ON THE NATURE OF DREAMS[1]

530 Medical psychology differs from all other scientific disciplines in that it has to deal with the most complex problems without being able to rely on tested rules of procedure, on a series of verifiable experiments and logically explicable facts. On the contrary, it is confronted with a mass of shifting irrational happenings, for the psyche is perhaps the most baffling and unapproachable phenomenon with which the scientific mind has ever had to deal. Although we must assume that all psychic phenomena are somehow, in the broadest sense, causally dependent, it is advisable to remember at this point that causality is in the last analysis no more than a statistical truth. Therefore we should perhaps do well in certain cases to make allowance for absolute irrationality even if, on heuristic grounds, we approach each particular case by inquiring into its causality. Even then, it is advisable to bear in mind at least one of the classical distinctions, namely that between *causa efficiens* and *causa finalis*. In psychological matters, the question "Why does it happen?" is not necessarily more productive of results than the other question "To what purpose does it happen?"

531 Among the many puzzles of medical psychology there is one

[1] [First published as "Vom Wesen der Träume," *Ciba-Zeitschrift* (Basel), IX : 99 (July, 1945). Revised and expanded in *Über psychische Energetik und das Wesen der Träume* (Psychologische Abhandlungen, II; Zurich, 1948).—EDITORS.]

problem-child, the dream. It would be an interesting, as well as difficult, task to examine the dream exclusively in its medical aspects, that is, with regard to the diagnosis and prognosis of pathological conditions. The dream does in fact concern itself with both health and sickness, and since, by virtue of its source in the unconscious, it draws upon a wealth of subliminal perceptions, it can sometimes produce things that are very well worth knowing. This has often proved helpful to me in cases where the differential diagnosis between organic and psychogenic symptoms presented difficulties. For prognosis, too, certain dreams are important.[2] In this field, however, the necessary preliminary studies, such as careful records of case histories and the like, are still lacking. Doctors with psychological training do not as yet make a practice of recording dreams systematically, so as to preserve material which would have a bearing on a subsequent outbreak of severe illness or a lethal issue—in other words, on events which could not be foreseen at the beginning of the record. The investigation of dreams in general is a life-work in itself, and their detailed study requires the co-operation of many workers. I have therefore preferred, in this short review, to deal with the fundamental aspects of dream psychology and interpretation in such a way that those who have no experience in this field can at least get some idea of the problem and the method of inquiry. Anyone who is familiar with the material will probably agree with me that a knowledge of fundamentals is more important than an accumulation of case histories, which still cannot make up for lack of experience.

532 The dream is a fragment of involuntary psychic activity, just conscious enough to be reproducible in the waking state. Of all psychic phenomena the dream presents perhaps the largest number of "irrational" factors. It seems to possess a minimum of that logical coherence and that hierarchy of values shown by the other contents of consciousness, and is therefore less transparent and understandable. Dreams that form logically, morally, or aesthetically satisfying wholes are exceptional. Usually a dream is a strange and disconcerting product distinguished by many "bad qualities," such as lack of logic, questionable morality, uncouth form, and apparent absurdity or nonsense. People are

[2] Cf. "The Practical Use of Dream-Analysis," pars. 343ff.

therefore only too glad to dismiss it as stupid, meaningless, and worthless.

533 Every interpretation of a dream is a psychological statement about certain of its contents. This is not without danger, as the dreamer, like most people, usually displays an astonishing sensitiveness to critical remarks, not only if they are wrong, but even more if they are right. Since it is not possible, except under very special conditions, to work out the meaning of a dream without the collaboration of the dreamer, an extraordinary amount of tact is required not to violate his self-respect unnecessarily. For instance, what is one to say when a patient tells a number of indecent dreams and then asks: "Why should *I* have such disgusting dreams?" To this sort of question it is better to give no answer, since an answer is difficult for several reasons, especially for the beginner, and one is very apt under such circumstances to say something clumsy, above all when one thinks one knows what the answer is. So difficult is it to understand a dream that for a long time I have made it a rule, when someone tells me a dream and asks for my opinion, to say first of all to myself: "I have no idea what this dream means." After that I can begin to examine the dream.

534 Here the reader will certainly ask: "Is it worth while in any individual case to look for the meaning of a dream—supposing that dreams have any meaning at all and that this meaning can be proved?"

535 It is easy to prove that an animal is a vertebrate by laying bare the spine. But how does one proceed to lay bare the inner, meaningful structure of a dream? Apparently the dream follows no clearly determined laws or regular modes of behaviour, apart from the well-known "typical" dreams, such as nightmares. Anxiety dreams are not unusual but they are by no means the rule. Also, there are typical dream-motifs known to the layman, such as of flying, climbing stairs or mountains, going about with insufficient clothing, losing your teeth, crowds of people, hotels, railway stations, trains, aeroplanes, automobiles, frightening animals (snakes), etc. These motifs are very common but by no means sufficient to confirm the existence of any system in the organization of a dream.

536 Some people have recurrent dreams. This happens particularly in youth, but the recurrence may continue over several

decades. These are often very impressive dreams which convince one that they "must surely have a meaning." This feeling is justified in so far as one cannot, even taking the most cautious view, avoid the assumption that a definite psychic situation does arise from time to time which causes the dream. But a "psychic situation" is something that, if it can be formulated, is identical with a definite *meaning*—provided, of course, that one does not stubbornly hold to the hypothesis (certainly not proven) that all dreams can be traced back to stomach trouble or sleeping on one's back or the like. Such dreams do indeed tempt one to conjecture some kind of cause. The same is true of so-called typical motifs which repeat themselves frequently in longer series of dreams. Here again it is hard to escape the impression that they mean something.

537 But how do we arrive at a plausible meaning and how can we confirm the rightness of the interpretation? One method—which, however, is not scientific—would be to predict future happenings from the dreams by means of a dream-book and to verify the interpretation by subsequent events, assuming of course that the meaning of dreams lies in their anticipation of the future.

538 Another way to get at the meaning of the dream directly might be to turn to the past and reconstruct former experiences from the occurrence of certain motifs in the dreams. While this is possible to a limited extent, it would have a decisive value only if we could discover in this way something which, though it had actually taken place, had remained unconscious to the dreamer, or at any rate something he would not like to divulge under any circumstances. If neither is the case, then we are dealing simply with memory-images whose appearance in the dream is (a) not denied by anyone, and (b) completely irrelevant so far as a meaningful dream function is concerned, since the dreamer could just as well have supplied the information consciously. This unfortunately exhausts the possible ways of proving the meaning of a dream directly.

539 It is Freud's great achievement to have put dream-interpretation on the right track. Above all, he recognized that no interpretation can be undertaken without the dreamer. The words composing a dream-narrative have not just *one* meaning, but many meanings. If, for instance, someone dreams of a table, we

are still far from knowing what the "table" of the dreamer signifies, although the word "table" sounds unambiguous enough. For the thing we do not know is that this "table" is the very one at which his father sat when he refused the dreamer all further financial help and threw him out of the house as a good-for-nothing. The polished surface of this table stares at him as a symbol of his lamentable worthlessness in his daytime consciousness as well as in his dreams at night. This is what our dreamer understands by "table." Therefore we need the dreamer's help in order to limit the multiple meanings of words to those that are essential and convincing. That the "table" stands as a mortifying landmark in the dreamer's life may be doubted by anyone who was not present. But the dreamer does not doubt it, nor do I. Clearly, dream-interpretation is in the first place an experience which has immediate validity for only two persons.

540 If, therefore, we establish that the "table" in the dream means just that fatal table, with all that this implies, then, although we have not explained the dream, we have at least interpreted one important motif of it; that is, we have recognized the subjective context in which the word "table" is embedded.

541 We arrived at this conclusion by a methodical questioning of the dreamer's own associations. The further procedures to which Freud subjects the dream-contents I have had to reject, for they are too much influenced by the preconceived opinion that dreams are the fulfilment of "repressed wishes." Although there are such dreams, this is far from proving that all dreams are wish-fulfilments, any more than are the thoughts of our conscious psychic life. There is no ground for the assumption that the unconscious processes underlying the dream are more limited and one-sided, in form and content, than conscious processes. One would rather expect that the latter could be limited to known categories, since they usually reflect the regularity or even monotony of the conscious way of life.

542 On the basis of these conclusions and for the purpose of ascertaining the meaning of the dream, I have developed a procedure which I call "taking up the context." This consists in making sure that every shade of meaning which each salient feature of the dream has for the dreamer is determined by the

associations of the dreamer himself. I therefore proceed in the same way as I would in deciphering a difficult text. This method does not always produce an immediately understandable result; often the only thing that emerges, at first, is a hint that looks significant. To give an example: I was working once with a young man who mentioned in his anamnesis that he was happily engaged, and to a girl of "good" family. In his dreams she frequently appeared in very unflattering guise. The context showed that the dreamer's unconscious connected the figure of his bride with all kinds of scandalous stories from quite another source—which was incomprehensible to him and naturally also to me. But, from the constant repetition of such combinations, I had to conclude that, despite his conscious resistance, there existed in him an unconscious tendency to show his bride in this ambiguous light. He told me that if such a thing were true it would be a catastrophe. His acute neurosis had set in a short time after his engagement. Although it was something he could not bear to think about, this suspicion of his bride seemed to me a point of such capital importance that I advised him to instigate some inquiries. These showed the suspicion to be well founded, and the shock of the unpleasant discovery did not kill the patient but, on the contrary, cured him of his neurosis and also of his bride. Thus, although the taking up of the context resulted in an "unthinkable" meaning and hence in an apparently nonsensical interpretation, it proved correct in the light of facts which were subsequently disclosed. This case is of exemplary simplicity, and it is superfluous to point out that only rarely do dreams have so simple a solution.

543 The examination of the context is, to be sure, a simple, almost mechanical piece of work which has only a preparatory significance. But the subsequent production of a readable text, i.e., the actual interpretation of the dream, is as a rule a very exacting task. It needs psychological empathy, ability to coordinate, intuition, knowledge of the world and of men, and above all a special "canniness" which depends on wide understanding as well as on a certain "intelligence du cœur." All these presupposed qualifications, including even the last, are valuable for the art of medical diagnosis in general. No sixth sense is needed to understand dreams. But more is required than routine recipes such as are found in vulgar little dream-

books, or which invariably develop under the influence of preconceived notions. Stereotyped interpretation of dream-motifs is to be avoided; the only justifiable interpretations are those reached through a painstaking examination of the context. Even if one has great experience in these matters, one is again and again obliged, before each dream, to admit one's ignorance and, renouncing all preconceived ideas, to prepare for something entirely unexpected.

544 Even though dreams refer to a definite attitude of consciousness and a definite psychic situation, their roots lie deep in the unfathomably dark recesses of the conscious mind. For want of a more descriptive term we call this unknown background the unconscious. We do not know its nature in and for itself, but we observe certain effects from whose qualities we venture certain conclusions in regard to the nature of the unconscious psyche. Because dreams are the most common and most normal expression of the unconscious psyche, they provide the bulk of the material for its investigation.

545 Since the meaning of most dreams is *not* in accord with the tendencies of the conscious mind but shows peculiar deviations, we must assume that the unconscious, the matrix of dreams, has an independent function. This is what I call the autonomy of the unconscious. The dream not only fails to obey our will but very often stands in flagrant opposition to our conscious intentions. The opposition need not always be so marked; sometimes the dream deviates only a little from the conscious attitude and introduces only slight modifications; occasionally it may even coincide with conscious contents and tendencies. When I attempted to express this behaviour in a formula, the concept of *compensation* seemed to me the only adequate one, for it alone is capable of summing up all the various ways in which a dream behaves. Compensation must be strictly distinguished from *complementation*. The concept of a complement is too narrow and too restricting; it does not suffice to explain the function of dreams, because it designates a relationship in which two things supplement one another more or less mechanically.[3] Compensation, on the other hand, as the term implies, means balancing

[3] This is not to deny the principle of *complementarity*. "Compensation" is simply a psychological refinement of this concept.

and comparing different data or points of view so as to produce an adjustment or a rectification.

546 In this regard there are three possibilities. If the conscious attitude to the life situation is in large degree one-sided, then the dream takes the opposite side. If the conscious has a position fairly near the "middle," the dream is satisfied with variations. If the conscious attitude is "correct" (adequate), then the dream coincides with and emphasizes this tendency, though without forfeiting its peculiar autonomy. As one never knows with certainty how to evaluate the conscious situation of a patient, dream-interpretation is naturally impossible without questioning the dreamer. But even if we know the conscious situation we know nothing of the attitude of the unconscious. As the unconscious is the matrix not only of dreams but also of psychogenic symptoms, the question of the attitude of the unconscious is of great practical importance. The unconscious, not caring whether I and those about me feel my attitude to be right, may—so to speak—be of "another mind." This, especially in the case of a neurosis, is not a matter of indifference, as the unconscious is quite capable of bringing about all kinds of unwelcome disturbances "by mistake," often with serious consequences, or of provoking neurotic symptoms. These disturbances are due to lack of harmony between conscious and unconscious. "Normally," as we say, such harmony should be present. The fact is, however, that very frequently it is simply not there, and this is the reason for a vast number of psychogenic misfortunes ranging from severe accidents and illness to harmless slips of the tongue. We owe our knowledge of these relationships to the work of Freud.[4]

547 Although in the great majority of cases compensation aims at establishing a normal psychological balance and thus appears as a kind of self-regulation of the psychic system, one must not forget that under certain circumstances and in certain cases (for instance, in latent psychoses) compensation may lead to a fatal outcome owing to the preponderance of destructive tendencies. The result is suicide or some other abnormal action, apparently preordained in the life-pattern of certain hereditarily tainted individuals.

[4] *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life.*

548 In the treatment of neurosis, the task before us is to re-establish an approximate harmony between conscious and unconscious. This, as we know, can be achieved in a variety of ways: from "living a natural life," persuasive reasoning, strengthening the will, to analysis of the unconscious.

549 Because the simpler methods so often fail and the doctor does not know how to go on treating the patient, the compensatory function of dreams offers welcome assistance. I do not mean that the dreams of modern people indicate the appropriate method of healing, as was reported of the incubation-dreams dreamt in the temples of Aesculapius.[5] They do, however, illuminate the patient's situation in a way that can be exceedingly beneficial to health. They bring him memories, insights, experiences, awaken dormant qualities in the personality, and reveal the unconscious element in his relationships. So it seldom happens that anyone who has taken the trouble to work over his dreams with qualified assistance for a longer period of time remains without enrichment and a broadening of his mental horizon. Just because of their compensatory behaviour, a methodical analysis of dreams discloses new points of view and new ways of getting over the dreaded impasse.

550 The term "compensation" naturally gives us only a very general idea of the function of dreams. But if, as happens in long and difficult treatments, the analyst observes a series of dreams often running into hundreds, there gradually forces itself upon him a phenomenon which, in an isolated dream, would remain hidden behind the compensation of the moment. This phenomenon is a kind of developmental process in the personality itself. At first it seems that each compensation is a momentary adjustment of one-sidedness or an equalization of disturbed balance. But with deeper insight and experience, these apparently separate acts of compensation arrange themselves into a kind of plan. They seem to hang together and in the deepest sense to be subordinated to a common goal, so that a long dream-series no longer appears as a senseless string of incoherent and isolated happenings, but resembles the successive steps in a planned and orderly process of development. I have called this unconscious process spontaneously expressing

[5] [Cf. Meier, *Ancient Incubation and Modern Psychotherapy.*—EDITORS.]

itself in the symbolism of a long dream-series the individuation process.

552 Here, more than anywhere else in a discussion of dream psychology, illustrative examples would be desirable. Unfortunately, this is quite impossible for technical reasons. I must therefore refer the reader to my book *Psychology and Alchemy*, which contains an investigation into the structure of a dream-series with special reference to the individuation process.

553 The question whether a long series of dreams recorded outside the analytical procedure would likewise reveal a development aiming at individuation is one that cannot be answered at present for lack of the necessary material. The analytical procedure, especially when it includes a systematic dream-analysis, is a "process of quickened maturation," as Stanley Hall once aptly remarked. It is therefore possible that the motifs accompanying the individuation process appear chiefly and predominantly in dream-series recorded under analysis, whereas in "extra-analytical" dream-series they occur only at much greater intervals of time.

554 I have mentioned before that dream-interpretation requires, among other things, specialized knowledge. While I am quite ready to believe that an intelligent layman with some psychological knowledge and experience of life could, with practice, diagnose dream-compensation correctly, I consider it impossible for anyone without knowledge of mythology and folklore and without some understanding of the psychology of primitives and of comparative religion to grasp the essence of the individuation process, which, according to all we know, lies at the base of psychological compensation.

555 Not all dreams are of equal importance. Even primitives distinguish between "little" and "big" dreams, or, as we might say, "insignificant" and "significant" dreams. Looked at more closely, "little" dreams are the nightly fragments of fantasy coming from the subjective and personal sphere, and their meaning is limited to the affairs of everyday. That is why such dreams are easily forgotten, just because their validity is restricted to the day-to-day fluctuations of the psychic balance. Significant dreams, on the other hand, are often remembered for a lifetime, and not infrequently prove to be the richest jewel in the treasure-house of psychic experience. How many people have I

encountered who at the first meeting could not refrain from saying: "I once had a dream!" Sometimes it was the first dream they could ever remember, and one that occurred between the ages of three and five. I have examined many such dreams, and often found in them a peculiarity which distinguishes them from other dreams: they contain symbolical images which we also come across in the mental history of mankind. It is worth noting that the dreamer does not need to have any inkling of the existence of such parallels. This peculiarity is characteristic of dreams of the individuation process, where we find the mythological motifs or mythologems I have designated as archetypes. These are to be understood as specific forms and groups of images which occur not only at all times and in all places but also in individual dreams, fantasies, visions, and delusional ideas. Their frequent appearance in individual case material, as well as their universal distribution, prove that the human psyche is unique and subjective or personal only in part, and for the rest is collective and objective.[6]

555 Thus we speak on the one hand of a *personal* and on the other of a *collective* unconscious, which lies at a deeper level and is further removed from consciousness than the personal unconscious. The "big" or "meaningful" dreams come from this deeper level. They reveal their significance—quite apart from the subjective impression they make—by their plastic form, which often has a poetic force and beauty. Such dreams occur mostly during the critical phases of life, in early youth, puberty, at the onset of middle age (thirty-six to forty), and within sight of death. Their interpretation often involves considerable difficulties, because the material which the dreamer is able to contribute is too meagre. For these archetypal products are no longer concerned with personal experiences but with general ideas, whose chief significance lies in their intrinsic meaning and not in any personal experience and its associations. For example, a young man dreamed of *a great snake that guarded a golden bowl in an underground vault*. To be sure, he had once seen a huge snake in a zoo, but otherwise he could suggest nothing that might have prompted such a dream, except perhaps the reminiscence of fairytales. Judging by this unsatisfactory

[6] Cf. *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, I, chs. V–VII.

context the dream, which actually produced a very powerful effect, would have hardly any meaning. But that would not explain its decided emotionality. In such a case we have to go back to mythology, where the combination of snake or dragon with treasure and cave represents an ordeal in the life of the hero. Then it becomes clear that we are dealing with a collective emotion, a typical situation full of affect, which is not primarily a personal experience but becomes one only secondarily. Primarily it is a universally human problem which, because it has been overlooked subjectively, forces itself objectively upon the dreamer's consciousness.[7]

556 A man in middle life still feels young, and age and death lie far ahead of him. At about thirty-six he passes the zenith of life, without being conscious of the meaning of this fact. If he is a man whose whole make-up and nature do not tolerate excessive unconsciousness, then the import of this moment will be forced upon him, perhaps in the form of an archetypal dream. It would be in vain for him to try to understand the dream with the help of a carefully worked out context, for it expresses itself in strange mythological forms that are not familiar to him. The dream uses collective figures because it has to express an eternal human problem that repeats itself endlessly, and not just a disturbance of personal balance.

557 All these moments in the individual's life, when the universal laws of human fate break in upon the purposes, expectations, and opinions of the personal consciousness, are stations along the road of the individuation process. This process is, in effect, the spontaneous realization of the whole man. The ego-conscious personality is only a part of the whole man, and its life does not yet represent his total life. The more he is merely "I," the more he splits himself off from the collective man, of whom he is also a part, and may even find himself in opposition to him. But since everything living strives for wholeness, the inevitable one-sidedness of our conscious life is continually being corrected and compensated by the universal human being in us, whose goal is the ultimate integration of conscious and unconscious, or better, the assimilation of the ego to a wider personality.

[7] Cf. my and C. Kerényi's *Essays on* (or *Introduction to*) *a Science of Mythology*. [Also, *Symbols of Transformation*, pars. 572ff., 577ff.]

558 Such reflections are unavoidable if one wants to understand the meaning of "big" dreams. They employ numerous mythological motifs that characterize the life of the hero, of that greater man who is semi-divine by nature. Here we find the dangerous adventures and ordeals such as occur in initiations. We meet dragons, helpful animals, and demons; also the Wise Old Man, the animal-man, the wishing tree, the hidden treasure, the well, the cave, the walled garden, the transformative processes and substances of alchemy, and so forth—all things which in no way touch the banalities of everyday. The reason for this is that they have to do with the realization of a part of the personality which has not yet come into existence but is still in the process of becoming.

559 How such mythologems get "condensed" in dreams, and how they modify one another, is shown by the picture of the Dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4 : 7ff.) [*frontispiece*]. Although purporting to be no more than a representation of that dream, it has, so to speak, been dreamed over again by the artist, as is immediately apparent if one examines the details more closely. The tree is growing (in a quite unbiblical manner) out of the king's navel: it is therefore the genealogical tree of Christ's ancestors, that grows from the navel of Adam, the tribal father.[8] For this reason it bears in its branches the pelican, who nourishes its young with its blood—a well-known allegory of Christ. Apart from that the pelican, together with the four birds that take the place of the four symbols of the evangelists, form a quincunx, and this quincunx reappears lower down in the stag, another symbol of Christ,[9] with the four animals looking

[8] The tree is also an alchemical symbol. Cf. *Psychology and Alchemy*, index, *s.v.* "tree"; and "The Philosophical Tree."

[9] The stag is an allegory of Christ because legend attributes to it the capacity for self-renewal. Thus Honorius of Autun writes in his *Speculum de Mysteriis Ecclesiae* (Migne, *P.L.*, vol. 172, col. 847): "They say that the deer, after he has swallowed a serpent, hastens to the water, that by a draught of water he may eject the poison, and then cast his horns and his hair and so take new." In the *Saint-Graal* (III, pp. 219 and 224), it is related that Christ sometimes appeared to the disciples as a white stag with four lions (= four evangelists). In alchemy, Mercurius is allegorized as the stag (Manget, *Bibl. chem.*, Tab. IX, fig. XIII, and elsewhere) because the stag can renew itself. "Les os du cuer du serf vault moult pour conforter le cuer humain" (Delatte, *Textes latins et vieux français relatifs aux Cyranides*, p. 346).

expectantly upwards. These two quaternities have the closest connections with alchemical ideas: above the *volatilia*, below the *terrena*, the former traditionally represented as birds, the latter as quadrupeds. Thus not only has the Christian conception of the genealogical tree and of the evangelical quaternity insinuated itself into the picture, but also the alchemical idea of the double quaternity ("superius est sicut quod inferius"). This contamination shows in the most vivid way how individual dreams make use of archetypes. The archetypes are condensed, interwoven, and blended not only with one another (as here), but also with unique individual elements.

560 But if dreams produce such essential compensations, why are they not understandable? I have often been asked this question. The answer must be that the dream is a natural occurrence, and that nature shows no inclination to offer her fruits gratis or according to human expectations. It is often objected that the compensation must be ineffective unless the dream is understood. This is not so certain, however, for many things can be effective without being understood. But there is no doubt that we can enhance its effect considerably by understanding the dream, and this is often necessary because the voice of the unconscious so easily goes unheard. "What nature leaves imperfect is perfected by the art," says an alchemical dictum.

561 Coming now to the form of dreams, we find everything from lightning impressions to endlessly spun out dream-narrative. Nevertheless there are a great many "average" dreams in which a definite structure can be perceived, not unlike that of a drama. For instance, the dream begins with a STATEMENT OF PLACE, such as, *"I was in a street, it was an avenue"* (1), or, *"I was in a large building like a hotel"* (2). Next comes a statement about the PROTAGONISTS, for instance, *"I was walking with my friend X in a city park. At a crossing we suddenly ran into Mrs. Y"* (3), or, *"I was sitting with Father and Mother in a train compartment"* (4), or, *"I was in uniform with many of my comrades"* (5). Statements of time are rarer. I call this phase of the dream the EXPOSITION. It indicates the scene of action, the people involved, and often the initial situation of the dreamer.

562 In the second phase comes the DEVELOPMENT of the plot. For instance: *"I was in a street, it was an avenue. In the distance a car appeared, which approached rapidly. It was being driven very unsteadily, and I thought the driver must be drunk"* (1). Or: *"Mrs. Y seemed to be very excited and wanted to whisper something to me hurriedly, which my friend X was obviously not intended to hear"* (3). The situation is somehow becoming complicated, and a definite tension develops because one does not know what will happen.

563 The third phase brings the CULMINATION or *peripeteia*. Here something decisive happens or something changes completely: *"Suddenly I was in the car and seemed to be myself this drunken driver. Only I was not drunk, but strangely insecure and as if without a steering-wheel. I could no longer control the fast moving car, and crashed into a wall"* (1). Or: *"Suddenly Mrs. Y turned deathly pale and fell to the ground"* (3).

564 The fourth and last phase is the *lysis*, the SOLUTION or RESULT produced by the dream-work. (There are certain dreams in which the fourth phase is lacking, and this can present a special problem, not to be discussed here.) Examples: *"I saw that the front part of the car was smashed. It was a strange car that I did not know. I myself was unhurt. I thought with some uneasiness of my responsibility"* (1). *"We thought Mrs. Y was dead, but it was evidently only a faint. My friend X cried out: 'I must fetch a doctor'"* (3). The last phase shows the final situation, which is at the same time the solution "sought" by the dreamer. In dream 1 a new reflectiveness has supervened after a kind of rudderless confusion, or rather, should supervene, since the dream is compensatory. The upshot of dream 3 is the thought that the help of a competent third person is indicated.

565 The first dreamer was a man who had rather lost his head in difficult family circumstances and did not want to let matters go to extremes. The other dreamer wondered whether he ought to obtain the help of a psychiatrist for his neurosis. Naturally these statements are not an interpretation of the dream, they merely outline the initial situation. This division into four phases can be applied without much difficulty to the majority of dreams met with in practice—an indication that dreams generally have a "dramatic" structure.

566 The essential content of the dream-action, as I have shown above, is a sort of finely attuned compensation of the one-sidedness, errors, deviations, or other shortcomings of the conscious attitude. An hysterical patient of mine, an aristocratic lady who

seemed to herself no end distinguished, met in her dreams a whole series of dirty fishwives and drunken prostitutes. In extreme cases the compensation becomes so menacing that the fear of it results in sleeplessness.

567 Thus the dream may either repudiate the dreamer in a most painful way, or bolster him up morally. The first is likely to happen to people who, like the last-mentioned patient, have too good an opinion of themselves; the second to those whose self-valuation is too low. Occasionally, however, the arrogant person is not simply humiliated in the dream, but is raised to an altogether improbable and absurd eminence, while the all-too-humble individual is just as improbably degraded, in order to "rub it in," as the English say.

568 Many people who know something, but not enough, about dreams and their meaning, and who are impressed by their subtle and apparently intentional compensation, are liable to succumb to the prejudice that the dream actually has a moral purpose, that it warns, rebukes, comforts, foretells the future, etc. If one believes that the unconscious always knows best, one can easily be betrayed into leaving the dreams to take the necessary decisions, and is then disappointed when the dreams become more and more trivial and meaningless. Experience has shown me that a slight knowledge of dream psychology is apt to lead to an overrating of the unconscious which impairs the power of conscious decision. The unconscious functions satisfactorily only when the conscious mind fulfils its tasks to the very limit. A dream may perhaps supply what is then lacking, or it may help us forward where our best efforts have failed. If the unconscious really were superior to consciousness it would be difficult to see wherein the advantage of consciousness lay, or why it should ever have come into being as a necessary element in the scheme of evolution. If it were nothing but a *lusus naturae*, the fact of our conscious awareness of the world and of our own existence would be without meaning. The idea that consciousness is a freak of nature is somehow difficult to digest, and for psychological reasons we should avoid emphasizing it, even if it were correct—which, by the way, we shall luckily never be in a position to prove (any more than we can prove the contrary). It is a question that belongs to the realm of metaphysics, where no criterion of truth exists. However, this is in

no way to underestimate the fact that metaphysical views are of the utmost importance for the well-being of the human psyche.

569 In the study of dream psychology we encounter far-reaching philosophical and even religious problems to the understanding of which the phenomenon of dreams has already made decisive contributions. But we cannot boast that we are, at present, in possession of a generally satisfying theory or explanation of this complicated phenomenon. We still know far too little about the nature of the unconscious psyche for that. In this field there is still an infinite amount of patient and unprejudiced work to be done, which no one will begrudge. For the purpose of research is not to imagine that one possesses the theory which alone is right, but, doubting all theories, to approach gradually nearer to the truth.