Murka’s Guide to Dreams and Symbols: Myths and the Inner Life

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General Overview

Murkaverse was initially inspired by the desire to better understand yourself in turbulent times, in fact when we initially started working on this project, many of us were undergoing stressful periods in our lives. During such times, dreams began to play a significantly more important role in our lives - seeing them, writing them down and discussing them among each other and with professionals, gave us a tool for introspection that was not developed before.

As such, Murkaverse is an ecosystem that gives you a companion, Murka, to help you better grasp the symbolism beneath the dream surface, which can often be elusive, hard to catch and confusing. Throughout our work on Murka, we were engaging with both professionals in the field, as well as literature of so many wonderful people that laid the groundwork for this project to come alive. When we mention literature, among many written pieces read, a few stand out when it comes to bringing out the significance of dream symbolism, and symbolism in general. Even though dreams and symbolism can exists apart from each other, they often intersect in dreams bringing out the symbols from our own lives, stories we read or heard, and generally recognised symbols - however to make the most out of the symbolism, naturally one has to be aware of the context of symbols, and their emotional attachment to their personal experiences.

Working through symbolism and especially symbolism in dreams is a very individual endeavour, that can feel at times overwhelming. This document was put together by the Murkaverse team in order to lighten the process for our friends reading this piece of writing.

In this guide, our goal is to introduce you to the general context behind symbolism, dream symbols and how to work with them.

We hope that this will be a helpful guide for you as you take on the journey of self-reflection through the world of dreams!

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Introduction

Human beings do not live by facts alone. We live in stories, images, metaphors, and symbols. Even in highly rational, technological cultures, our most important experiences, love, loss, identity, purpose, are rarely grasped in purely literal terms. We *feel stuck*, *carry a weight, chase shadows,* or *grow wings.* The symbolic layer is often added in order to visualise the experiences or feelings for us and give them more depth, while at the same time allow the psyche to organise our day-to-day experiences.

Dreams are one of the clearest windows into this symbolic mode of functioning. While the brain sciences can measure sleep stages and neural activation, depth psychology has focused on *what* is being expressed: the images, motifs, and emotional dramas that unfold every night. Sigmund Freud interpreted dreams as disguised fulfillments of repressed wishes (Freud, 1900). Carl Gustav Jung went further, seeing them as symbolic messages from the unconscious that compensate and complement our conscious attitude (Jung, 1968).

This guide offers:

1. A clear introduction to symbolism and why the mind *thinks* symbolically.

2. An overview of major theoretical approaches to dreams, with emphasis on Jung and his successors.

3. A practical, psychologically grounded method for engaging with your own dreams.

The aim is not to provide a mechanical *dream dictionary*, but to help you understand dreams as a living symbolic dialogue between consciousness and the unconscious, something Murkaverse is designed to support in an accessible, modern way. For more detailed overview of specific topics we recommend reading the literature mentioned in the bibliography - especially Cirlot's *A Dictionary of Symbols* for a deep dive into specific meaning of symbols.

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Symbolism as a Fundamental Feature of Human Life

Signs vs symbols

Jung draws a basic distinction between *signs* and *symbols*. A *sign* points to something already known: for example, the letters *Wi-Fi* on your phone indicate wireless connectivity. A *symbol*, by contrast, is an image, word, or situation that expresses more than can be fully defined, something partially known and partially beyond us (Jung, 1968). A symbol can carry with personal or social hidden meaning behind the visual or contextual understanding. For example, an animal can signify a specific attribute of personality traits, but also personal relation to the animal itself.

Cirlot, in *A Dictionary of Symbols*, emphasizes that a symbol is *plurisignificant*: it carries many layers of meaning at once - emotional, historical, mythological, personal - rather than a single fixed translation (Cirlot, 1958). A cross, a river, a house, or a snake can never be reduced to *one* meaning; each condenses a network of associations that unfolds differently for each person and each context. This means that a symbol itself can carry with it multiple meanings at the same time - personal, collective and mythological.

The deep history of symbolic thinking

Archaeology suggests symbolic thought appears very early in human history, in cave paintings, burial practices, and ritual artefacts from the late Palaeolithic era (Cirlot, 1958). Animals, celestial bodies, and geometric forms were not only observed but *used* as carriers of meaning.

Some of the more common or recognisable symbols can be derived from various elements, such as:

1) Myths and religions – Animal figures like lions, oxen, and eagles representing cosmic powers or evangelists; solar and lunar motifs (Jung, 1968; Cirlot, 1958). Often throughout our existence as humans we have used stories, myths and religious texts to interpret something that we either could not have explained at the time - for example a lightning strike was difficult to explain as the force of nature using electricity and thus was given a more mythological context of gods to provide an explanation. Similarly, as already mentioned animals and their traits were used to

give additional meaning to people or figures in history - both mythological and historic.

2) Art and heraldry – Colours, animals, metals and shapes encoded moral qualities, cosmic forces, and family histories (Cirlot, 1958). Thus, when you look at symbols used in heraldry of countries, families and companies, you can often find a secondary meaning in addition to the visual elements. Furthermore, the ancient art of alchemy comes into play, when you look at metals and how they relate to self-reflection. While we can think of alchemy as a physical art of combining elements together to arrive at a different element. We can also think of alchemy as an art of transmutation of emotions and feelings - combining various experiences and emotions to reach higher emotions. As such, for example gold can be considered an emotion of purity and higher quality, and the ultimate goal of creating gold through the use of Philosopher's Stone can be interpreted as thorough self work to purify yourself and align with the higher Self.

3) Ancient writing – Egyptian hieroglyphs and other scripts begin as pictures whose *form* expresses an action or idea (e.g., a leg signifying movement, elevation, founding). Similarly, the wall drawings of Stone Age people and runes used by Celts and vikings can be interpreted as drawings with additional meaning to them, that ultimately are expressing specific context that they are trying to transfer through visuals.

From a depth-psychological perspective, these are not random decorations. They are attempts of the psyche to *map* experiences that are too complex or too numinous, too charged, to be handled in purely literal language.

Symbols as a bridge between conscious and unconscious

Modern consciousness is relatively narrow. At any moment we can hold only a few things clearly in mind; much of our perception, memory, and emotional reaction remains unconscious. Jung describes the unconscious not as a mere *trash heap* of repressions, but as a living system of tendencies, images, and potentials that are just as real and vital as the conscious ego (Jung, 1968).

Symbols are the bridge between these two domains. They allow unconscious material (emotional conflicts, potential for growth and forgotten experiences to name a few) to appear in a form that consciousness can see and understand. Furthermore, the symbols also condense many contradictory tendencies - thesis and antithesis - into a single image that can explain the inner turbulences, turmoils or

aspects of the inner self that require attention. Additionally, the symbols carry a

charge of feelings or emotions with them, forcing us to pay attention to them even when we would rather ignore the issue. This is why upon seeing a symbol in your dreams, you can attach a specific emotion to it, or even wake up with a feeling that lingers post sleep. Dreams are one of the primary *channels* through which this symbolic bridge operates.

Dreams as Symbolic Narratives

What is a dream, from a scientific angle?

From a neurocognitive perspective, dreaming is closely associated with REM sleep - periods of characteristic brain activation and rapid eye movements in which around 80–95% of awakenings yield dream reports (Hobson, 2002; Domhoff, 2003).

Modern researchers propose various functions for dreaming. Hobson uses the idea of activation-synthesis model (Hobson, 2002) that see dreams as the brain's attempt to make sense of internally generated neural activation. When we sleep, our brain is going through a filtration process, during which it processes the feelings, thoughts and experiences that have occurred during the waking state. Domhoff offers a point of continuity hypotheses, which argues that dreams reflect our waking concerns, emotions, and personal preoccupations in a looser, more imagistic form (Domhoff, 2003). Essentially saying that the dreams offer a look into our inner world that we often push aside during the day, but cannot disregard during sleep. Finally, Revonsuo suggests that dreaming rehearses dangers and social challengers in a virtual environment, helping us adapt - he calls this *evolutionary threat simulation theory* (Revonsuo, 2000).

Depth psychology generally agrees that dreams are meaningfully related to waking life, though it emphasises their symbolic structure and their role in psychological development more than their evolutionary function.

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Freud: wish-fulfilment and disguised meaning

Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) is the classic starting point for modern dream theory. Freud believed that dreams are mainly hidden wish-fulfilments – they show us what we deeply want, especially desires or feelings we've pushed down or find unacceptable. What we actually remember in the morning – the little *movie* of the dream with its scenes and characters – is called the *manifest content*. But behind that story lies the *latent content*: the real wishes, worries, and conflicts the dream is about. According to Freud, a kind of inner *censor* in the mind does not let this raw material appear directly, because it might be too disturbing or anxiety-provoking. Instead, it reshapes it into something safer and more indirect, using tricks like merging several ideas into one image (condensation), shifting the emotional focus from one thing to another (displacement), and turning it all into symbolic images. This way, the underlying wish is expressed, but in a disguised form that lets us keep sleeping.

Freud pioneered the technique of *free association*, asking the dreamer to say whatever comes to mind about each element of the dream. By following these associative chains, he believed one could reach the repressed complexes that generated the dream.

Jung initially worked closely with Freud but came to feel that reducing dreams primarily to sexual or infantile wishes overlooked much of their richness and forward-looking potential (Jung, 1968).

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Jung: archetypes, the collective unconscious, and compensation

Jung agreed that dreams are related to unconscious material, but he saw the unconscious as far more than a repository of repressed wishes. Jung also thought dreams come from the unconscious, but he didn't see the unconscious as just a storage room for repressed wishes. For him, there were two layers. First, the *personal unconscious*: this is made up of your own forgotten memories, subtle impressions you didn't fully notice at the time, and emotional *knots* or complexes formed from your life history. Second, he suggested a deeper level called the *collective unconscious*, which is shared by all humans. This layer isn't about personal memories, but about inborn psychological patterns called *archetypes*. These are universal *templates* for certain types of experiences and characters - like the Mother, the Hero, the Shadow (our darker side), the Wise Old Man, the Child, or the Trickster. According to Jung, these archetypes shape the way we dream, imagine, and react, which is why similar themes and figures appear in myths and dreams all over the world (Jung, 1968; Henderson in Jung, 1968)

Archetypes are not inherited images but *inherited tendencies to form certain types of images and narratives*. This is why similar motifs recur across myths, fairy tales, religions, and individual dreams. Von Franz famously called fairy tales the *purest and simplest* expressions of archetypal patterns; she treats them as collective dreams of humanity, dramatising fundamental psychic processes such as maturation, integration, and the confrontation with shadow or destructive inner figures (von Franz, 2017).

Jung noticed that dreams often act like a natural counterbalance to how we are in daily life. If someone is very sure of themselves or even arrogant when awake, they might dream of failing an exam, falling, or showing up unprepared - almost as if the dream is quietly saying, "You're not as in control as you think." If a person is very rational and intellectual, their dreams may swing the other way and become intensely emotional, chaotic, or even mystical, bringing in what their daytime mind tends to ignore. And if someone neglects their inner world, feelings, needs, creativity, this may show up in dreams as hurt or abandoned figures, like injured children, empty or ruined houses, or strange, unsettling people. In Jung's view, dreams try to restore psychological balance by showing us the parts of ourselves we are leaving out. This compensatory function does not mean the dream always contradicts conscious life; sometimes it confirms, deepens, or anticipates it. But the general rule is that dreams try to restore a more *balanced psychic economy* (Jung, 1968).

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Personal and collective dimensions of dream symbols

An image like a *house* might, on the one hand, resonate with universal associations: protection, structure, the *container* of the personality. On the other hand, its specific rooms, conditions (ruined, flooded, newly built), and atmosphere will link directly to the dreamer's own history and current situation.

Jung was very clear that there is no symbol that has one fixed, universal meaning for everyone. What a symbol means always depends on the context of the dream and the individual's own life and associations. At the same time, he didn't think symbols were just random or purely personal inventions. Our *private* meanings are shaped by deeper, shared patterns, archetypes, that have formed over long cultural and evolutionary history. In other words, your dream symbols are uniquely yours, but the way they take shape is influenced by common human themes that appear in myths, religions, and stories across the world (Jung, 1968; Cirlot, 1958; von Franz, 2017).

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How Dreams Relate to Life: Compensation, Crisis, and Development

Compensation and psychological balance

In simple terms, our everyday awareness is narrow and often biased, so we can easily miss or downplay what is really going on inside us. Dreams step in to fill those gaps. Someone who insists they are *fine* might dream of storms, shaky ground, or brakes that do not work - images that hint that things are actually unstable underneath. A person who sees themselves as *strong* and unemotional might dream of hurt animals or neglected children, which can represent the softer, vulnerable parts of themselves that have been pushed aside but still need attention and care.

Jung describes multiple cases where dreams warned of impending dangers, psychological or even physical, long before consciousness recognised them, because the unconscious had already registered subtle cues and trends (Jung, 1968).

Revonsuo's threat-simulation theory and similar empirical work, in a different language, echo this idea: dreams frequently rehearse social conflicts, fears, and dangers, suggesting an adaptive role in simulating threats and rehearsing responses (Revonsuo, 2000).

Recurring dreams and nightmares

When a dream keeps coming back, it usually points to something in your life that has not been worked through yet or is out of balance. For example, those classic *exam dreams* - being late, unprepared, or failing a test - often reflect ongoing worries about being judged, not being good enough, or being evaluated in some way. Recurring dreams of a *locked room* can suggest that there's a part of you, or a potential in your life, that you haven't opened up to yet, almost like a sealed-off area in your psyche. And long-term, repeated nightmares often circle around deeper wounds: past trauma, a sense of constant threat, or aggressive feelings you do not feel safe expressing. In all these cases, the repetition is the psyche's way of saying "This still needs your attention."

From a Jungian angle, the point is not to force the dream away, but to understand *why* the psyche needs to keep returning to the same image. From a clinical or neurocognitive angle, careful work with recurrent nightmares can reduce distress and may correlate with improved emotional regulation (Domhoff, 2003).

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Dreams, myths, and fairy tales

Jung, von Franz and others highlight intimate parallels between dreams and traditional stories. Fairy tales like *Bluebeard*, *Cinderella*, or *Sleeping Beauty* can be read as collective dramas of psychological development - confronting destructive inner figures, negotiating envy and rivalry, or awakening dormant potentials (von Franz, 2017).

In this perspective, you can think of dreams as your own private mythology. Every night, your mind creates *personal myths* - short inner stories that you did not consciously plan. They use the same kind of language as myths and fairy tales: strong symbolic images, larger-than-life characters, and simple but emotionally intense plots. In a dream, *you* are placed right in the middle of an archetypal drama - like a hero's journey, a confrontation with a monster, or a rescue story, but the setting, characters, and details are shaped by your own history, relationships, and current struggles.

For projects like Murkaverse, this connection between individual dream and collective myth is crucial: it allows AI-assisted interpretation to lean on a rich symbolic tradition without erasing the dreamer's individuality.

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A Practical Framework for Working with Your Dreams

There is no fully objective or mechanistic method for interpreting dreams, but Jung, von Franz and later analysts suggest a set of practical principles that can help you engage with your dreams in a grounded way (Jung, 1968; von Franz, 2017).

General principles and cautions

1) Treat the dream as meaningful. Even if it seems absurd or trivial, start from the assumption that it expresses something about your current psychological situation.

2) Stay close to the dream context. Avoid drifting into free association that leaves the original imagery behind; keep returning to "What does the dream *actually* show?"

3) Avoid rigid dictionaries. Symbol lists (including Cirlot's) are tools for *amplification (*i.e. providing expanded context to symbols), not oracles. Your own associations and life context have priority (Cirlot, 1958).

4) Watch the emotional tone. The feeling of the dream - fear, awe, shame, curiosity, is often the most direct clue to its meaning.

5) Respect your limits. Some dreams touch trauma, intense anxiety, or psychotic content; in such cases, professional support is advisable.

A six-step method

Below is a simplified framework, adapted from Jungian practice, that individuals can use - and that tools like Murkaverse can support in a structured but non-reductive way.

Step 1: Record the dream as accurately as possible. Write the dream down immediately upon waking, capturing:

1) Setting (where? when? atmosphere?);

2) Main characters (human, animal, objects, forces);

3) Sequence of events (what happens first, next, last?);

4) Strong feelings and body sensations.

Order matters. The *plot* often traces a psychological movement from one state to another.

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Step 2: Clarify the waking context

Ask yourself:

1) What has been preoccupying me lately - emotionally, relationally, professionally?

2) What conflicts, decisions, or mood shifts have been present in the last days or weeks?

Dreams are not random; they tend to cluster around current tensions and developmental tasks.

Step 3: Explore personal associations

For each key element, ask:

1) “What does this remind *me* of?”

2) “Where have I seen this before in my life?”

3) “How would I describe this figure/object to someone who doesn’t know it?”

The point is not to be clever but honest. A dog might mean loyalty to one person, fear to another, wild instinct to a third. *House*, *car*, *forest*, *ocean*, *phone*, *AI* - all have individual histories.

Step 4: Amplify the symbol

Once you have personal associations, you may *amplify* by looking at:

1) Cultural motifs (myths, fairy tales, religious images, films);

2) Symbolic dictionaries (e.g., Cirlot) used carefully as prompts, not scripts (Cirlot, 1958);

3) Archetypal patterns (e.g., Hero, Shadow, Mother, Trickster) that the dream might echo (Jung, 1968; Henderson in Jung, 1968).

For example, a *white rabbit* in a dream might first link to your childhood pet, but amplification could bring in *Alice in Wonderland*: the anxious figure “always running late,” hurrying the protagonist into a strange inner world. The Cheshire Cat, by contrast, might evoke uncanny guidance, ambiguity, or the paradoxical grin that

remains when the body disappears - an image of enduring psychological attitude

without a fixed form. The dreamer's own context (e.g., rushing through life vs. encountering confusing guidance) decides which line of meaning is relevant.

Step 5: Identify the dream's movement and function

Ask:

1) What is the basic *tension* or problem of the dream?

2) Does the dream move from worse to better, or better to worse?

3) Who or what initiates change? Is anything transformed, lost, or gained?

Then consider the dream's likely *function* in relation to your conscious stance:

1) Is it *compensatory*, showing the opposite of your waking attitude?

2) Is it *prospective*, anticipating a future development or inner possibility?

3) Is it *commentary*, highlighting the consequences of current patterns?

This is where Jung's idea of compensation becomes especially useful: the dream rarely just repeats what you already know; it adds something missing.

Step 6: Translate into psychological language and experiment in life

Finally, translate the dream into a concise psychological statement. Instead of "I killed the dragon," you might say: "A strong, instinctual fear is confronted and limited." Instead of "The house flooded," you might say: "Emotions are overwhelming the current structure of my life." (von Franz, 2017).

Then ask:

1) If this is the message, what small concrete action would honour it?

2) Do I need to feel something more fully, set a boundary, take a risk, rest, or seek help?

Dreams are not solved when we have a clever explanation; they are *answered* when we live differently in response to their message.

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Limits and Possibilities of Dream Symbolism

Dreams and symbols are powerful, but they are not magic. It is important to keep several limitations in mind:

1) Ambiguity is inherent. Symbols are polyphonic (I.e carry multiple meanings in them) by nature. There is rarely one definitive interpretation; rather, some readings resonate and bring insight, others do not.

2) Context is everything. The same image can mean very different things for different people and at different times in one life.

3) Psychological work takes time. Complex patterns may unfold over dozens of dreams; Jungian analysis often tracks long series over years (Jung, 1968; Jacobi in Jung, 1968).

4) Not all dreams are *deep*. Some dreams are more about daily residue, physiological states, or minor emotional adjustments. That does not make them meaningless, but it does mean not every dream carries a grand message.

5) Symbolism does not replace ethics or reality-testing. Understanding your dreams does not absolve you from real-world consequences and responsibilities.

At the same time, the possibilities are considerable. Regular engagement with dreams tends to:

1) Increase emotional awareness and nuance;

2) Reveal blind spots, self-deceptions, and untapped potentials;

3) Connect personal struggles with larger mythic patterns, reducing isolation;

4) Support long-term processes of individuation - Jung's term for becoming more fully who one uniquely is (Jung, 1968; von Franz, 2017).

Digital tools like Murkaverse can help by:

1) Providing a structured space to record dreams;

2) Assisting with symbol amplification across cultures and traditions;

3) Reflecting patterns over time (motifs, emotional tones, recurring figures).

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But no tool can replace the inner work of honest reflection and living out the insights that emerge.

Conclusion

Symbolism is not an exotic hobby of poets and mystics; it is the basic language of the psyche wherever literal language reaches its limits. From prehistoric cave art to heraldry, religious imagery, and contemporary fantasy worlds, humans have relied on symbols to bridge the conscious world of everyday life and the deeper, often mysterious movements of the unconscious (Cirlot, 1958; Jung, 1968).

Dreams are the most visual expression of this language. Every night, the psyche stages symbolic dramas that comment on our attitudes, compensate our one-sidedness, and gesture toward future possibilities. Freud demonstrated that dreams are not meaningless noise but intimately linked to our conflicts and desires (Freud, 1900). Jung expanded this insight by discovering archetypal patterns and emphasising the compensatory, meaning-bearing role of dreams in the process of individuation (Jung, 1968; von Franz, 2017).

To work with dreams, then, is not to collect ready-made meanings but to enter a sustained dialogue with your own symbolic life - circling around images, amplifying them with myth and culture, and gradually translating them into psychological insight and concrete change. This is the spirit in which Murkaverse approaches dream analysis: not as fortune-telling, but as an invitation to participate more consciously in the ongoing story your psyche is telling about who you are, where you are stuck, and what you might become.

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