

The Science of Dreaming and Sleep in Selected Charles Dickens' Novels and Letters

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Abstract : The present work examines the representation of dreaming in Charles Dickens' novels, particularly Oliver Twist. Dickens showed great interest in the science of dreaming and had ample knowledge of the latest dream theories in the Victorian era, as can be seen in his personal correspondence, most notably in his famous letter to Dr. Thomas Stone on 2/2/1851. This essay places Dickens' personal writings side by side with his novels to elucidate whether the scientific paradigm about dreaming included in the novel is consistent with the current (in Dickens' time) scientific knowledge, or whether it is anachronistic or visionary (ahead of his time). Oliver Twist is particularly useful because it contains entire passages pondering on the nature of dreaming, enumerating types of common dreams, and taking a stand on the interference of sensory perception during the dreaming state. The author is particularly intrigued by Dickens' assumption of the commonality and universality of lucid dreaming as revealed in these passages. This essay places popular Victorian dream theories, such as those contained in Robert Macnish's *The Philosophy of Sleep*, side by side with recent dream theory, particularly psychophysicist Stephen LaBerge's numerous articles and books on the topic of lucid dreaming to see if Dickens deviated in any way from the reigning paradigm of the Victorian era in his representation of dreaming in his novels. While Dickens puts to great narrative use many of the characteristics of dreaming described by leading Victorian theorists, the author of this study argues, however, that Dickens' most visionary statements derive from his acute observations of his own dreaming experiences.

Keywords : consciousness, Dickens, dreaming, lucid dreaming, Victorian

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