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Dreams as Folklore*

Folkloristic research into popular dream narration and interpretation is a very recent phenomenon¹. From the folklorist's point of view dreams are part of the cultural heritage surrounding human intercourse and are transmitted during direct interaction and through dream books². Dream narration and interpretation bear many of the characteristics of folklore: dreams are part of the personal experience narrative tradition and contain both idiosyncratic symbols, and symbols that are culture-bound, anonymous in origin, highly stereotyped and passed on from one person to another. The models available for dreams demanding an interpretation are, furthermore, both individual and part of the collective tradition. Dreams have so far been studied as communal elements of culture chiefly by the anthropologists³, but dreams and their narration are also an interesting field for the folklore researcher.

The individual and the collective tradition

Attitudes to dreams and the significance attached to them vary considerably from one culture to another. We may roughly speak of three main categories according to the value placed on dream and waking reality. The first category consists of cultures in which dreams are given a greater reality value than the waking state. An example are the Mojave, an Indian culture of the American Colorado River Basin. Culture as a meaningful way of life is validated only in dreams. Through interpretation dreams also control the waking life of the

* Revised version of a paper presented at the 10th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research in Innsbruck, July 1992.

¹ See, e. g., Kaivola-Bregenhøj, Annikki: *Drømme gennem tusinde år*. København 1986; Virtanen, Leea: *Dream-telling Today*. In: Siikala, Anna-Leena (ed.): *Studies in Oral Narrative (Studia Fennica 33)*. Helsinki 1989, 137–150; Trümpy, Hans: *Der Traum in volkskundlicher Sicht*. In: Wagner-Simon, T. (ed.): *Traum und Träumen. Traumana-lysen in Wissenschaft, Religion und Kunst*. Göttingen 1984, 150–161; Jeggle, U.: *Träume – Kultur – geschichtliches Material*. In: *Urbilder und Geschichte. C. G. Jungs Archetypenlehre und die Kulturwissenschaften. Akten eines Kolloquiums*, Basel, Mai 1987. In memoriam Hans Trümpy. ed. C. Burckhardt-Seebass. Basel/Frankfurt am Main 1989, 57–69.

² Dreams are also described in myths, folktales, epics, canonic books, hagiographies, pure and psychological literature, all of which are outside the present study. Bad dreams and nightmares are also dream categories that are left out, cf. Raudvere, Catharina: *Mara och mardrömmar*. In: Kaivola-Bregenhøj, Annikki/Palmenfelt, Ulf (edd.): *Drömmar och kultur. Drömböcker och drömtolkning*. Stockholm 1992, 114–140.

³ See the bibliographies in O'Neil, Carl W.: *Dreams, Culture, and the Individual*. San Francisco 1976; Tedlock, Barbara (ed.): *Dreaming. Anthropological and Psychological Interpretations*. Cambridge 1987.