



Call for Papers

International Conference

hosted by the DFG-funded Research Training Group “European Dream-Cultures” (GRK 2021)

21 - 23 March 2018 at Saarland University

Dreams of Birth and Death

Liminal Bodily Experiences in Dreams: Literature, the Fine Arts, Theatre, Music and Film

The enigmatic anthropological phenomenon of dreaming has always captured the imagination of European cultures: dream depictions can be found in artistic media from the antiquity to the present day. Depending on their specific historical and cultural contexts, the representations of dreams – whether in literary texts, paintings, music or on the stage – clearly differ from each other in their aesthetic and formal components. However, representations of dreams share one theme in particular which cuts across all historical and cultural boundaries: the transition between life and non-life as an existential, liminal experience, similar to those found in the processes of giving birth/being born and in dying. It is this theme that our conference takes into view.

Dreams that focus on the limitations and boundaries of human life are negotiated in the Bible, in classical myths (the Iliad, the Oresteia), in medieval epics and tales (Parcifal, die Nibelungen, the Canterbury Tales) and in early modern plays (Shakespeare, Calderón); they are inscribed into the Enlightenment (Diderot, Rousseau), the Romantic era (Novalis, Brentano) and into modern and contemporary literature (Kafka, Karahasan, Politycki). The fine arts (Daumier, Hodler), music (Berlioz, Korngold) and film (Bergman, Kubrick, Craven) have frequently sought to portray dreamlike (or nightmarish) experiences that are existential and/or transcendental. Birth and death are often found to be disquieting and threatening not least because they invariably involve a highly personal experience of one’s own body. At the same time, they are processes that take place beyond the limits of memory: death and birth are situated at or beyond the borders of life; as such, they occur too early or too late to be perceived and recorded as authentic experiences.

However, dreams – fictionalized, imagined, and performed – can open up experiential spaces for these extreme physical transitions. The mysterious elements of dreams – their disregard for the physical laws of time and space, and for cultural models of identity, coherence and logic, are magnified in dreams of the beginning and end of life. Simultaneously, the artistic depiction of such experience is particularly challenging, as dreams delve into the gap between universal human experiences like birth and death on the one hand, and their subjective, individual inexpressibility on the other, in ways that are every bit as confusing as they are original: memories and stories of dreams find ways and means to transform that which is “elsewhere” and unimaginable into something palpable and conveyable.

DFG-Research Training Group 2021

European Dream-Cultures



Since 2015, members of the DFG-funded Research Training Group “European Dream-Cultures” have been investigating the interrelations between dream aesthetics, culture, and the history of knowledge. Bearing in mind the goal of pursuing a literary, cultural and media history of dreams and dreaming, this international conference is dedicated to the phenomena of dreamed birth and death, related discourses and artistic realisations.

We invite research papers on death and birth in dream – in all types of art and from the perspectives of various disciplines, ranging from art and literature studies to theatre, film, music and media studies, as well as history, theology and philosophy.

Papers could focus on (but are not limited to) topics such as:

Existential liminal experiences and aesthetic dream depictions

- Exploring artistic depictions of dreams of birth and death regarding:
 - somatic vs. sensory experience,
 - limits of the body / limits of the medium,
 - experiences of time and/or space
- Positively connoted dreams of death
- Dreams of birth and death and their real-world connections (political implications, (post)dictatorial contexts, dream and collective traumata, identitarian functions, colonial and postcolonial implications, etc.)
- Dream depictions of existential liminal experiences in multimedia art forms

Poetics-of-knowledge perspectives / interplay of “cultural work” and aesthetic construction

- Historical evolution of religious discourses and artistic dreams of birth and death
- Interplay of cultural and scientific knowledge of birth and death in artistic dream depictions
- Gender-specific articulation of birth and death in artistic depictions of dreams
- Individual dream poetics and existential liminal experiences between biography and cultural/academic discourses on birth and death

In keeping with the analytical focus areas defined in the Research Group’s agenda, the subjects of study can be approached from diachronic, transmedial and/or comparative perspectives.

If you are interested in giving a paper at our conference, please send your brief abstract (max. 3,000 characters) to: traumkulturen@uni-saarland.de by **31 August 2017**, including a short bio. Abstracts – and papers – can be in German, English or French.

Following the conference, selected contributions will be published in a volume of the series *Traum – Wissen – Erzählen* by Fink Verlag (Paderborn).