



Dreaming and Storytelling

Bert O. States

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Are dreams merely odd things that happen to us at night, sometimes pleasant, sometimes terrifying, but not to be taken too seriously? Is there any reason to think about them at all, other than in terms of questions such as "Why should Aunt Sarah turn into a bird and invite us all to dinner in her sycamore tree?"

In this witty and eminently readable book, Bert O. States rethinks both the meaning of dreams and the relationship between dreaming and the telling of stories. Dreams constitute a private literature of the self, he says, that?despite their seeming lack of order or structure?can help us to understand the very nature of shared literature.

Observers have often pointed out narrative elements that are common to dreams and stories?including "cinematic" visual techniques and such plot devices as reversals of fortune and paired villains and antagonists. Drawing on current work in such fields as neurobiology, cognitive psychology, literary theory, and dream theory, States asks whether dreaming and storytelling may share similar psychic processes as well.

He first considers the bizarreness of dreams compared to the expected intelligibility of stories. He then surveys a wide array of stories and reported dreams, focusing on them as narratives with varied beginnings and endings, character functions, cause-and-effect relationships, archetypal structures, even generic constraints. Turning to the question of intentionality, States addresses the perennially intriguing question of whether dreams actually do have meanings, or whether we thrust meaning upon them.

Anyone interested in the poetics of imaginative experience?whether approached from the perspective of the literary critic, the psychologist, or the psychoanalyst?will want to read *Dreaming and Storytelling*.

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