

# “Oh Lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes Benz” - A metaphorical analysis of a long term dream journalist and her troubles with vehicles

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*Summary.* Due to the loss of a very important person followed by a personal crisis I started the documentation of dreams and began to consult therapeutic support. In 163 dreams from 1999 to 2019 some kind of vehicle for transportation were involved. More than half of the time it was a car (100 dreams). Car trouble dreams were very frequent (77 dreams, 77 %) and showed themselves over the documentation time again and again. These dreams were accompanied with negative experience and emotion. Patricia Garfield (2001) assumes that these dreams do not reflect problems with driving a car while awake but are a metaphorical expression of having less control in life itself. She assumes that all nightmares, including those about trouble with vehicles, are coping attempts. Another study found out that the subjective stress and job satisfaction is correlated with the emotional tone of driving dreams of truck drivers (Schredl, Funkhouser & Arn, 2005-06). And for Lakoff (1993) powerful dreams are forms of thoughts that express emotionally powerful contents (desires, fears, solutions, fantasies...) by means of conceptual metaphor. Do our vehicle dreams show us how we run our lives?

*Keywords:* Dream series, transportation in dreams, vehicle troubles, metaphorical system

## 1. Introduction

“We seem to ‘grasp hold’ of the immaterial only by means of a conceptual integration with the experiences of our physical bodies” (M. H. Freeman, 2002). For Freeman metaphors are not only a figure of speech, it is a fundamental structuring process for the human mind because our understanding is embodied in our experience of the physical world.

According to Gibbs (2010) metaphor is a mode of being because there are shared motor representations for action, observation of another person’s actions, imitation and mental simulation of action in our body. In addition to that memories are fundamentally embodied information and dreams make use of these. Further there is a discussion about the use of metaphorical language for assessing personality. Metaphors are examples of automated action because they are learned in social interaction, become subconscious and are used automatically. They are a sort of mind setting and influence our cognition of the self and the world so that people can only speak metaphorically about the complex and abstract matter of the ‘self’ (Moser, 2000). Metaphors map the dream onto the meaning of the dream, so that the metaphorical system plays a generative role in dreaming, mediating between the meaning of the dream to the dreamer and what is experienced in the act of dreaming. A natural mechanism for relating concrete images to abstract meanings. It is a system that can be used to provide plausible interpretations of dreams, but it is important to have a knowledge of the dreamer. Different knowledge of the dreamer produces different interpretation (Lakoff, 1993).

Patricia Garfield pointed out that car trouble dreams have a metaphorical link to feelings of not being in control of one’s life, and that these dream theme cross cultures and time. Also Michael Schredl (2019) found out, that between 26.8% and 40.5% of the participants of different countries reported that ‘losing control of a vehicle’ occurred at least once during their lifetime. These typical dream themes reflect typical waking life issues (Mathes & Schredl, 2014). Losing control of a vehicle is found at position 33 from 55 in a study of participants reporting typical dreams (Schredl 2019). Patricia Garfield expanded this idea by looking at possible metaphorical links (2001).

I also found a lot of dreams with this content and over a period of 20 years there were often dreams with vehicle troubles, most often with the car. The aim of this research is to investigate the connection between the metaphorical meaning of recurring dreams with vehicle troubles, especially with the car.

## 2. Method

From the age of 28 the female dreamer recorded dreams in an unstructured dream diary, 163 dreams were about traveling. These dreams were analyzed without a program.

The female dreamer has a driving license for car and motorbike and as a teenager she spent a lot of time riding on a horse her family had at home. She drove a moped for a short time and had an accident with it when she was 17. She never ride a bike very frequently. For the time of pre-school and school until she was 18 years old, she regularly took the bus. Flying by plane started during her time as a student with a frequency less than once a year. For the first six years from the beginning of the dream documentation the dreamer regularly drove a company car, later she mainly traveled by public transport and from the beginning of 2019 she drove with a car from friends. She never owned a car. She also never possessed her own motorbike nor drove one after the driving test. The dream reports were handwritten. The ones with means of transportation were sorted out and

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the individual parameters counted individually. No statistical program or database was used.

The metaphorical analysis was made for the recurring themes, especially for dreams with cars, with a consideration of similar issues with other means of transportation.

So if life is a journey, how do we run our lives? Who are we traveling with in our lives? Which obstacles appear and how to overcome these? Do these vehicle dreams show, how we live our lives according to personality traits learned from people we love? The entities are the travellers, a relationship to life which is mediated by the vehicle and the difficulties correspond to impediments during the travel. The metaphorical explanations used come from Zoltan Kövecses (2010) and Lakoff (1993).

### 3. Results

In 100 (about 61%) of 163 traveling dreams cars were involved. The other big part were with public transportation like train, bus, subway, urban railway, tram, cable car or plane (37 dreams, 23 %). The others were dreams with horses, with bicycle, with the motorbike, creative vehicles (spaceship, flying carpet...), and with trucks, excavator and tractor involved. The dreams point out continuity to her waking life. Most of the dreams were with cars and public transportation like in her waking life through this time of documentation. Only 3 times she drove with a motorbike and she always was the co-driver. When traveling with the car, the dreamer was more often the driver (55 driver, 30 co-driver, 15 spectator). These findings would support the continuity hypothesis that dreams act like a mirror to reflect our waking life (Schredl, 2003). Although there was no change with regard to driving the company car regularly (1999 to 2006, 13 times driver, 9 times my car) to the time when the dreamer later was mainly traveling by public transport (2006 to 2019, 42 times driver, 23 times my car). Maybe this dream metaphor is then used a sort of "basic pattern" that has established over the time and taken when it suits to the current emotion in life (Schredl 2019). So that driving has become an automated action, like metaphors are automated actions and that this embodied information is used during the dream process to represent current emotional concerns? Car trouble dreams overall were very frequent, about 76 % (77 dreams from 100) although the dreamer never had a car accident and never experienced these kind of situations which appeared in her dreams. There were more than twice as many dreams negative when she drove her own car (42 negative, 13 positive), as a co-driver twice as many (20 negative, 10 positive) and as a spectator all dreams were accompanied with negative experience and emotion (15 negative). The experiences with horses, motorcycle and bike also were mainly negative. My findings are consistent with the analysis of Schredl (2020) when he analyzed means of transportation in a long dream series. There the percentage of problems with the car is also higher when the dreamer is the driver. Differently to Schredl there were also mainly negative experiences with other means of transportation. The only exception from this trend was, when traveling with 'creative vehicles' (flying carpet, spaceship,...) they were easier to handle than familiar vehicles. Similar also once driving with a longboard in the dream, a water moped or a kind of boat but driven in the air, worked out almost immediately in the dream, even the dreamer never drove this kind of vehicle.

In this series of dreams the most common causes of travel problems with the car are problems with the vehicle. The

dreamer can not find the vehicle at all, the vehicle is not working properly or a part of it is damaged (lights, wheels, brakes, steering, car door, windows), or the dreamer does not know the vehicle and how it is working. In summary it can be said that the dreamer does not have the vehicle under control. The second most common cause of problems with cars but also with the bus during the journey were accidents, most often with deaths, a few times with injured or sick people. The third part were problems with the road, the underground or there were obstacles in the path. Often the road is too steep, too narrow, the ground is bumpy, full of roots, the bridge is broken or the car is under water. Not easy to travel. Often driving too fast with the car, driving the wrong way or a broken vehicle was a reason that accidents or injuries later followed. In metaphorical terms traveling in dreams refer to movement through life. The car itself refers to the personal space and the extension of being. The car as a wheeled house, the self in movement. How does the dreamer deals with himself on the emotional and psychological level. How does the dreamer drives this vehicle? How does he run his life? The car, for Patricia Garfield (2001) can also be seen as the physical body. So when we do not find our car, it could mean that we have troubles to get things together or to get going, to get where we want to be in our world. Or when something goes wrong during the journey, can you slow down before you crash? Do the brakes work properly? Do other people we meet in our lives have working vehicles? What if we are traveling some time with such people? Here I will give a few examples and try to explore the metaphorical connection.

#### A recurrent dream during childhood

I lie in the street near my parents' house. A car is coming, but I can't move to find safety. I wake up. Here the dreamer has no control of his body. LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN.

#### Example of a car dream with a bus involved

I'll drive my car to the border. There I take my clothes out of the back of my car, I want to sell them abroad and there is a man who wants to help me. I put my clothes in a wheel chest and drive across the border. After we had crossed the border the man ran away and left me alone in this foreign land and this foreign city. I am afraid turn and go back to the border when I see a happy, pretty little girl in a white dress and a white hat walking down the street, behind her arriving a big bus which is broken, tires without rubber. The bus catches the little girl and drives across her belly with his metal tires. To look at this scene makes me endlessly sad about this girl, because she is dead. I think she is dead for sure and there is nothing I can do anymore.

LIFE IS A JOURNEY AND DEATH IS THE END OF THE JOURNEY, this two conventional metaphors are well known to us and are part of our everyday conceptual system because they have felt representations in life itself. The small girl is run over by the big car which is broken. (Time of the early psychotherapy)

#### Example of car dream with my mother

I am back in Carinthia with my mother. We are traveling by car. I drive the car. My mother is sitting between my legs, helpless like a frightened young animal and presses on the

gas pedal. She gives full throttle all the time. First I can still see the road and I am driving on my lane. But suddenly curves are coming and I can not see the road anymore, the trees and the road blur in front of my eyes and at the end there is only a bright white light. It felt as if I go blind. So I'm getting nervous and I'm trying to stop, but she still gives gas and the brakes are under her control too. Until she realizes, that I am totally confused, it is already too late. A policeman on a big, shiny motorcycle has stopped our car. His motorcycle is even bigger than our car and he is neat and clean dressed. He looks at us and did not say a word. First I thought, don't tell him too much. I left my driver's license in the car. Then I began to explain, that I was dizzy and could not distinguish the environment from the road. Maybe it was the coffee, I thought. Usually I don't drink coffee in the morning. Again he don't ask me anything, he only watches us. Me and my mother. My mother did not say a word. As if she were dumb. Then he gives my mother a reproachful look. That reminds me that I do not have a drivers license, I am too small to drive the car. Actually she should have driven the car alone, to take me to the right place. That is what the policeman wanted to tell her. I know this now very well.

This dream came about at the beginning of the dream documentation and accompanying analytical talk therapy. My mother controls the gas pedal. Our driving is much too fast for me so CAREFUL ACTION IS CAREFUL MOTION and LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN and LACK OF INVOLVEMENT IS DISTANCE because my mother is on top of the situation and I am under her control. KNOWING IS SEEING, TESTICLES ARE EYES and IMPOTENCE IS BLINDNESS and WORLDLY POWER IS SEXUAL POTENCY, POWERLESSNESS IS IMPOTENCE. Freud observed that Oedipus' cutting out of his eyes was metaphorical castration, a metaphor that testicles are eyes and impotence is blindness. Lacking of power and influence. Blind means to be powerless. During driving with the car I did not know that I am too young, that I do not have yet the authorization to drive. The policeman stops us on a shiny motorbike when I realize that I am too young to have a driving license. (Time of the early psychotherapy)

#### Example of a car dream with my best school friend

The little girl is sitting on my knees while I drive the car. My best friend from school is sitting next to me in the passenger seat. Behind us policemen drive on their motorcycles. I get nervous because I can't ride with the child on my knees. I ask my girlfriend if she can take it, but she has other things to do.

It's hard for me to drive the car with the kid on my knees. LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN.

#### Example of a bicycle dream with my family

My family, they're all behind me in this race. But my father gave me a bike that didn't work properly. After a few minutes it was broken. I liked the green color very much, but the steering didn't work.

The vehicle is not in order. LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN. The dreamer always had a very distant relationship with her father. Here the next dream with public transport seems to shed a light on the whole.

#### Example of a dream with a tramway

I am in a city and waiting at the tram stop. Then I go to the other side, because I don't know where to get on the tramway, when I realize that I don't know where I want to go either, because I don't know where I live.

Again also with public transportation KNOWING IS SEEING, TESTICLES ARE EYES and IMPOTENCE IS BLINDNESS and WORLDLY POWER IS SEXUAL POTENCY, POWERLESSNESS IS IMPOTENCE.

#### Example of a car dream with my father

It takes me a while to get my father's car under control. I turn the steering much too hard and so turn too hard, but finally I get to the place where I want to park.

Difficulties to control, to direct, to go in the right direction.

LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN and CAREFUL ACTION IS CAREFUL MOTION. In this dream series there is also one dream where I get a green bike for a race from my father, but the steering does not work. So this problem could have been present already during childhood, at a time I learned to drive a bike?

#### Example of a car dream with a policeman

I'm sitting in my car waiting at a crossroads. A policeman is standing in front of me. There is another one to my right. They control the traffic. The Latin America summit takes place in Vienna. There is something wrong with the policeman standing in front of me. He takes his gun, puts it in his mouth and pulls the trigger. His body collapses, his head hits my car hood. I drive away. At home I see the blood on the car hood.

Again DEATH IS THE END OF A JOURNEY, the policeman, an instance which takes care of order does not work properly.

#### Example of a car dream with my mother

I'm driving my mother's car, but I forget to turn on the lights, see the police and then turn them on. Before I didn't know where to turn on the lights on my mother's car.

You cannot drive in the dark without functioning lights. Again KNOWING IS SEEING, TESTICLES ARE EYES and IMPOTENCE IS BLINDNESS and WORLDLY POWER IS SEXUAL POTENCY, POWERLESSNESS IS IMPOTENCE.

#### Example of a car dream with broken wheels

I come with my car to my parents and show my father the rear tires on which no rubber is anymore. He says that he can fix it and pulls slimy threads out of the cylinder with tweezers in the middle while the tire was on my knees. I had to get out.

The vehicle is not in order. LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN. In contrast to earlier dreams, this one tries to repair the vehicle with the help of my father.

#### Example of a car dream with broken lights

I'm taking my car to a cottage in the mountains. I have the dog with me. I park the car in another place and notice that the lights in front are broken.

Again KNOWING IS SEEING, TESTICLES ARE EYES and IMPOTENCE IS BLINDNESS and WORLDLY POWER IS SEXUAL POTENCY, POWERLESSNESS IS IMPOTENCE.

#### Example of a car dream with broken wheels

I'm driving a pink car into the underground garage. As I drive down I see that the rear left car tire is missing. I have to ask my mother if she knows that. Maybe I can go on with my former school friend.

Again something with the vehicle is defect and LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN. Here another possible solution is found, to drive with a friend.

#### Example of a car dream with a steep path

I go up the steep path and think that I can't go back here with my car anymore, I have to find another way.

CAREFUL ACTION IS CAREFUL MOTION and CONTROL IS UP.

#### Example of a car dream with the whole family

The whole family sits in the car, my mother drives the car, with stop light she crosses an intersection. I'm scared and say to her: "We could all have been dead by now." We were then trapped by car in a room without a window to which we went down a sloping ramp into the ground. I tried different ways to get the wall open again and we could finally get out.

(The new job is very stressful and working process is very uncoordinated, my boss resembles my mother in the way she works, I am not happy.)

LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN and ACCIDENTAL CHANGES ARE ACCIDENTAL MOVEMENTS

#### Example of a car dream with my mother

I was out with my mother. She wanted to drop me off in town and then bring the car back. But then I saw that she needed help parking and reversing on the road and I told her when a car was coming and when she could drive. Then I drove her back to where the car originally came from. First we drove across the country, next to a river in which, first I thought there were turtles, but when I took a closer look, bodies with one head but no limbs drove down the river at regular intervals. I couldn't see exactly what it was, somehow alive, but somehow not, without sense organs. We drove deeper into the forest, where it became dark and absolutely quiet. There I saw on a path that led down the river what these bodies really were. Now they were climbing out of the water. Muscular, naked men come up a path to us. It slowly gets creepy for me, at this sight, because otherwise there was absolutely nothing alive to be seen in this forest, except the trees and these strange men. Then I notice that my mother fell asleep at the wheel and that she even could not be woken up by my shouting. I had to try again and again to open her eyes with my finger until it worked after several attempts. As if her eyes were taped shut. You are asleep! I scream at her when she wakes up and tell her that I will drive now. Don't you notice how the mood here is in this forest, the place is as if an instinct that I had before was there because I felt animated, the whole body tingling as I drove into this forest. I knew that terrible things would happen if we continued driving. I tell my mother that we can also return the car

where we picked it up. So we turn immediately and soon we were out of the forest again. Only now I see the fence and the gate through which we drove. A plaque was visible there and marked this forest as a university research institute. On the way a small roebuck happily approaches me. But in this moment I couldn't be happy about it, I felt this anger in me, this anger about the dangerous situation which I had just experienced and which I should have known already. I know this place, I know this forest, I know the place behind the forest where the rented vehicle with the caravan came from. I have been here before. I hold this little tender creature by the neck and think that I could break his neck with ease at this moment. But I don't do it and crawl the sweet animal behind his neck, it shakes and continues with my mother. Actually I could have given him something to eat, but I had nothing with me. On the way back we come to a stand on the side of the road and I ask the man what is going on in this forest. But this man was already very drunk. 'A thriller happened, eh...there', he says. The way he talks, he is so drunken that he can't stand properly with his glass in his hand. Who knows if he understood me at all, I think. We go on and I am glad that we are out of this forest.

In this dream we have the metaphor SLEEP IS DISABILITY, so my mother is disabled in a dangerous situation. Here the metaphor even is a so called megametaphor when we consider that the concept of sleep often function as a source domain for the concept of death, SLEEP IS DEATH. The identification of sleep with death is prefigured with blackness, darkness and mourning. Since death is viewed as sleep and sleep is understood as a disability, death will also be seen as a disability: the utmost human disability in which we are blind, deaf, dumb, immobile.

#### Example of a car dream with my mother

I'm traveling in the car with my mother, snow is on the road. The street is steep and has been rebuilt. Where a car drove in front of us, now children are sledding and playing in the snow. As a precaution I make a stop to take a closer look at this situation. It is steep and there is not even a proper road at this point. As always, my mother says, that's alright, somehow it will go. But my answer is no, this is not a road and I am not driving there.

Here CONTROL IS UP and CAREFUL ACTION IS CAREFUL MOTION happened the first time and no accident happened. (A time of confrontation with my mother, when I told her that I want to do things not so hasty as she does.)

#### Example with a car dream

Back in the car again. I don't know exactly which one, I guess mine. I'm going too fast. Obstacles appear, branches from trees beside the road reach far into the street. I wonder why this is allowed, with the car roof I touch these branches. Up the hill a man stands on the road with his little boy. I think he must be crazy, standing on the street with his child, I slow down and touch the curbside of the road. I still don't have full control of the car. I think I should drive slower.

Driving too fast, obstacles appear. LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN. (Spending time with a friend who has a 5 year old son.)

### Example of a car dream, driving with a couple

I sit in the back seat of a couple's car. The man is driving, but he's so tired that the woman has to keep his eyes open to keep him from falling asleep.

Again a picture of sleep, SLEEP IS DISABILITY, SLEEP IS DEATH.

### Example of a dream with a train

I get on a train, then notice that I have no ticket, get off again and ask when the next one is leaving.

KNOWING IS SEEING AND IMPOTENCE IS BLINDNESS. A ticket is necessary when using public transportation. When traveling with public transport, it often happened that the dreamer realizes that she has no ticket for the journey, no authorization to travel again.

### Example of a dream with a plane

I'm at the airport with my friend. I won a flight, but I can't find my way around the airport. We're driving through tubes and tunnels and stuff, but we can't find the plane.

LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN. Several times in this series the dreamer did not find the car. Here with a friend they could not find the plane. Is there a lack of relationship at all because of the missing vehicle?

## 4. Discussion

We can argue that when we talk metaphorically about say, life is like a journey it do not necessarily evoke images of a journey, but when sleeping, with our eyes closed, in our dreams maybe we do. Possible that we project these metaphors like a movie onto a screen. A movie of our social and emotional worlds within. The conceptions of our inner world, of our self, of others, parts of others in our self, our penalties and our conflicts. The dream, a picture of the emotional and social structure in which the dreamer finds himself according to contacts and relationships with a connection to our emotional memory.

In this dream series many dreams show passivity and a lack of coping resources what is actually typical for children's dreams (Foulkes, 1999). This corresponds with the fact that in this series of dreams also many animals are present, which would be interesting to investigate as well.

Recurring metaphors were LACK OF CONTROL IS DOWN, SLEEP IS DISABILITY, IMPOTENCE IS BLINDNESS, DEATH IS THE END OF A JOURNEY, so important parts of the vehicle like wheels or the control of the car is defect. Seems to show difficulties to run life properly because proper equipment is missing?

The problem with driving with her mother also reappeared at a time when the dreamer was under a lot of stress at work. Patricia Garfield also mentioned the possible link between car trouble dreams and waking life stress. And a close relationship between daytime mood and dream emotion was found out in two other study. Work-related dreams of hairdressers showed that lower life satisfaction leads to a higher frequency of work-related dreams and the emotional tone was related to job satisfaction and life satisfaction (Schredl, 2009). Another study also found out, that the emotional tone of the dreams of truck drivers were affected by daytime stress and job satisfaction. (Schredl et al., 2005-2006). Although the dreamer is not a professional

driver, driving dreams with negative emotions, a old pattern emerged during a period of professional stress and general dissatisfaction with life itself, a situation that required major transformation. Since the dreamer rarely drove a car at that time, neither as driver nor as a co-driver this could confirm that the subject of traveling and driving a vehicle in dreams functions as a metaphor for coping with problems in life, obstacles the person is currently facing and available resources to manage them. It also supports the continuity hypothesis, where a connection, not a simple one (Schredl, 2019), seem to exist.

The dreamer was several times on the way with the car of her mother, even she did not drive it in her waking life. Could this car perhaps be representative for a shared or learned part of personality with her? Also in the study about the truck drivers (Schredl, 2006), nearly half of them were driving other vehicles. Maybe we have a set of personality traits in our mind, and when we have a special kind of experience in our waking life it is connected to an earlier experience, a memory of experience and the person with whom we shared it?

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