A Semionarratological Study of Dreams

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Abstract：The study of dreams has long been neglected by narrotologists due to the issue of its narrativity. Based on Zhao Yiheng's general narratology theory，this study aims to discuss the narrativity of dreams as a fictional para-performative narrative，the narratological interpretation of the dream，and exploring dreams' function as self-healing systems within the human body from a general narratological perspective.

Keywords：dreams，narrativity，implied author，dreams as self-healing systems

符号叙述学视野下的梦叙述研究

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摘　要：梦叙述长期以来被叙述学家们所忽略，主要是由于其叙述性问题遭到学界质疑。赵毅衡的广义叙述学理论肯定了梦作为叙述文本的合法地位。本文借用广义叙述学理论，尝试进一步探讨梦作为类演示类文本的叙述性问题，并从叙述学的角度解析梦的意义生成，同时本文也试图从叙述学的角度讨论梦叙述的自我治愈功能。

关键词：梦，叙述性，隐含作者，梦的自我治愈功能

The study of dreams has long been neglected by narrotologists due to the pending issue of its narrativity. Some Western narratologists deny the narrativity of dreams. Gerald Prince points out that dreams do not possess the basic features of narrative（pp. 317−327）. Patricia Kilroe states that "not [...] all dream texts are narratives". Few Chinese narratologists have been

influenced by the study of dreams. Long Diyong regards dreaming as a narrative activity that occurs within the human subconscious. Unlike Prince，Long argues that dream text possesses the basic characteristics of narrative，such as character，events，space，beginning，plot development，turning points and endings.（龙迪勇，2002，pp. 31－33）Long is the first Chinese narratologist to affirm the narrativity of dreams，but his study focuses on recounted dreams，that is，the secondary mediumlized dream rather than the original one. It maintains the major content but loses the form.

The narratological study of dreams once led to a dead end，but thanks to Zhao Yiheng's work，dream texts as narratives have re-entered the narratological field. Zhao explains that a "dream is not a direct experience，but the representation of experience by mental icons. Dream text involves characters，including the dreamer as a charater-narratee. So dream text is regarded as a mental narrative"（2011，p. 47）. In *General Narratology*，Zhao focuses on discussing the textuality and narrativity of dreams to provide convincing evidence of dreams as narrative texts. Based on Zhao's dream theory，this study goes a step further to explore the narrativity of dreams as fictional para-performative narratives，the narratological interpretation of dreams，and dreams' function as self-healing systems for people from a general narratological perspective.

Ⅰ．Dreams as Fictional Para-Performative Narratives

Zhao's general narratology is a semi-narratology that examines all forms of narrative-based semiotic text.（Jin，2014，p. 195）Unlike previous narratological studies，which have long focused on novels，Zhao attempts to provide universal rules for all narrative genres，including performative，mental and conative narratives.

According to Zhao，a narrative consists of the primary and secondary narrativisations：

1．Events involving characters are organised by some subject into a semiotic text.

2．The semiotic text can be interpreted by another subject to be with intentions of time and meaning.（赵毅衡，2013，p. 7）

This definition reveals that a narrative text involves at least three basic elements：the narrator，the narratee and the character（s）. The narrator begins the primary narrativisation by telling a story that involves characters. Then the narratee accomplishes the secondary narrativisation by interpreting the story and giving it meaning. A narrative text comprises two narrativisations，one by the narrator and the other by the narratee.

A dream with the basic narrative features is defined as a mental narrative. In a dream text，the narrator and the narratee act as one subject，such that "in a mental narrative，part of the subject（the narrator）sends the narrative text to the other part of the same subject（the narratee）"（赵毅衡，2011，p. 52）. The narratee who receives the narrative text is always manifest in the dream text，watching what is happening in the dream world as if watching a movie. Meanwhile，as a character in the dream text，the character-narratee is involved in the dream world and experiencing what is happening. The narratee，however，typically does not know that he is dreaming，except in rare lucid dreams. He passively receives messages from the narrator without being able to make his own choice，and experiences everything happening in the dream without realising that he is in a dream.

Although the reasons for dreams or their narrators remain academically undetermined，the existence of narrative subjects in dreams cannot be doubted. Unlike a dream's narratee，its narrator is not manifest in the dream world. According to Zhao's theory of the narrator's "frame-person" duality，the narrator appears either as a person，taking the form of a human storyteller within the narrated world，or as a narrative frame of cues for constructing the narrative. （赵毅衡，2011）The dream narrator can be categorised as a third-person implicit narrator，as in fiction，because neither is personalised，but to present itself as a frame. Unlike in fiction，where the third-person narrator can at times reveal himself through narrative intrusion，the dream narrator never shows up as a person，but rather consistently takes the form of a frame.

Human experiences are represented by mental icons in a dream's text. As a narrated world represented by mental icons，a dream is incapable of referring to the exterior reality，and thus a dream's text is defined as a

fictional text. （赵毅衡，2011，p. 48）Similar to performative narratives such as dramas and movies，a dream's text can only be received or shared when events are happening. Hence，the dreamer-narratee is the only one who can receive messages from the dream. As Zhao explains，unlike the usual performative narrative，in which the audience may be fully involved，the dreamer-narratee can typically only watch what is happening in the dream passively. （赵毅衡，2011，pp. 41－42）The dreamer-narratee cannot stop dreaming，and must wait passively for it to end or to be awoken by a real-world intrusion.

Dream texts as mental narratives represent human experiences through mental icons that，by nature，cannot refer to the exterior reality of the real world. Such texts share some similarities with performative narrative，but they remain unique. In this way，Zhao identifies dreams as fictional para-performative narratives.

Ⅱ． A Narratological Interpretation of Dreams

Sigmund Freud states that a "dream never concerns itself with trifles. Whatever one dreams is either plainly recognisable as being psychically significant，or it is distorted and can be judged correctly only after complete interpretation，when it proves，after all，to be of psychic significance" （2011，p. 238）. There seems no doubt that dreams have rich meanings，but they have long been scientifically interpreted only through psychoanalysis. The introduction of general narratology into the field of dream study is expected to generate significant breakthroughs in dream interpretation.

Freud believes that dreams have a manifest meaning revealed by their manifest dream content，and a latent meaning revealed by their latent dream content. Interpreting a dream involves determining the thought content or the latent meaning behind the dream，which may be disguised by the manifest content. As with other fictional texts，a dream text has surface and sub texts，each with their respective meanings.

A semiotic text has a bipolar structure comprising the axis of selection （paradigmatic）and the axis of combination （syntagmatic）. The former follows the rules of similarity while the latter follows the rules of contiguity.

Any narrative is the result of the narrator's manipulation of these two axes. The alternants selected from the paradigmatic axis are organised through contiguity to form a text. Once the text has been constructed，only the syntagmatic axis is manifest in the text，creating the text's manifest structure. The paradigmatic axis retires to the backdrop，forming the text's latent structure.（赵毅衡，2013，p. 161）

A narrative text has both manifest and latent structures，and thereby possesses manifest and latent meanings. A text is interpreted to find the latent structure formed by a paradigmatic axis，and then its latent meaning is investigated. One interprets a text's latent meaning by determining the relationships between the selected and the unselected alternants on the paradigmatic axis. The unselected alternants construct a subtext，or latent text，that reveals the latent meaning.

In a dream's text，through selecting and combining，the narrator presents the manifest content to the narratee，who only receives the manifest meaning of the dream because in the dream he cannot see the presence of the unselected alternants on the paradigmatic axis. The interpretation of dreams involves reading the subtext constructed by the unselected alternants—a feat that cannot be accomplished by the narratee during the dream，but rather by the dreamer in the real world through professional psychoanalysis. Those unselected alternants cannot enter the dream text because they are filtered when the dream is censored to disguise/protect its latent content，which reveals the intrinsic desire of human beings. Because "wish-fulfilment is the meaning of every dream"（Freud，2011，p. 199），the purpose of dream interpretation is to discover what wishes the dreamer wants to fulfil，and Freud argues that those wishes are not always decent. Thus，in dreams the narrator prefers to select other symbols to replace the direct symbols of wishes in the text.

Regarding a dream's content，Freud notes that "the dream-content appears to us as a translation of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression，whose symbols and laws of composition we must learn by comparing the origin with the translation"（2011，p. 322）. Here，the dream-content refers to the fictional dream world or manifest content of the dream

text，and dream-thoughts refer to the latent content of the dream，or its interpretation. In this way，Freud regards a dream's manifest content as the translation of the latent dream，which is the origin. Thus，when people in the real world try to interpret the meaning of dreams，they must compare the translation，the presence of the syntagmatic axis，with the origin and the hidden alternants on the syntagmatic axis.

It appears that the more unselected alternants there are on the paradigmatic axis，the more difficult it is to determine the origins of the wish symbols，yet the more complicated the latent meaning of the dream. Hence，a dream can be classified as simple by children and as complicated by adults. According to Freud，"the simplest dreams of all are to be expected in the case of children whose psychic activities are certainly less complicated than those of adults. The dreams of little children are often simple fulfilments of wishes" (2011，p. 192). Young children are less experienced，complicated and knowledgeable，and thus they do not have many alternants on the paradigmatic axis，as most of the time they just select the wish symbols in their dreams. Because children's dreams are simpler，the manifest and latent content almost overlap. In comparison，the dreams of adults are more complicated due to the rich resources of their paradigmatic axes. The broad width of an adult's paradigmatic axis makes his dreams more metaphorical，whereas the narrow width of a child's paradigmatic axis makes her dreams more metonymic.

The above analysis of dream interpretation shows that dreams have manifest and latent meanings，with the purpose of interpretation being the discovery of the latent meaning，which refers to the author's wishes，desires or intentions. In a dream's text，the author's wishes and desires are the intention of the dream's narrative，or the values and perspectives of the implied author.

When falling asleep，the dream's narrator，like the executive author of a fictional narrative，expresses his own ideas or certain perspectives; that is，the latent meaning of the dream. However，his real intention cannot be directly revealed to the narratee，but rather appears as manifest content due to distortion，condensation or displacement. Once awake，the dreamer can

obtain the dream's latent meaning through a psychoanalysis of its manifest content；namely，the intentions or values of the implied author. Because the dream's narrator represents an aspect of its author in the real world，its implied author in the text is identified with the author（the dreamer in the real world）and the narrator. Unlike other fictional narratives，which can be either reliable or unreliable，dream narratives must be reliable because the author，the dreamer-narrator and the implied author converge，with no distance between the narrator and the implied author.

For almost all of the narratives，the implied author is supposed to be nobler than the author，according to Zhao. Zhao argues that most narratives should have a moral purpose and shoulder the responsibility of providing ethical ideas that follow community regulations or conventions while meeting the community's expectations.（赵毅衡，2013，p. 54）This is a common view achieved between the author and the reader，with the former being responsible for a nobler implied author and the latter interpreting a nobler implied author from the text. The implied author in a dream's text，however，is different. Because a dream is totally private and cannot be shared during dreaming，there is no need for the dreamer to shoulder any social responsibility. Meanwhile，the dream world has its own rules and logic，and the dreamer does not need to follow the rules or norms of the real world. Thus，the dreamer may tell stories that totally violate the conventions or regulations of the real world，and the implied author is not necessarily nobler than the dreamer in the real world. Psychologically speaking，because a dream is "the fulfilment of the instinctive desire"（弗洛伊德，2009，p. 12），the implied author，representing the intentions or values of the human Id，should be humbler than the self.

Dreams as narratives are rich in meaning，both manifest and latent. The purpose of conducting a narratological interpretation of a dream is to determine the perspectives or values of the dream text's implied author，which represent the latent meaning of the text；namely，the intentions or desires of the dreamer.

Ⅲ. **Dreaming as a Self-Healing System**

Narration is a human activity，and even in sleep，it does not stop. It

serves the purpose of healing those who have suffered from depression，pressure，and melancholy. When faced with stress or misfortune，people tend to tell their stories to someone else or to themselves through literary writing，diary writing or letters. By telling what they have been through，they can release the pressure and heal. Dreaming，however，is the most economic，safe and convenient way for people to release pressure through narration.

Dreaming is a perfect self-healing system for people due to its structure. In fact，it might be the most convincing evidence that people have a strong desire to tell stories. Dreaming might be the only occasion where people can tell everything freely. When the dreamer falls asleep，he enters the dream world，which is separate from the real world and thus ruled by different regulations. The dreamer finds himself in his own subconscious world，ruled by a unique logic not found in the outside world. In a fictional narrative，the dream's narrator within the secondary framing or in the fictional dream world does not need to account for what he has told because the dream world is separate from the real world，and the narratee is the only one who knows about the stories.

Unlike other fictional narratives such as novels，plays or movies，which are supposed to entertain and teach，a dream's narrator is not responsible for telling a story with a moral purpose. He can say whatever he wants without worrying about any social rules or conventions. That is why the dream world is so different from the real world，which can be shocking. For the narratee，the story or experience in the dream is so real that he typically does not realise how ridiculous or illogical it is. The dreamer in the real world，however，is not responsible for the dream，no matter how horrible，terrible or shocking it may be，because it is not real for him. In this way，the dreamer can release everything without real-world constraints.

Not only can the dream narrator say whatever he wants，he can also always find an ideal narratee. The human brain seems to divide into two parts，with one part sending the dream message and the other receiving it. Whenever the narrator wants to tell his story，the narratee must listen because they are two parts of the same subject. So where there is a narrator，there is always a narratee in the dream. Moreover，as the narratee，the

dreamer can never say no to the narrator—he can only receive the message passively，watching and experiencing everything with no influence over the storytelling or the narrator. He cannot even stop the storytelling or just walk away，no matter how horrible the dream. The narratee must listen to the story until the narrator stops or the subject awakens. Thus，the dream's narratee is always ready for the narrator.

Dreaming as a method of releasing pressure is not only economical and convenient，but also safe because the narrator and the narratee within the private narration can always keep secrets between themselves. Susan Lanser raises the idea of public and private narration. Private narration refers to narratives within which the narratee is present as a character in the fictional world. （1986，pp. 341－363） The dream is always a private narrative in which the dreamer is always manifest as the narratee to receive the dream，and as the character to experience the dream story. Thus，what the narrator tells is between the narratee and himself within the private narrative. Unlike other fictional narratives，wherein the readers can overhear the story，a dream's story cannot be shared，which means that the narratee is the only one to hear it.

When the dreamer awakens，although he can recount the dream to others，he can never tell it in the exact way that the narrator did because the medium of the dream has changed from a para-performative narrative by moving picture and mental icon to a recorded narrative with language. Likewise，the dreamer in the real world cannot recall all of the details in the dream because he forgets them，or censorship prevents the message from entering his consciousness.

The structure of the dream makes it a perfect self-healing system. Gillian Holloway has analysed more than 28,000 dreams and summarised the common experiences of different dreamers. Most of the dreams that people share are bad dreams，which are more influential due to the pressure or anxiety involved. Dreaming not only helps people release pressure and anxiety through narration，but also helps the dreamer realise his needs in the real world so that he can act.

Based on Zhao's general narratology theory，this study aims to interpret

dreams from a narratological perspective. As a fictional narrative，a dream shares some characteristics with other fictional narratives，yet it has very particular characteristics. The study of dreams as narratives can widen the fields of narratology and psychology while promoting the development of the two subjects.

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