

The Evolution of Dream Interpretation in Literature from Antiquity to Modern Times

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Received: 16 June 2025; **Accepted:** 12 July 2025; **Published:** 14 August 2025

Abstract: The article traces the history of the study and artistic interpretation of sleep in literature from ancient civilizations to modern times. The evolution of the perception of dreams and their functions in culture and literature is analyzed: from divine revelation in antiquity and the Middle Ages to symbolic reflection of the unconscious in psychoanalysis and experimental narrative in modernism and postmodernism.

Keywords: Sleep in literature, the history of sleep, literary dreaming, psychoanalysis and literature, the unconscious, symbolism of sleep.

Introduction: The history of the study of dreams in literature has been developing for a long time and is based on certain patterns that require separate consideration. Dreams as a phenomenon are found in the literature of almost all nations and have their own cultural and historical contexts. Literary dreams are regarded as plot constructions typical of various national literatures, forms, and genres. This technique is used, for example, in the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh, the Old Testament, historical texts from Egypt, Assyria, and the traditions of Ancient India, where communication with God can take place through dreams.

In order to trace the evolution of sleep in literature and identify certain theoretical aspects of it, we need to turn to the following fundamental stages and approaches that were formed during the development of literature and science on sleep.

First of all, it is necessary to focus on the period of antiquity. For the ancient Greeks, sleep was a means to gain inspiration and prophecy. Ancient authors believed that Hypnos, the god of sleep, was connected with human destiny, could influence the course of a person's life and therefore the hero of a work. We are talking about works by Homer ("Iliad", "Odyssey"), Hesiod ("Theogony") and Sophocles ("Oedipus"). Their nature of sleep is clearly expressed: it is a source of divine revelation. Plato ("The Republic") and Aristotle

("On The Soul") also sought to understand the nature and meanings of sleep and its connection with consciousness. They were the first to interpret symbolic dreams that defied conventional logic. Philosophers also tried to explain why human dreams were full of signs and irrationality.

The ancient world saw sleep as a phenomenon that connected the real world with the otherworld. In this view, sleep was seen as a message from the gods, a harbinger of victory or defeat, and a reflection of the inner state of heroes. For ancient Greece, dreams were considered part of divine revelation, sent to guide people. Therefore, staying in Asclepius's temples was common, as it was believed that Asclepius, the god of medicine, would give advice or healing in dreams. Interpreting dreams, in which deities appeared in symbolic form, became widespread. In these cases, deities could provide hints that needed to be interpreted, helping people make choices and decisions. Dream interpreters, called oneirocrates, were consulted by crowds of people.

Ancient Rome was characterized by a different approach: dreams were a source of information. This meant that they had a practical aspect. Military leaders could decide on battles after interpreting dreams, and politicians could join one side or another. Because of this, the practice of consulting dream interpreters became widespread. They were supposed to tell if a conspiracy was forming against the ruler and how the

planned battle would end. Cicero saw dreams as reflections of a person's physical and mental states. He believed that both conditions affected each other. Plato and Aristotle wrote several works on the nature of dreams.

Cicero viewed dreams as a reflection of a person's physical and mental state. He was convinced that both conditions mutually affect each other. In his treatise "On the State," he cites the famous episode of "Scipio's Dream," in which ideas about the immortality of the soul, cosmic order, and the moral duty of a citizen are revealed through the dream. Plato, in his dialogue "Philebus," and in "The Republic," divides dreams into "divine" and "un-divine," emphasizing that, in a state of sleep, the soul can approach truth if it is not burdened by desire. In his work "De Insomnis," Aristotle explains the nature of sleep as the result of activity of imagination, which continues work of senses in dream. He is skeptical about prophetic dreams, considering them as result of physiological process, rather than divine interference.

Plato was convinced that there was a connection between sleep and the human subconscious. For Aristotle, it was more acceptable to link sleep with human physiology. It's worth noting that in that era, sleep was not only a personal experience but also part of the mentality and worldview, as well as a source of knowledge and a way of understanding the will of gods. Sleep was also seen as a clue to solving complex issues and problems that were perceived as dead ends.

Medieval literature was characterized by a strong interest in sleep and its symbolic meaning. Dante Alighieri used the technique of sleep in *The Divine Comedy* to create grand worlds, introduce mystical elements into everyday life, and transform human experience. Sleep in that time was seen as a form of communication with God.

The Renaissance launched the mechanisms for studying the inner world of man, including consciousness and the subconscious. Shakespeare's works, such as "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "Macbeth", used sleep to reveal the psychological states of characters and convey metaphorical meanings.

Dreams in the Middle Ages and Renaissance were also seen as a bridge between the earthly and divine worlds. The religiosity of medieval culture reflected the understanding of sleep as a message from God or a temptation from the devil. Clergymen and scholars specialized in interpreting dreams, often basing their understanding on biblical stories and allegories. People also used "dream books" to decipher the symbols in their dreams.

During the Renaissance, when masters turned to the legacy of ancient culture, dreams began to be viewed not so much as a religious phenomenon but as a mirror reflecting a person's inner world, their fears and desires. The influence of humanistic ideas led to a more rational approach to interpreting dreams, although their prophetic and sacred potential was not completely lost. The 17th and 19th centuries saw an increase in interest in science and a rational understanding of the world. Rene Descartes (*Reflections on First Philosophy*) argued about the nature of subjective experience and questioned the authenticity of dreams, typical of Modern times views.

The scientific study of sleep physiology began to develop thanks to the research of Johann Peter Müller and Michel-Jean Savigny. Literature of the Romantic period contributed to the aesthetics of sleep by depicting it as a space for fantasy and freedom from social pressures. An example is E.T.A Hoffman's "The Nutcracker and The Mouse King". Dreams in Modern times were not considered divine revelations, but rather an object of scientific investigation and artistic interpretation. In the Renaissance, dreams still had some mystical significance. But in the 17th and 18th centuries, they became simply a product of human thought, subject to the same rules as when awake.

John Locke argued that dreams are a process of processing impressions received in the waking state. He denied their supernatural nature, considering them a chaotic and irrational set of thoughts and images. Descartes saw the deceptiveness and harmfulness of feelings and doubt in dreams, which were harmful to true knowledge. Modern times and the Age of Enlightenment laid the foundation for the scientific and artistic study of dreams and paved the way for further analysis in psychology and other disciplines. Dreams have become an object of study for those seeking to understand the nature of human consciousness.

Freud's psychoanalysis ("Interpretation of Dreams") in the 20th century had a huge impact on the understanding of dream images in art and culture. His theory of the unconscious served as a tool for analyzing works of art, and in some cases it allows us to accurately interpret the hidden desires and fears of the characters.

Followers of psychoanalysis Carl Gustav Jung and Otto Rank made important contributions to the theory of archetypes and the collective unconscious. Literary modernism, the work of James Joyce (*Ulysses*) and Virginia Woolf ("*Mrs. Dalloway*"), became a demonstration of the desire to penetrate into the depths of the character's psyche through the description of the stream of consciousness, which is

also associated with the experience of sleep.

It is obvious that during the twentieth century, dreams became the object of attention both in the framework of psychoanalytic theory and in clinical practice. Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, argued that dreams are a "royal road to the unconscious," they are a reflection of suppressed desires, conflicts and hidden drives. His *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) is the basis for understanding dreams as symbolic acts of unconscious mental processes.

The Freudian approach to dream analysis is to decipher their symbolism, to search for latent content hidden behind the manifest. Freud's method of free association gave people the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings related to dreams, which means they can identify traumas and deep-seated conflicts. Jung is the author of the concept of the collective unconscious: dreams contain archetypal images and symbols common to all mankind. Myth-making remains alive throughout the history of the evolution of human civilization, which affects dreams and their understanding. Adler believed that dreams can signal feelings of inferiority and a desire for superiority. Klein considered dreams as a reflection of early object relations and protection from anxiety in the process of becoming individualism [5].

Postmodern literature of the early 20th century also explores the themes of sleep, but focuses on the games of the imagination and the multiplicity of interpretations of reality. Umberto Eco ("The Name of the Rose") and Jorge Luis Borges ("The Garden of Diverging Paths") use dreams as a way to demonstrate the relativism of truth and the complexity of cognition.

Dreams in the postmodern era are gaining a new interpretation, intertwined with the deconstruction of reality and the subjectivity of perception. In the modern world, dreams appear both as a reflection of the subconscious mind and as alternative narratives that question axioms.

The postmodern perspective views dreams as a space with blurred boundaries between the real and the illusory, where linear time and cause-and-effect relationships lose their significance. In this context, dreams are a metaphor for a fractured, fragmented reality with multiple interpretations of what is happening [4].

In modern culture, dreams are used as a tool for exploring identity and self-discovery. Artists, writers, and filmmakers turn to dream images and motifs in order to express complex emotional states, explore subconscious fears and desires, and create alternative worlds where anything is possible. Symbols from dreams break into reality, wreak havoc on it, and are

able to change the fate of heroes. The hero can be transported to the dream world or leave it to return to reality. They are also often grotesque, parodic dreams in which aesthetics replace ethics. The dream no longer explains the world, it is itself a dream [7].

On the other hand, scientific research on dreams, based on the achievements of neuroscience and psychology, rationalizes this phenomenon. Modern neuroimaging techniques are a way to study brain activity during sleep and identify neural correlates related to aspects of dreaming.

The history of the study of dreams in literature covers a wide range of views and methods, the former of which are associated with religious beliefs of antiquity, and the latter with scientific discoveries of modern times. Each generation of writers enriches their understanding of this phenomenon, which turns literature into a powerful tool for reflection and self-expression.

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