightmares, rather than any attempt being made to understand what those nightmares had to say in the context of a person's life story. In Macbeth's case he was propelled into a living nightmare because he could not face up to what he had done.

The doctor held the key to what the situation was really asking for.  
Witnessing Lady Macbeth's torment, he shrewdly observed:

More needs she the divine than the physician.  
V,1.70.

There we have it. Hubris enters the picture when we fail to recognize the place of the sacred in a life well lived. I am not referring to any conventional notion of God, rather that it behoves us to find ways of living with respect for something other than our conscious attitudes. This isn't a question of espousing some dogma or adopting a theoretical stance, rather of embracing the experience of psyche, the world of sleep and dreams.

I worked for many years with Sharon, a professed atheist, but we were always in complete accord when it comes to realizing that her dreams brought powerful messages from a part of her that knew her far better than she knew herself at a conscious level. She once expressed this beautifully after a particularly moving hour together, saying, "I am often amazed at how strong a direction our talks can take, without even a road map when we set off." The unconscious, including by way of potent dreams, consistently supported her in an ongoing journey towards claiming a calm authority and a voice of her own in a life that had once seen her deferring time and again to the needs and wishes of others. Homeopathy helped; those conversations, including about the dreams that consistently brought crucial situations to our attention, were fundamental. Without that attention, the risk would have been of self-betrayal.

Both Lady Macbeth and her spouse betrayed themselves by pursuing ambition and the acquisition of power completely at the expense of love. "Where love reigns there is no will to power; and where the will to power is predominant, love is lacking." (3). Balancing these opposing forces is the task of a lifetime. Taking responsibility for our actions and facing what Jung called the shadow, our propensity for such undesirable traits as envy, jealousy and greed, is a vital step on that journey. That was what the Macbeths simply couldn't do.

The homeopathic remedy indicated for Macbeth is emblematic of the roots of his problem and the context of his insomnia. The scene that leads us inexorably in its direction is when he hallucinated on the night of the planned murder:

Is this a dagger which I see before me  
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee-  
I have thee not and yet I see thee still!  
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible  
To feeling as well as sight? Or art thou but  
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,  
Proceeding from a heat-oppressèd brain?

II.1.33-39.

The rubric "Delusions, sees spectres ghosts and spirits, hovering in the air" includes only two remedies, *Aurum met* and *Lachesis*. The constellation of symptoms that are discernible in Macbeth point inexorably in the direction of one of these remedies. These include the fact that he was deeply fearful, manifested overweening ambition and was totally in thrall to his wife rather than valuing his own points of view. When confronted by the three witches he felt "my seated heart knock at my ribs". This recalls the "hard rebound of the heart" so characteristic the *Aurum* picture, as is the depth of woe and self-deprecation that he experienced in the wake of his crime. His sense of genuine self worth was eclipsed by his susceptibility to the clutches of his demonic consort; it had fallen into the unconscious and the realm of sleep and dreams that was no longer accessible to him. As ever, Shakespeare came to the heart of the matter with awesome economy when Macbeth declared:

To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself.  
II, 2,73-74.

He couldn't face the ways in which he had betrayed himself by valuing achievements and the demands of his spouse over and above becoming a human being of worth forged by way of living with principles and a conscience.

I believe that even had Macbeth been offered the remedy, true healing could only have come had he also admitted to his crimes and let go of the terrible arrogance that led him to contemptuously dismiss the three witches predictions that he would be safe until Birnam Wood came to Dunsinane and that "none of woman born shall harm Macbeth". Malcolm's troops were instructed to edge towards Macbeth under cover of branches torn from Birnam Wood and Macbeth died at the hands of Macduff, born by Caesarean

section. This brings forcibly home to us that we can never really know how any individual will achieve resolution and healing, albeit in such difficult histories by way of death, for it always contains that element of surprize. It has been my consistent experience that it also takes a long time. Those wonderful moments of awakening that are familiar to all homeopaths following administration of a well chosen remedy are steps on the way rather than ends in themselves.

As for Lady Macbeth, her sleep problem and lack of a meaningful relationship with the unconscious signify the extent to which she was cut off from any realization of her own capacity for violence, in particular the way that she pushed her husband into power rather than finding ways of coming into her own in life. A single, horrifying speech brings us right to the heart of the matter in her situation:

Come, you spirits,  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here  
And fill me from top to toe top-full  
Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood;  
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
The effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts  
And take the milk for gall, you murdering ministers,  
Wherever, in your sightless substances,  
You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,  
That my keen knife sees not the wound it makes,  
Nor heaven peek through the blanket of the dark  
To cry, "Hold! Hold!"

I.5.38-52.

Relevant rubrics are:

*Unfeeling*

*Cruelty*

*Absence of all moral restraint*

*Want of religious feeling*

*Malicious*  
*Full of hatred*  
*Desire to kill*  
*Wicked disposition*

Totally contemptuous of her husband's prevarication when she pushed him to murder the king, we can add *Hatred of persons who do not agree with him (her)*. After the king was murdered we witness her falling into psychosis and suffering *Separation of body and soul, Contradiction of will* and *Somnambulism*.

The indicated remedy is *Anacardium*, which tellingly translates from the Greek as "without heart". She was cut off from her femininity and any tenderness of heart, living only with a regard for manipulating her circumstances and her husband rather than living an authentic life of her own. Driven rather than led by way of the promptings of the soul, enraged instead of empowered, unsexed rather than womanly, she spoke with violent certainty, mistaking opinion for absolute truth. As in her husband's case, her symptoms were redolent of a soul problem that cried out for recognition.

Her crucial moment of self-betrayal came as she declared, checking that Duncan was asleep so that the murderers could fulfil their task:

Had he not resembled  
My father as he slept, I had don't.  
II.2.12-13.

Looked at symbolically rather than literally, Duncan can be seen as the "old king" in myth who needs to die for a "new king" to take his place, signifying the need for a re-visioning of attitudes through a time of transition in life. She couldn't take this step because, emotionally, she was clinging on to being a father's daughter, unable to take the leap into mature and independent womanhood.

The fundamental problem with the Macbeths was that they were joined at the hip, undifferentiated as a man and woman and frighteningly dependent on one another. She was identified with masculine attitudes, manifesting in aggression and cruelty; he was cut off from his manhood, completely unable

to withstand the pressure she put upon him. Both were estranged from feminine sensibilities, intent on manipulating their outer situation with no regard for the consequences for the soul. Their fate can bring home to us what really cries out for attention when a person complains of insomnia.

Take Mary, who sought my help with persistent problems with sleeplessness as she struggled in a relationship with a chaotic man who consistently blamed her for their constant problems. At the heart of the matter lay her tendency to undervalue herself so much that she was prone to believing him when he insisted that all would be well if only she could allow herself to be close to him. She did need to realize to what extent the problem was actually his, as he had reached his forties without ever having forged a close relationship with a woman, but there was a danger that we confined our attention to this. When we women rail against men as the source of our problems we perpetrate the very same violence that we so roundly condemn. Mary was one of many otherwise intelligent and independent women I have encountered in the consulting room who, in common with Lady Macbeth, have felt compelled to push the men in their lives to change rather than realizing that what really needed to transform was their attitude to themselves. For that is the only thing any of us has a right to change. Her problem was that she had habitually and unthinkingly acceded to whatever others needed at the expense of taking herself into account.

A dream late in the period of our working together was telling:

My sister and my mother were telling me what I was doing wrong.

How tempting it was to assume that they were acting in her interests, but far from that being the case, this dream helped Mary to realize the extent to which she had been influenced by these two women persuading her that she was to blame for family problems. The truth was that Mary had been forced into a role as "mother" in the family when very young. Her mother neglected her maternal responsibilities in favour of having an affair, whilst her sister had blithely got on with life without a care for the ways in which Mary and her two brothers bore the brunt of the ensuing neglect. As for her father, he had been absent as a significant figure in her life just as he was absent from the dream. Through midlife, Mary was destined to replay

this scenario in a relationship with a man who took her for granted and relied on her for his creature comforts, just as her mother and sister had done. The difference was that this time she was destined to wake up to the fact that she wasn't experiencing problems because she was worthless, rather that she was continuing to experience problems because she had failed to realize a sense of her own worth.

When working psychologically, as I do, I am alert to the first dream that someone reports, for it invariably catches the essence of the problem and also gives me an indication of to what extent a change of attitude is possible. In Mary's case she dreamed:

I picked a girl up. She was foreign, and no-one would help her, so I did. She said, "So you're Mary? I can see you aren't as bad as everyone says you are."

That "foreign girl" was nothing less than an un-lived aspect of herself. By way of befriending her, Mary was destined to realize that she wasn't the terrible person that her problematic upbringing had led her to believe. This key dream over-arched all of the years of our work together. Well-indicated remedies, including *Arsenicum* to address sleeplessness and night sweats, supported her well but it was her dreams that led us in the direction of the issues that deserved her attention, signalling to us each step of the way what she was ready to assimilate about herself as she re-visioned her life and embraced a sense of herself as a worthwhile person. She had seen the man in her life as the problem; it took many hours of therapy to reveal that he was not the problem *per se*, rather that he mirrored her tendency towards self-deprecation, recalling C G Jung's assertion with which I began this piece that sleeplessness afflicts those who are failing to realize the inner significance of their dilemmas. Mary's challenging relationship was actually a great gift, enabling her for the first time in her life to realize to what extent she had sacrificed herself in service to others' needs. My heart leaped on the day she felt able to say, "I know now that I can do this", referring to claiming the right to be loved simply for being herself.

By way of her trials and tribulations, Mary claimed a voice of her own. She came to appreciate the edict of the three witches in *Macbeth* that:

Fair is foul and foul is fair.  
I.1.12.

That is homeopathy in a nutshell, bringing home to us the extent to which perceived differences between experiences as "fair" or "foul" dissolve once we grasp just to what extent a life of ease breeds complacency whilst strength and insight are born of our discovering appropriate ways of living with pain and difficulty. The Macbeths were pure poison, yet by way of allowing ourselves to be touched, homeopathically, by the unadulterated grimness of their actions their fate has the positive potential to bring home to us the risks of hubris and self-betrayal from which no-one is exempt.

The world of sleep and dreams is one in which women feel particularly at home, although of course it is accessible to men too. The fate of the Macbeths brings home to us the terrible dangers of failing to embrace the feminine approach in our lives and work. Its crucial theme is that change that happens unconsciously happens negatively, which is why it is so important it is to seek to understand the roots of someone's suffering rather than endeavouring only to alleviate it.

As homeopaths we have a wonderful tool with which to address suffering. What I have to say raises fundamental questions about how we use that tool. In cases of insomnia it is especially vital to bear this in mind, for the paradox is that healing needs to come by way of enabling persons to wake up, in particular to the reality of an inner life and to the sacred task of becoming the persons that only they can be.

1. Jung, *CG*, 1960, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, *Collected Works Volume 8*, paragraph 516, Routledge, London.
2. Shapiro, James 2005, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, Faber and Faber, London.
3. Jung, *CG*, 1966, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, *Collected Works Volume 7*, paragraph 78, Routledge, London.