

Man and His Symbols by C.G. Jung
(p.62-64 in the hardcover)

It will be clear from all I have said that we cannot lay down general rules for interpreting dreams. When I suggested earlier that the overall function of dreams seems to be to compensate for deficiencies or distortions in the conscious mind, I meant that this assumption opened up the most promising approach to the nature of *particular* dreams. In some cases you can see this function plainly demonstrated.

One of my patients had a very high opinion of himself and was unaware that almost everyone who knew him was irritated by his air of moral superiority. He came to me with a dream in which he had seen a drunken tramp rolling in a ditch—a sight that evoked from him only the patronizing comment: "It's terrible to see how low a man can fall." It was evident that the unpleasant nature of the dream was at least in part an attempt to offset his inflated opinion of his own merits. But there was something more to it than this. It turned out that he had a brother who was a degenerate alcoholic. What the dream also revealed was that his superior attitude was compensating the brother, as both an outer and an inner figure.

In another case I recall, a woman who was proud of her intelligent understanding of psychology had recurring dreams about another woman. When in ordinary life she met this woman, she did not like her, thinking her a vain and dishonest intriguer. But in the dreams the woman appeared almost as a sister, friendly and likable. My patient could not understand why she should dream so favorably about a person she disliked. But these dreams were trying to convey the idea that she herself was "shadowed" by an unconscious character that resembled the other woman. It was hard for my patient, who had very clear ideas about her own personality, to realize that the dream was telling her about her own power complex and her hidden motivations—unconscious influences that had more than once led to disagreeable rows with her friends. She had always blamed others for these, not herself.

It is not merely the "shadow" side of our personalities that we overlook, disregard, and repress. We may also do the same to our positive qualities. An example that comes to mind is that of an apparently modest and self-effacing man, with charming manners. He always seemed content with a back seat, but discreetly insisted on being present. When asked to speak he would offer a well-informed opinion, though he never intruded it. But he sometimes hinted that a given matter could be dealt with in a far superior way at a certain higher level (though he never explained how).

In his dreams, however, he constantly had encounters with great historical figures, such as Napoleon and Alexander the Great. These dreams were clearly compensating for an inferiority complex. But they had another implication. What sort of man must I be, the dream was asking, to have such illustrious callers? In this respect the dreams pointed to a secret megalomania, which offset the dreamer's feeling of inferiority. This unconscious idea of grandeur insulated him from the reality of his environment and enabled him to remain aloof from obligations that would

be imperative for other people. He felt no need to prove—either to himself or to others — that his superior judgment was based on superior merit.

He was, in fact, unconsciously playing an insane game, and the dreams were seeking to bring it to the level of consciousness in a curiously ambiguous way. Hobnobbing with Napoleon and being on speaking terms with Alexander the Great are exactly the kind of fantasies produced by an inferiority complex. But why, one asks, could not the dream be open and direct about it and say what it had to say without ambiguity?

I have frequently been asked this question, and I have asked it myself. I am often surprised at the tantalizing way dreams seem to evade definite information or omit the decisive point. Freud assumed the existence of a special function of the psyche, which he called the "censor." This, he supposed, twisted the dream images and made them unrecognizable or misleading in order to deceive the dreaming consciousness about the real subject of the dream. By concealing the critical thought from the dreamer, the "censor" protected his sleep against the shock of a disagreeable reminiscence. But I am skeptical about the theory that the dream is a guardian of sleep; dreams just as often disturb sleep.

It rather looks as if the approach to consciousness has a "blotting-out" effect upon the subliminal contents of the psyche. The subliminal state retains ideas and images at a much lower level of tension than they possess in consciousness. In the subliminal condition they lose clarity of definition; the relations between them are less consequential and more vaguely analogous, less rational and therefore more "incomprehensible." This can also be observed in all dreamlike conditions, whether due to fatigue, fever, or toxins. But if something happens to endow any of these images with greater tension, they become less subliminal and, as they come close to the threshold of consciousness, more sharply defined.

It is from this fact that one may understand why dreams often express themselves as analogies, why one dream image slides into another, and why neither the logic nor the time scale of our waking life seems to apply. The form that dreams take is natural to the unconscious because the material from which they are produced is retained in the subliminal state in precisely this fashion. Dreams do not guard sleep from what Freud called the "incompatible wish." What he called "disguise" is actually the shape all impulses naturally take in the unconscious. Thus, a dream cannot produce a definite thought. If it begins to do so, it ceases to be a dream because it crosses the threshold of consciousness. That is why dreams seem to skip the very points that are most important to the conscious mind, and seem rather to manifest the "fringe of consciousness," like the faint gleam of stars during a total eclipse of the sun.

We should understand that dream symbols are for the most part manifestations of a psyche that is beyond the control of the conscious mind. Meaning and purposefulness are not the prerogatives of the mind; they operate in the whole of living nature. There is no difference in principle between organic and psychic growth. As a plant produces its flower, so the psyche creates its symbols. Every dream is evidence of this process.