

**“BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY  
CLUJ-NAPOCA  
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**The Interpretation of Dreams: A Freudian,  
Jungian, and Phenomenological Analysis**

**THESIS ABSTRACT**

**Coordinator:  
Professor Copoeru Ion, Ph.D.**

**Ph.D. Student:  
Grigorescu Crina-Maria**

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**Key words:** dream interpretation, the science of dreams, the phenomenology of dreams, Freud's perspective on dreams, Jung's perspective on dreams, dreaming consciousness, the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious, dream analysis, dream therapy, healing through dreams, the relationship between dreams and the vigil state, the Freudian way of interpreting dreams, dream sources, dream psychoanalysis, dream contemporaneity, a philosophical dream interpretation.

## **Abstract**

### *Hypothesis and Objectives*

How often do we hear people talking about dreams? That phenomenon that takes places during sleep, not dreams as goals we set to achieve during our lifetime, because there's a fundamental difference there. We dream, but we forget that we do. We offer no importance to the events that happen during sleep (with the exception of nightmares), and we can't wait to wake up and continue with our daily duties. For this reason, and with a revolutionary attitude, this thesis proposes that dreams have a power that most of us know nothing about. Dreams, when interpreted and understood, can help us improve the way we live, the way we see things and our perception on the less enjoyable aspects of our existence. Like any other phenomenon, dreams are not random, meaningless experiences that happen just so we don't get bored during sleep; they send signals and messages when something is not working well physically or mentally. It's true, there are dreams with no sense, very chaotic or fantastic; but even the most surprising of them can reveal an important message, that unseen side of things which in the waking and conscious state, we would not be able to notice. In this work we will be able to see that dreams have the ability to help us overcome phobias, depressions, anxieties and other more or less neurotic problems. They have been interpreted for thousand of years, however, they have been mentioned only periodically by several philosophers and scientists; because only a few people offered us a complete investigation on the phenomenon. That's why, in order to be able to observe the whole picture and to carry out an elaborate philosophical analysis, this work also includes the research of doctors from other fields, like Freud or Jung, because their findings can help us prove our hypothesis. The content also includes a phenomenological approach and contemporary papers that will help us observe the evolution of dream theories.

## *Synthesis of Chapters*

Through *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud, the well-known father of psychoanalysis, aims to prove that dreams can be discerned, understood and even interpreted. With a confident attitude, Freud embarks in his work on a complex journey through the universe of dreams. He flirts with the different theories that have been elaborated before him and analyzes all the aspects that can bring us closer to the understanding of this nocturnal phenomenon. Among his discoveries we find four different types of somatic excitations that contribute to the formation of dreams (but which do not represent their only source) and classifies the different theories, emphasizing the connection of dreams with mental illnesses; which helps him prove the therapeutic contribution of dreams. Without going too far from his hypothesis that dreams can be interpreted, a pretty difficult task, considering the fact that most researchers denied this by stating that dreams are absurd and meaningless; the psychoanalyst manages to introduce in his work his interpretation methods and along with them, his own detailed analyzed dreams. Although he was directly or indirectly contradicted, criticized and defamed, Freud maintained strongly that dreams represent the fulfillment of a wish. A very bold statement, given the limiting character this theory unquestionably ascribes to itself. Starting on this path, and adopting a rigidity hard to fight, Freud claims that regardless of the dream, its meaning represents the fulfillment of a desire, whether it's a conscious or repressed desire; recent or long forgotten. Even the uncomfortable or anxious dreams represent the same for him; and those opposed to his theory, whether they're patients, readers or researchers, would be prone to dreams of *counter-desire*, which are represented by the desire to contradict his theory.

Another important aspect found in this first chapter, and which will also be discussed from a Jungian perspective, is dream symbolism; where again, we encounter the Freudian rigidity, because for him, the symbols that appear in our dreams are either male or female members (here we can find a long list of objects/images that we see during sleep). Lastly, the approach moves towards the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious, which is essential for our thesis, taking into account that both Freud and Jung believed that dreams are "the royal road to the unconscious". Therefore, this part of our research can help us observe the advantages of dreams and the unconscious aspects they can reveal to us. Freud's theory is not complete either, but undeniably complex; that's why it plays an important role in helping us prove the therapeutic benefits of dreams.

In the second part of this thesis, the approach turns into a practical one, as Carl G. Jung, in his *Dream Analysis*, debates and interprets with the participants to his seminar thirty dreams of a single patient; which is a 45-year-old businessman, intelligent, cultivated, married, with children, and not very neurotic, but sensitive. His marital problems prompt the dreamer to seek Dr. Jung's help. Contrary to most opinions and despite the fantastic features of dreams, Jung sustains the fact that dreams can be subjected to analysis and are essential for analytical psychotherapy. Like Freud, he accepts the existence of a psychic reality that consists of an unconscious part of the human mind, although for him, this unconscious is no longer personal, as it was for Freud, but collective. For both researchers, this would be the primary source of dreams; but for Jung, dreams belong to both the past and the future. Furthermore, Jung discovers a dramatic narrative structure found in most dreams; which variably begin with an exposition in which there are statements of place, of the identity of the human figures in the dreams, and rarely, indications of time; after that, the plot begins to unfold and culminates emotionally. However, for Jung, understanding dreams is not based only on a causal explanation, as Freud claims, but also in the comprehension of their purpose; what the dream means to the dreamer and his way of living, once a correct interpretation has been made.

As we already mentioned, dream symbolism plays an important role for Jung too; but his perspective differs from that of Freud, because Freud reduces his fixed symbolism to simple signs or symptoms, while Jung keeps an open mind and believes that their meaning cannot be truly optimal until the context of their appearance has also been taken into account; after the dreamer's life circumstances and conscious orientations have been established. This is one of the reasons why he chooses to analyze the dreams of a single patient. Additionally, for Jung, it is also necessary to construct, dream by dream, the imperative referent or context. In order to achieve this, we need to know as many details as possible about the dreamer, an aspect with which Freud agreed. Jung's discoveries do not end here; the recognition he receives in the history of the unconscious and dream studies is due to the archetypes: the *Shadow*, the *Anima*, the *Animus* and the *Self*. Jung believes that these archetypes have the power to influence our dreams and can help us make accurate interpretations. All of this being said, we can now see the contribution Jung brings to this thesis and how he can aid us in proving that dreams can be interpreted and once understood, they let us see the difficulties from our lives from a healthier perspective. Even the patient, at the end of his analysis,

acquires the ability to provide accurate interpretations, which also helps him solve his problems easier.

The approach in the last chapter becomes even more philosophical, because it includes the theories of some of the great phenomenologists that introduced fragments about dreams into their research. We have Husserl, for whom dreams are similar to illusions or hallucinations and are not worth investigating, because they are phenomenologically difficult to access. Fink also considers dreams as a more captivating form of imagination, and tells us that the mental state during sleep is difficult to access, considering that from a phenomenological perspective we can only analyze an awakened ego. However, he believes that avoiding the phenomenon would mean that we have already formed an opinion about it. Sartre, on the other hand, also observes that the dream state is induced by an unconscious form, which cannot become conscious and does not allow the dreamer to place into existence what is experienced. Although Sartre is criticized by Héring; they both agree that the dreamer creates a world rich in objects and situations, but for Héring, this would be the cognitive function of dreaming, which also allows us to understand reality. A brief introduction to dreams is also found in Patocka's research, who thinks that the dreamer's helplessness shows us the intrinsic transition into the dimension of dreams, whose disorder does not allow it to be the same as the real dimension. His conclusion is that dreams do not represent something coherent, and by no means, something real, because this could call into question our entire existence. A final theory introduced is that of Conrad, who does not consider the world of dreams to be in opposition to the real world, but its opposite. He defends his theory by saying that when we begin to dream, we begin to build a world of our own, which cannot include anything real and is completely detached from the real world. We must remember that from his perspective, the dream is not a mental process of displacement, but a localizable experience without any change in consciousness.

All these phenomenological theories are analyzed with the help of Nicola Zippel through his work *Dreaming Consciousness: A Contribution to Phenomenology*. This being said allows us to move on to other contemporary phenomenologists, but before doing so, it is essential to mention Zippel's conclusion on the phenomenon, which is that the dream has only been partially researched from a phenomenological point of view. We only find fragments among the philosophical studies, because no philosopher has made dreams the core of his research. It didn't happen out of lack of interest, but because of the difficulty of

investigating an unconscious mental state. Another contemporary phenomenologist contributing to dream research is Julia Iribarne, who argues that dreams have meaning and they can help us discover new aspects of the human being. The last phenomenological theory is that of Maria Zambrano, analyzed from the perspective of Maria Neves; who expresses her fascination about dreams and emphasizes their importance in her therapeutic philosophical consultations. To be able to observe the evolution of dream theories, we will also discuss neurophysiological aspects that further strengthen our hypothesis.

### *Contributions and Conclusions*

Dreams are a much too complex phenomenon to form a conclusion in their regard, or their source and meaning; especially if we also take into consideration that no human being dreams the same; each one of us creates mental images during sleep that are related to our personal lives and only ourselves are able to completely understand. Although we cannot express a clear conclusion, the good news is that the phenomenon continues to be researched and new discoveries emerge with every interest that any scientist gives to it. Even if the contribution that this thesis offers is not that obvious, I confidently sustain the fact that it is beneficial for dream studies. The philosophical analysis of these works takes us one step closer to the understanding of dreams. And even if most people do not consider dreams important, or sleeping in general; there still are many people fascinated by them. Therefore, I strongly consider that dreams are a great path to discover the mysterious and complex parts of our being; not only they send us “messages” when something does not go well, they are also able to signal certain diseases that we could go through without us knowing. Moreover, the fast-evolving technologies represent an even greater support that we can benefit from when researching dreams; as long as we keep an open mind to new ideas that continue to develop.



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