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THE
ANALYSIS OF
DREAMS



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Foreword

by

E. B. STRAUSS, M.A., D.M., D.Sc., F.R.C.P.
President of the British Psychological Society (1956-57)



This is not an easy book; but any original work on the analysis of dreams, to be of any value, would be difficult reading. The difficulties are even greater for the English reader in view of the unfamiliar framework of Professor Boss's technique: phenomenology never really crossed the Channel sufficiently to make its mark on British psychiatry; and existentialism seems to have as many connotations in the British mind as there are existentialists on the Continent.

However, the reader will miss the meaning and beauty of this book unless he is able to grasp the author's main premises.

A phenomenological psychiatrist is, I suppose, one who is content from the start to regard all human experience as phenomena of a Reality, the nature of which need not concern him. He is prepared, philosophically speaking, to move in and seek to manipulate the world of appearances, leaving the world of ultimate spiritual realities, if they exist, for the consideration of the metaphysician and theologian. An existentialist psychotherapist, in Professor Boss's sense, is one who regards it as important to link up all the psychic phenomena which are his special field of study with the rest of the universe in which they occur as part-phenomena. In that way experience can be made, to a certain extent, to escape from the rigid categories of 'subjective' and 'objective'.

An analysis of the dream-life which uses both phenomenological and ontological instruments is bound to be stimulating, original, exciting—and unfamiliar.

The *interpretation* of all dreams in Freud's over-simplified terms as symbolic expressions of repressed, sex-derived wishes is seen to be unacceptable to an analytical psychotherapist of Professor Boss's approach.

Again, Professor Boss throws considerable doubt on Jung's

attempt to interpret dreams as compensatory mechanisms designed to integrate the various faculties and bring about 'individuation' of the personality through the intervention of 'archetypes' deriving from the non-personal levels of the Unconscious.

Nevertheless, in the last analysis, is there so very much difference between the full experiencing of 'selfhood', which would appear to be the ultimate object of Professor Boss's type of psychotherapy, individuation, the object of Jungian analysis, and the resolution of unconscious, instinct-derived conflicts and the achievement of an appropriate adulthood thereby, which is the desired goal of Freudian analysis?

No one is in a position to state categorically that *his* is the correct or solely possible interpretation of this or that dream. Yet, any psychotherapeutic procedure, including 'faulty' or narrow dream-interpretations, that serves to direct or re-direct a patient's steps on the path which leads to mental health is useful and worthy of respect.

Professor Boss's great merit is that he has enormously widened and deepened our ideas on the meaning of dreams in relation to the rest of life, without demanding our wholesale rejection of the work of other psychologists who have set themselves the same task.

Preface



A psycho-analytical therapist may hear anything between five and twenty dreams daily, and often an even greater number. Thus, at a conservative estimate, during twenty-five years of practice as a psychotherapist I have been told of about 50,000 dreams by at least 500 different people. In any case, thanks to a written record kept during the last five years, I have been able to verify that during that period I have been told of 11,200 dreams by neurotics, by analysts in training, and by normal acquaintances.

I obtained my first insight into the vast realm of dreams, through many years of training in classical psycho-analytical theory and practice, such as is required by the Freudian school. But I increasingly encountered dreams which would yield to the key of the Freudian dream theory only most reluctantly and with the greatest difficulty, so much so that the whole theory appeared to be inadequate. For this reason I examined the scientific works of other dream psychologists. As luck would have it, a psychotherapeutic group was being formed in Zurich under the leadership of C. G. Jung, with the co-operation of A. Maeder, another pioneer amongst dream explorers. During the ten years that this group functioned I had many opportunities of becoming thoroughly conversant with the dream doctrines of both these investigators. The additional therapeutic techniques of dream interpretation which I owe to my association with this group, are a part of the essential tools of my medical activity. However, even here I could not find an adequate elucidation of the dream phenomena themselves, nor did H. Silberer, A. Adler, W. Stekel, and the numerous later studies of other dream psychologists clarify for me the actual essence of these phenomena, valuable as their theoretical conclusions were.

For all of them agreed with Freud's original dream theory in that they replaced the immediate and direct phenomenon by explanations of it. They saw in dreams the expression of something else, something merely assumed to exist behind the phenomena, some mental construct.

There is no doubt that all these dream theories had an important role to play. How else could modern dream investigation have begun tackling this elusive problem at all? It is only thanks to this tremendous preparatory work that today we may ask about the proper and full content of the dream phenomenon. However, this very question forces us to forgo all theories and hypotheses, to concentrate on the dream itself and to see what we can learn from it alone.

This book is thus an attempt to pave the way for the direct study of the dream phenomenon itself, by removing all the disguises and schemata of mental constructs of contemporary dream theories. I was able to undertake this daring task owing to my contact with the existentialist analytical approach of Martin Heidegger. Stimulated by the work of Ludwig Binswanger, I made a thorough study of Heidegger's published, and even of some of his unpublished, writings, and then benefited from Heidegger's unstinted readiness for direct discussion. Whether I have the mind for the strict detail demanded by existentialist analysis and its discussion, can only be decided by this work. I shall not have failed completely in my task, if in this book I succeed in liberating the phenomenon of the dream from the psychological and anthropological point of view, hitherto adopted by those who have been studying dreams, and thus place it in its own light.

Introduction



“Once upon a time I, Chwang-Tse, dreamt I was a butterfly fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was aware only of following my fancy as a butterfly, and unconscious of my human individuality. Suddenly I awoke, and there I lay, myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming I am a man.”

Few other human phenomena have, in the course of history, been accorded such varied treatment as the dream. Opinions on the dream fluctuate between “its evaluation as a heightening of man’s faculties, not infrequently to the point of virtuosity, and the verdict that it represents a decided diminution of spiritual powers, often quite subhumanly so”.^{1*}

The oldest dream book extant is a papyrus preserved in the British Museum. It belongs to the time of the 12th Egyptian dynasty, to the years 2000–1790 B.C., and comes from Dêr-el-Medineh. A very comprehensive dream guide was discovered in Nineveh. It dates from the seventh century B.C. and was found in the great library of clay tablets of the last great Assyrian king Assurbanipal. The Chaldeans particularly excelled in the art of dream interpretation after they had taken over Assurbanipal’s heritage, and when, following their victory over the Assyrians, they had founded the neo-Babylonian Chaldean kingdom. To the same period of ancient history must be ascribed also the dream interpretations of Joseph the son of Jacob, who could interpret not only his own dreams but also those of his fellow prisoners and later those of the Pharaohs.² In those ancient days of man’s history, dream interpretation was called a divine art because, according to the grandiose, all-embracing, theocentric philosophy of the times, dreams were considered to be immediate revelations of God or of the gods. Thus, as the fourth book of Moses reports, the Lord himself had descended in a pillar of cloud in order to rebuke Aaron

* The references will be found at the end of the book.

and Miriam. "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known in a vision, I do speak with him in a dream." We also read in the oldest Egyptian accounts of the dream that Horus expressly attributed his bad dreams to the machinations of evil gods. All he could do was to pray to his mother, the goddess Isis, to save him from the evil consequences of such dreams.

Being visitations from the gods, dreams were not thought to determine the fate of individuals alone. Very often they decided the fate of entire armies and peoples. Thus the Patriarch Jacob took heed of his dream of the heavenly ladder in which the voice of God ordered him to return to his homeland. From clay tablets we may learn that the Assyrian king Assurbanipal undertook his campaign against the King of the Elamites Te-uman as a direct consequence of a dream of one of his seers. In it the goddess Ishtar herself had demanded this campaign, promising protection, fortune and glory. The inscriptions add that the goddess kept to her word given in the dream, and that Assurbanipal conquered the army of the Elamites on the shores of the Eulaeus, captured Te-uman and beheaded him.

The ancients considered not only dreams themselves but even their interpretations as the work of the divine. Joseph the son of Jacob was the first to tell of this. Particularly to his fellow prisoners did he stress the fact that dream interpretation is the direct work of God. He expressly informed Pharaoh that he himself could not interpret dreams. "It is not in me," he said, "God shall give Pharaoh an answer in peace."³

When later Nebuchadnezzar ordered Daniel not only to interpret his dream, but also to guess what it was that he had dreamed, Daniel could only accede to this request "because there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets".⁴ Even Homer still spoke of the dream as a messenger of the gods. At the very beginning of the *Iliad*, which describes how war and pestilence were decimating the Achaeans, Achilles advises the sons of Atreus to seek the advice of one of the priests, seers or dream-interpreters, "for dreams too are sent by Zeus".⁵ In the Second book of the *Iliad*, Zeus deliberately deceives Agamemnon in a false dream, so as to vindicate Achilles and to destroy the Achaeans: "Speed on, false dream," the god orders, "into the huts of Agamemnon son of Atreus, and bid him prepare for battle the armies of the curly-headed Achaeans; for now his chance has come for capturing the spacious city of Troy, for we, the immortal Olympians, are all agreed on it. The pleading of Here has persuaded us, and the Trojans' fate is sealed." On the other hand, in the sixth book of the *Odyssey*, Pallas Athene herself, thinking of

the safe return of the noble Odysseus, hastens to the sleeping Nausicaa. Knowing that Odysseus had just landed on the shores of the Phaeacian island Scheria, she appears to the queen's daughter in the guise of a favourite playmate, and admonishes the sleeper to go to this shore and to wash her beautiful clothes there, at the first blush of dawn.

(Socrates, too, considered dreams to be divine admonitions that had to be obeyed.) It is for this reason that even during his last days in prison he began to write poetry at the god's behest. This at least is what Plato writes in his *Phaedo* :

"Tell him the truth, Cebes," said Socrates, "that I did not compose them because I wanted to rival him or his works. I knew that that was not easy. I was trying to discover the meaning of some dreams, and I wrote the poems to clear my conscience, in case this was the sort of 'art' that I was told to pursue. It happened like this: the same dream had kept on coming to me from time to time throughout my life, taking different forms at different times, but always saying the same thing: 'Socrates, pursue the arts, and work hard at them.' I had previously supposed that it was urging me to do what I was in fact doing, and trying to encourage me in its performance: that like those who shout encouragement to runners in a race, so the dream, when it urged me to 'pursue the arts', was encouraging me in what I was doing; for philosophy is the greatest of all arts, and that was my pursuit. But then when the trial took place, and the god's festival prevented my execution, I thought that just in case the dream meant, after all, that I should follow this popular kind of 'art', I ought to follow it and not disobey. It seemed safer not to depart before salving my conscience by the composition of poems in obedience to the dream. So I first wrote in honour of the god for whom the ceremonies were being held. . . ." ⁶

Thus the ancient Greeks still considered the dream a divine commandment. Because of it many a cult was changed, and new ones were introduced.⁷ It was nothing unusual to report dreams in official documents. Even the dreams of women were expressly included in Statutory law.

While this ancient respect for the dream was never lost by the Islamic world,⁸ in the West it only rose to prominence many centuries later. No less a person than Bishop Synesius of Cyrene, who lived in the fourth century A.D., wrote the following :

"I am not surprised that some have owed the discovery of treasure to their dreams; that others have gone to bed quite prosaically, and yet awakened as gifted poets after having conversed with the Muses in their dreams. I need hardly speak of those whom the dream warned of impending dangers or of those who dreamt of a remedy that would cure them. What is most wonderful and most mysterious is the fact that sleep opens the soul to the fullest intuitions into the true essence of things, and that it allows it to pass beyond nature and to become as one with that intelligible sphere, from which it has strayed so far that it no longer even knows whence it came. . . . From this we can see that it is always a man who instructs us when we are awake, but that it is God alone who illuminates us when we sleep."⁹

In the thirteenth century the Spanish physician, alchemist, and philosopher Arnald of Villanova was appointed official dream interpreter to the courts of Aragon and Sicily. Because of his skill, his fame had spread far and wide, and gave him a lasting influence on the thought of his contemporaries. In his book on the dream *Expositiones visionum quas sunt in somnia ad utilitatem medicorum non medicam*¹⁰ he writes, for instance, that rain in the dream might well signify enlightenment by God. We find a mystic of the fourteenth century writing as follows: "A sage says that angels appear to man more often in sleep than in waking life, because in sleep man is less distracted by the diversities of external things than in waking." Even at the beginning of the Renaissance all great physicians, theologians, and philosophers were still very much concerned with dreams and their interpretation. The outstanding Milanese doctor Geronimo Cardano admitted that dreams of exceptional brilliance had decided the most important events of his life.¹¹

However, between early antiquity and the Middle Ages the dream had for the first time lost its divine nature. Dreams were interpreted by crude rules of thumb. According to Plutarch, already in the fifth century B.C. there were dream books and dream tablets from which one could simply read off prophecies and admonitions. Aristotle and Hippocrates questioned the divine nature of dreams. Aristotle no longer sought the origins of dreams outside man but inside his own nature. Dreams, he said, were the necessary manifestations of this nature. They derived from the experiences and personal attitudes of the dreamer, from his cares, his hopes and also from his biological processes, especially from the coursing and

warmth of his blood. In his later writings he even tried to give a psycho-physiological explanation of prophetic dreams. However, the mere fact that he granted the possibility of prophetic dreams clearly proves that he too still based himself on the metaphysical foundations of the ancient Greeks.

Only with Petronius, Nero's counsellor, did the metaphysical foundations of the world of ancient Greece collapse, soon to be followed by the disintegration of this world itself. Arrogantly Petronius declared, "It is neither the gods nor divine commandments that send the dreams down from the heavens, but each one of us makes them for himself." (*"Somnia quae mentes ludunt volantibus umbris non denubra deum, nec ab aethere numina mitunt, sed sibi quisque facit."*)¹² In these sentences we can see the first clear expression of the Rationalism and Enlightenment of the Western World. True, in the second century A.D., Artemidorus of Daldis still felt that he was called to the study of dreams by Apollo himself. It was Apollo who ordered this Lydian to gather all that was known about dreams. On his many journeys he collected from the writings of knowledgeable writers, from traditional folklore and even from the talk of discredited magicians and vagabonds, all that had any possible bearing on the dream. His findings were collated in five large dream books. Artemidorus still admitted that some dreams were of divine origin, as distinct from those dreams that dealt with the activities of the day, and that expressed desires, feelings and bodily processes. Nevertheless, Artemidorus's books are essentially a schematic description of dream images arranged according to groups. Already the interpretations are largely mechanical, and follow rigid methods of deciphering, fixed from ancient times. All the same these dream books of Artemidorus contain many psychological hints that strike one as surprisingly modern,¹³ and his work had a decisive influence on all subsequent dream literature. Up to the beginning of modern scientific investigation, very little was written about the dream that was not greatly influenced by Artemidorus. It is for this reason that Philipp Melanchthon himself, the prominent Protestant theologian and friend of Luther, in his preface to the German edition of the five dream books of Artemidorus, expressly pointed to their usefulness in medical science.

Dreams fared no better in the enlightened period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than they did in Nero's times. The precursor of modern positivism, Thomas Hobbes, once more considered dreams to be nothing but the effects of somatic stimuli. Voltaire looked upon the belief that dreams might be predictions or

prophecies as nothing but superstitious nonsense. For him dreams were mainly the expression of somatic stimuli, or of excessive passions. Kant still warned us not to underestimate dreams because "in doing so we might well be carelessly overlooking one of nature's great mysteries".¹⁴ He even suspected that ideas in sleep were "clearer and broader than even the clearest in waking life". But he then went on to say that we could have no awareness of these ideas themselves, since during sleep we could not share experience with the body. On no account must the dream, i.e. what one remembers on waking up, be confused with these ideas. For what the sleeper remembers on waking up is altogether something different, and occurs only when he is no longer fully asleep, when he is reasonably perceptive, and when he weaves his mental activity into external sense impressions. It is for this reason that he remembers them afterwards, in part, but finds in them only wild and absurd chimeras.¹⁵ In his anthropological reflections Kant makes the dream appear closely related to superstition, magic and, last but not least, to indigestion.¹⁶

Then, after the Romantic poets and thinkers had once more honoured the dream with a brief but friendly smile, the once divine art of dream interpretation had to flee before the mechanical materialism of the second half of the nineteenth century, and take refuge in the darkest superstitions and in the practices of unscrupulous charlatans. If technical and scientific knowledge was no longer capable of seeing in even the most intelligent thoughts and noblest feelings of waking life anything but a secret locked in the cells of the brain, a mere epiphenomenon of molecular mechanics, how much less readily could it grant any meaning or sense to that flighty phenomenon which at night so frequently mocks all our rational thoughts. Whenever scientists of the time were at all concerned with the dream, they adopted such ideas as Herbart's. The latter called the dream "a slow process of partial and very anomalous awakening". A similar description is found in Binz's book on the dream which appeared in 1878. In it the transition from dreaming into waking is described in the following words:

"Towards morning the fatiguing bodies contained in the cortical protein are increasingly decomposed and carried away by the purifying blood-stream. Here and there, some cell groups have already woken up while everything around them is still completely inert. At this stage the isolated work of the individual cell groups is perceived by consciousness without the necessary