

The child motif and its transformation in dream series from psychoanalytic therapies: Empirical evidence of an archetype?

Christian Roesler

Catholic University of Applied Sciences Freiburg, Germany
 Analytical Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Basel, Switzerland
 Psychotherapy Science, Sigmund Freud University Linz, Austria

Summary. The occurrence of the child motif in dream series from psychoanalytic therapies is examined in 38 cases using the grounded theory method. In C.G. Jung's analytical psychology, it is assumed that archetypal symbols with universal forms emerge during the transformation process in psychotherapy. Jung's characterization of the archetype of the divine child is presented, as is the controversy surrounding the distinction between the child archetype and the concept of the inner child. Qualitative analysis confirms a characteristic form of the child motif's appearance across different dream series, as well as a characteristic developmental dynamic of the motif. While at the beginning of the dream series/therapies, the dream ego is indifferent or hostile toward the child, it increasingly takes responsibility for the child as the series progresses and is able to care for it successfully. This development goes hand in hand with progress in psychotherapy. The implications for the validity of Jung's archetype theory are discussed.

Keywords: Child motif in dreams, dream interpretation, Jung's archetype of the divine child, psychoanalytic psychotherapy, qualitative research

1. Introduction

Sophie Scholl, a resistance fighter against the Nazi regime and member of the White Rose organization, who was sentenced to death by the Nazis, dreamed in her cell the night before her execution:

"On a sunny day, I was carrying a child in a long white dress to be baptized. The path to the church led up a steep mountain. But I carried the child firmly and safely in my arms. Suddenly, there was a crevasse in front of me. I had just enough time to lay the child down on the other side—then I fell into the abyss." (Will 2023, p. 74).

She told the dream to her cellmate Else Gebel, who survived imprisonment and shared it with Sophie's sister Inge, who published it in a book about the White Rose in 1952. Psychoanalyst Herbert Will (2023) has studied the dream and its interpretation intensively from the perspective of dream interpretation and the model of dream analysis developed by Ulrich Moser. He clearly sees elements of spiritual orientation in it, which open up a perspective of meaning for the dreamer in her existentially desperate situation. He sees the child as a symbol of the dreamer's conviction that her ideas will survive her death.

"Let's assume that the child represents, to a certain extent, her own child, for whose survival she is fighting and who perhaps also embodies her own ideal self. Then this dream points to a future that transcends her individual life. Sophie Scholl's interpretation of her dream, which she tells Else Gebel, supports this interpretation: The child is our idea, and it will prevail despite all obstacles." (ibid., p. 79).

The study presented here deals with the motif of the child in dreams and examines it in context using numerous dream series. I regard the motif of the child in dreams as an astonishing and creative act of symbolization by the unconscious or the psyche, in which a similar motif or symbol is chosen for interindividually similar psychological content, which, as will be shown below, also develops a typical dynamic in the dream series examined. The empirical findings also point in a surprisingly clear way to the archetypal motif of the divine child or child archetype described by Carl Gustav Jung. Although I take a rather skeptical view of Jung's entire archetype theory (cf. Roesler 2023), I see the spontaneous emergence of this motif in numerous dream series and its dynamic development as a phenomenon that comes closest to what Jung meant by the concept of archetype. In an impressive way, the psyche creates and shapes a dream image that actually refers to similar content and meanings in a large number of dreams, without the dreamers themselves being aware of this at all. Instead, the appearance of the motif usually causes surprise and amazement, and they wonder where this child has suddenly come from.

In contrast to the numerous discussions of the motif in analytical psychology and beyond in the form of case studies, the present study attempts a systematic investigation of the motif on the basis of extensive data. After presenting the theoretical concepts on the motif to date, the results of a study using the methodology of grounded theory are

Corresponding address:

Christian Roesler, Prof. Dr. habil. Dipl.-Psych., Professor of Clinical Psychology, Catholic University of Applied Sciences Freiburg, Karlsstr. 63, 79104 Freiburg
 Email: christian.roesler@kh-freiburg.de

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summarized on the basis of a large number of dream series from analytical psychotherapies, which surprisingly clearly confirm the aspects of the child motif already mentioned in analytical psychology, but also expand on them.

In the context of the Structural Dream Analysis (SDA) research program, approximately 100 extensive dream series from psychotherapies have been examined to date against the background of diagnostic information on the respective cases and information on the success of the respective therapy (Roesler 2024; Roesler et al. 2025). The central finding of these investigations is that in successful psychotherapies, there is a typical and characteristic pattern of change in dream structures over the course of the series (Roesler 2024b). A central finding was thus that what Jung referred to as archetypal motifs or symbols were not found in the material examined, but rather typical and universal patterns of dream narratives (e.g., the dream ego is threatened, the dream ego becomes independent of others, etc.), which were clearly related to both the dreamer's psychopathology and the process of change in psychotherapy. However, when looking at the material, the child motif discussed here appeared repeatedly, exhibiting a striking and typical mode of representation and dynamic of change. Because the motif appeared so conspicuously time and again, it was systematically investigated and the results are presented in the present study. Precisely because we did not systematically search for the motif or assume it hypothetically in advance, but rather it emerged during a closer examination of the dream series, I consider it strong evidence of a motif that is archetypal in the genuine sense.

The archetype of the divine child in Jung and analytical psychology

Jung's work on the psychology of the child archetype was originally part of a joint publication with Karl Kerenyi on "The Divine Child" (Jung 1975, CW 9/1). The motif is an archetype that appears in "myths, fairy tales, dreams, and psychotic fantasies" (p. 167); it can be assumed that they "correspond to certain collective (and not personal) structural elements of the human soul in general." (p. 168). In addition to its worldwide occurrence in fairy tales and myths, the motif can be found "empirically in spontaneous and therapeutically triggered individuation processes." (p. 194). In his treatise, Jung details the universal basic structure of the meaning of the "divine" child, who begins as unattractive and devalued, is born in an unattractive and unlikely place (e.g. Zeus in a cave, Jesus in a stable), who must be hidden from persecution (e.g., by Herod) and who, at the beginning, is often not believed to be capable of anything (e.g., Percival), but it is precisely from this unattractiveness that the savior of the coming age emerges. Jung then substantiates this basic structure with numerous myths and religious motifs from all over the world. Jung also shows how the motif of the child appears in the dreams of modern people in psychotherapy, and takes on similar meanings that can be summarized as "the child is what has a future." The appearance of the child motif in psychotherapy in particular is therefore an anticipation of future developments and thus highly significant in therapy. Typically, the dreamer initially rejects the child because it appears unattractive and worthless. However, it often symbolizes those parts and potentials from which the decisive transformation of the personality takes place. Other typical features of the child motif are

the miraculous birth and the abandonment and exposure of the child, "conceived, born, and raised under very unusual circumstances. Its deeds are as wonderful or monstrous as its nature or physical constitution." (p. 175). The prerequisite for the appearance of the child motif for the individual is a painful conflict situation from which there seems to be no way out—for the conscious mind. However, a sense of meaningful creation shines through, giving rise to the "numinous character" of the child.

According to Jung, the child motif is therefore a universal symbol that appears worldwide in fairy tales and myths and in individuals in dreams and therapeutic processes. The latter is associated with a personal, seemingly unsolvable conflict, which the child motif helps to resolve by incorporating unconscious aspects of the personality. The archetype of the divine child is thus an expression of the individuation process and indicates personal change and renewal. The appearance of the child motif in dreams anticipates future developments and appears in spontaneous and therapeutically induced individuation processes. "In the individuation process, it anticipates the figure that emerges from the synthesis of the conscious and unconscious elements of the personality. [...] It represents the strongest and most inevitable urge of the being, namely to realize itself" (p. 186).

Dorst (2018) adds that the child motif appears at turning points in therapy and is experienced as particularly touching and significant. The context is then usually not a concrete desire to have children or a pregnancy. It is a strange child who, on the one hand, is in need of help and, on the other hand, embodies an unchildlike wisdom or conveys a message. Central elements of this mythological motif are that the birth of this figure is associated with enormous hopes for the healing and salvation of all people, even to the point of overcoming death, but that this child and the knowledge associated with it are threatened by hostile forces from the very beginning. The child is typically born at night, cold, lonely, rejected, and poor, which is interpreted as a symbol of the existential threat and helplessness of humanity, which is offered hope of salvation in the child. According to Jung's understanding, this can also be transferred to the individual situation in psychotherapy, in which the patient suffering from a neurosis/mental disorder, in his inability to find his way out of the problem on his own, spontaneously produces this hope-conveying motif. The appearance of the child motif in dreams can then point to the undamaged core of the "personality, which can then be worked out in the course of therapy (Dorst 2018). Jung emphasizes that "the 'child' prepares a future transformation of the personality" (1975, p. 278).

From these elements, we can hypothesize that, on the one hand, the appearance of the motif in dreams is related to therapeutic progress and, more specifically, that there is a connection between the appearance of the motif and turning points in psychotherapy.

The concept of the "inner child" in psychotherapy

One concept in which the child motif can be found across various psychological paradigms and has gained popularity in recent years is that of the "inner child." Due to the widespread use of the concept, there is no clear definition, but the inner child usually describes the idea that needs, experiences, and injuries from one's own childhood unconsciously shape the experiences and behavior of the adult

individual and that caring for the inner child, in the sense of recognizing and fulfilling these needs, promotes healing (Dorst 2018). The inner child is thus a metaphor for the original psychodynamic idea that psychological suffering has its roots in unconscious conflicts that originate in negative childhood experiences. This idea has now been integrated into a wide variety of treatment concepts across different schools of thought (Herbold & Sachsse, 2007), such as schema therapy (Young et al., 2003) or psychodynamic-imaginative trauma therapy (Reddemann, 2009), as well as being taken up in many popularized and esoteric self-help guides (Chopich & Paul, 1993). These concepts refer primarily to unconsciously stored experiences, memories, and feelings from one's own childhood that have been hurt in the broadest sense. At the same time, the concept also includes the idea that this inner child has the potential for growth and healing.

Dorst (2018) critically notes that overly idealized ideas are associated with the concept and that it can lead to attributing all problems in adult life to childhood. The inner child is therefore less an empirically tested concept than a metaphor used in practice to explain the influence of individual childhood experiences on adult life.

In her book "Von der Kindheit zum Kind in uns" (From Childhood to the Child Within Us), Jungian Katrin Asper (1995) links these two aspects of the child archetype on the one hand and the concept of the inner child on the other. On the one hand, the image of the child often reflects the wounded and neglected side of the person, and often the conscious side of the adult person takes on the attitude of former caregivers who neglected or even attacked this side. At the same time, the emergence of this motif in dreams reveals a potential for self-healing that goes beyond this, in which the conscious personality is called upon to turn toward the childlike and wounded part of itself and thereby set in motion a therapeutic development.

A grounded theory on the occurrence of the child motif in dream series

In the Structural Dream Analysis (SDA) project, approximately 100 dream series and the corresponding case descriptions have been examined in detail (Roesler et al. 2025). To investigate the manifestations of the child motif, a subsample of 38 dream series featuring the child motif was examined in more detail. The dream series come from case reports in the archives of a psychoanalytic training institute, which contain detailed information on the case, the diagnosis, the psychodynamics, and the course of therapy, in addition to the dreams discussed during therapy (cf. Roesler et al. 2025). The research question was to determine the forms in which the child motif appears in these dream series and whether it is possible to develop a systematic theory in this regard that also clarifies the connections to the course of the respective psychotherapies. Finally, this empirically based theory was related to the ideas about the child archetype in Jung and other authors.

2. Research methodology

The exploratory question was investigated using the Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss 1967, Strauss & Corbin 2015), a qualitative content analysis method for category formation. The aim of grounded theory

is to develop inductively empirically based theories about a specific phenomenon on the basis of available data.

The central process of the method is coding (using MAX-QDA software), in which concepts related to the research questions are first formed from the data (open coding), these are then provided with comments and notes on possible meanings and connections (memos), and finally the concepts found are differentiated, refined, and divided into main and subcategories (axial coding). In selective coding, these categories are reduced to a core category wherever possible, thus formulating an empirically grounded theory that is then verified by reanalyzing the data. In addition, using the method of theoretical sampling, the sample is continuously expanded and supplemented on the basis of the knowledge gained until theoretical saturation is reached and expanding the sample does not yield any new insights (Flick, 2018).

In preparation for open coding, the first step in each dream series was to identify the dreams in which one or more children appear. Based on the exploratory question, initial questions were then asked about the texts in open coding (When, where, and how does the child motif appear? What characteristics does it have? What relationships does it have to the dream ego and to the other figures in the dream?) and memos with ideas about the connections between the codes were created for each dream series.

Based on Flick (2018), a coding paradigm was then designed to serve as an initial model for explaining the relationships between the categories (context and intervening conditions; Flick 2018): How does the phenomenon appear, what are the causal conditions, what action strategies are associated with the phenomenon, and what are the consequences? Subsequently, a model was developed to show how the motif typically develops within the dream series. The assessment of the development of the child motif obtained in this way was then compared with the treating therapists' assessments of the outcome of therapy in order to evaluate the validity of the model.

3. Results

In the dream series examined, the child motif appears in a total of 153 dreams (between one and 27 times per series), for which a total of 600 codes were created. In a total of 29 dream series, a development of the motif can be observed over the course of the series. The empirically found occurrence of the child motif results in the model presented below, in which the categories found are related to each other. The decisive characteristics in the model of the relationships between the categories are, on the one hand, the attitude and emotions of the dream ego toward the child and, on the other hand, the child's neediness and the question of its care.

3.1. General characteristics of the child motif in dream series

- One outstanding characteristic is that the child seems to appear out of nowhere and is usually not a known or real child. Nevertheless, it is related to the dream ego or is even clearly identified as its child.
- The origin of the child is also addressed (whereby the child is sometimes simply handed over to the dream ego by other figures or is simply there): in some cases, the child is the child of the therapist (in stark contrast

to the real circumstances) or even the product of a relationship between the therapist and the patient (This could, of course, be interpreted as an Oedipal fantasy, although from a Jungian perspective it would be more accurate to speak of a symbolic fruit of the therapeutic relationship.); sometimes the therapist is also something like a midwife. In fact, the motif of virgin birth even appears in relation to the question of the child's origin:

Example: *I dreamed I was pregnant. At the beginning of the pregnancy. Anyway, I had sex with Chris, pretty weird, listless, why did I do it? I don't know. I had a miscarriage because of it. It was clear that the child was dead. It's gone. I can't remember the process. I was upset that it was gone, but I didn't know exactly whether I should be happy about it. The child was not planned, and yet I didn't think it was good that it was gone. Pretty soon after that, I was suddenly pregnant again. I didn't have a boyfriend. Even though I hadn't had sex, I knew I was pregnant—like the Virgin Mary (the patient laughs). Then I was pregnant for 3-4 days in the dream. You couldn't see anything, but people still asked me if I was pregnant.*

- In some cases, the child seems strange or even bizarre, in that it combines the characteristics of a child or baby with those of an adult or even an elderly person, or possesses a special wisdom: "half adult, half child" (F32, 3), has the face of an adult (F38, 7), gray hair (F34, 55), can speak fluently at the age of two months (F26, 10) or already menstruates (F03, 2). The child also has something monstrous about them, is born with claws instead of fingers (F24, 7), has barbed teeth (F21, 21) or a trunk instead of a nose (F17, 6).

Example: *My friend Lilly just had a baby. We visited Lilly. The baby was speaking fluently at the age of 2 months.*

- The gender of the child does not seem to play a role; often, the gender is not specified at all, or the child is referred to in a gender-neutral way as a child or baby. In some dream series, the gender also changes and may even be the opposite of the dreamer's gender. Sometimes, the child appears in a group of children, but they are treated as a group rather than as individuals.

3.2. Process characteristics

The child is not an isolated motif, but shows a developmental dynamic over the course of the dream series. The question of caring for the child has emerged as a core category, and in this context, the decisive factor in the developmental dynamic is whether the dream ego takes responsibility for the child and is successful in caring for it. During coding, it was noticeable that in many dream series, the relationship between the dream ego and the child motif develops in such a way that the dream ego feels increasingly responsible for the child and manages to take over its care.

- A typical motif at the beginning of dream series is that a child is expected in the sense of a pregnancy, whereby male figures in the dream or the male dream ego itself may well be pregnant. Likewise, women who are long past childbearing age may have such a pregnancy in their dreams. This demonstrates that the motif is not

related to wishes for having children in real life but has to be seen as a symbolic expression.

Example: *My husband was pregnant. He had to take it easy. The realization came like a bolt from the blue.*

- Typically, after its initial appearance at the beginning of the dream series, the child is also injured or mistreated, neglected or otherwise in a miserable condition, sometimes already dead and decomposed; no one cares. A very typical motif is that the child falls into the water or has already fallen, or has been dropped into the water by the dream ego or even deliberately thrown in, and is in danger of drowning.
- It becomes increasingly clear in the course of the series that the dream ego is responsible and should take care of the child. Typically, at the beginning or in the first half of the series, the dream ego does not feel responsible for the child (and hands it over to others), or even neglects/abuses/kills the child, behaves indifferently, or is powerless.

Example: *"I'm having a child. When it arrived, I realized I didn't want it."*

- In the course of development, the dream ego typically becomes increasingly better at taking responsibility (sometimes after an intermediate phase of ambivalence) and caring for the child.

Example: *I am in a garage and have a baby (boy) and you (therapist) help me. I was then in a restaurant with my baby. And then I wanted to go out again, to a Greenpeace shop... I gave the baby to some people and crossed the street to go to the shop and to the toilet there. (Guilty conscience because I gave the baby away). After I came out of the toilet, I went back to the restaurant to my baby (relieved because it was still there).*

- Typically, relapses occur during development, in which the child is suddenly at risk again and the dream ego experiences a relapse into earlier powerlessness/indifference.
- Some dream series actually end with a dream in which the dream ego takes special care of the child, rescues it, provides for it, or accepts it as their own child and adopts it, and the child is (then) visibly doing well.

Example: *I had a baby who could already sit up. I was sitting with him on the stairs to my shared apartment. He looked cute and well-fed. I was still surprised that I had one. I fed him an orange-colored food. The baby smiled at me and opened its mouth. There were teeth, completely disfigured, with barbs pointing forward and backward, as if they could hurt themselves but also bite. I thought that such small teeth were not dangerous to others when biting, and that these were only baby teeth, which would eventually fall out.*

The following subcategories were found for the core category of child care.

- 1 - "No one cares for CHILD": Description of the child's situation without any clear motives on the part of the dream ego or other figures, or any action being taken (e.g., the death of the child is described).
- 2 - "Other characters provide for the CHILD": Provision for the child by other characters is central

- 3 – “DREAM EGO aversive”: The aversive feelings of the dream ego towards the child are central
- 4 – “DREAM EGO ambivalent”: The dream ego has ambivalent feelings toward the child or cares for it even though it does not want to
- 5 – “DREAM EGO cares about CHILD”: The dream ego cares about the child’s well-being but does not take care of it (e.g., because it is threatened itself)
- 6 – “DREAM EGO fails to care for CHILD”: The dream ego takes care of the child but does something wrong, loses it, and it is harmed or dies
- 7 – “DREAM EGO cares for CHILD”: The dream ego successfully cares for the child (appropriately)

3.3. Theoretical model (grounded theory)

In the theoretical model, it is assumed that the subcategories can be arranged hierarchically (from category 1 upwards to category 7), depending on how successfully the dream ego masters the challenge of caring for the child. In the course of the dream series, the dream content develops into higher categories and the dream ego becomes increasingly successful in caring for the child. “DREAM EGO aversive” is higher in the hierarchy than “Other figures provide CHILD,” because in the latter category, the child is cared for, but not by the dream ego, while in “DREAM EGO aversive,” the dream ego is at least motivated to care for the child.

An exemplary case study: Mr. H.

The case described below includes 217 dreams of a fellow analyst, which he documented during the seven years of his training analysis (see Jenni & Roesler 2024 for details). Overall, the dream series shows the child motif and its developmental dynamics in an exemplary form (the dream series contains even more dreams with the child motif, but those presented below illustrate the developmental dynamics sufficiently).

Dream 6:

My male school friend G., a neighbor in M. (town), is expecting a child. He is supposed to come to our house for the birth. His mother asks him to and expects him to. All of this is forced upon me and I am only doing it to keep up appearances. G. (school friend) comes to our house and sits at the kitchen table. Then something happens with the amniotic fluid. G. (school friend) stays with us for a day, then he is taken to the hospital by ambulance.

The motif of expecting a child, which is typical for the beginning of therapy, where difficulties arise and the dream ego is still rather defensive. It is not possible to take care of the expected child on one’s own, but the friend has to go to the hospital.

Dream 28:

A small child has been sentenced to death by a committee of which I am a member. As the child is led to the place of execution in chains, I am overcome with pity. I grab the child, free it, and plead for acquittal, which is granted.

This is also a typical motif for the beginning of therapy. The dream ego is involved in the child being sentenced to death. But then the dream ego’s attitude changes in the dream, and it stands up for the child and successfully frees it.

Dream 47:

I am with M. (my wife) and M. (my sister-in-law) in a mill with a canal running underneath it. The room we are in is above the water. It has direct access to the water. I am standing on wooden planks and see three heads swimming towards us in the distance. It is already dark. I recognize three little boys. I call out to them that they have to get out of there or they will die. I help them out of the water; they couldn’t do it alone. When I reach the last one, I fall in myself.

This corresponds to the typical motif of a child (or in this case, several children) falling into the water and threatening to drown. The dream ego takes care of the children and helps them out, but then falls in himself; in this respect, the rescue is not entirely successful.

In the following, there are repeated dreams about a former girl-friend who has a child (unlike in reality). The dream ego is surprised by the liveliness of the child and that it exists, that it is the child of the girl-friend, who obviously came from a relationship with a man, which would also have been possible for the dream ego in his former relationship to the girl. The motif is taken up almost identically in the following dream. The child’s mother is hostile toward the dream ego, and the child is characterized as illegitimate, meaning that it is not accepted by its father. However, the dream ego wants (nevertheless) to live with her and the child. This corresponds to taking responsibility for the child.

Dream 111:

Dr. P.’s child (daughter) had died. ... As a tailor, I was supposed to take care of the coffin. It was ready at 6:00 p.m. sharp. I still had a child’s corpse from him, which was wrapped in plastic. So I didn’t know whether it should go in the coffin. When I unwrapped it, it had already leaked, continued to leak, and I held it over the manure. Our L. (apprentice) helped me energetically.

It is a typical motif in longer dream series that after an initial phase of increasing responsibility and care for the child, the child then dies, is dead, etc. Characteristic is the striking indifference of the dream ego.

Dream 148:

In the forest, “the circle closes tightly around the child at the tree.” I give preference to the child over myself, who is standing outside.

Here, the attitude has changed again; the dream ego stands up for the child.

Dream 207:

I am standing with S. (son) on a narrow street. A large truck is coming up behind us. As feared, it fails to see us. Forcing its right of way, it overtakes us, injuring S. (son) on the foot and causing abrasions on his collarbone. It is not clear whether the collarbone is broken. The driver dismissed everything as trivial and wanted to buy S. (son) an ice cream to stop him crying. I refuse and reproach him for his reckless behavior.

Here, too, the dream ego stands up for the child, who is no longer being disregarded and hurt by the dream ego, but by the other person in the dream.

Dream 217, last dream in the series within the context of the training analysis:

I am in a barley field on the outskirts of town, considering leasing some land here. But it is a long way to go. A small cat comes running towards me, looking very bedraggled. It looks as if it has scabies. I touch it after wrapping it in a piece of paper. It is in such a pitiful state that I think it should be put down. But the L. animal shelter is too far away. Some young farmers arrive and I talk to them. As I look at the cat's paws, I see little fingers instead of claws. It becomes increasingly clear that the cat is a little girl. An abandoned child who was fed by a cat and behaved accordingly. I imagined that I could be her godfather and that this was a highly interesting discovery for science.

Basically, the story of the child is recapitulated: she was raised by a cat instead of humans because no one cared for her and she was abandoned, which is why she suffered for a long time. But now the dream ego accepts her and takes her in, allowing her to become human, and wants to adopt her/become her godfather.

4. Discussion

The present study has taken a bottom-up research approach, using inductive methods based solely on the material without the addition of theoretical assumptions to show that there is a typical pattern in which the child motif appears in dream series and changes over the course of the series.

The manifestations of the motif correspond surprisingly clearly with Jung's explanations of the archetype of the child. In dreams, the child actually appears strange or even bizarre, particularly infantile and helpless, yet at the same time adult, which is why Jung describes it as a "symbol of the constructive union of opposites" (Jung, 1975, p. 188). There is also evidence of the wonderful or monstrous nature of the motif (p. 175). In several cases, unusual pregnancies are described in connection with the appearance of the child motif, such as a pregnancy "like the Virgin Mary" (F20, 12) or the pregnancy of a man (F26, 9). According to Jung, the birth occurs "in a non-empirical manner ... for example, through virgin birth or miraculous conception or birth from unnatural organs" (p. 176).

Typically, relapses occur during development, in which the child is suddenly endangered again and the dream ego experiences a relapse into earlier powerlessness/indifference. This confirms Jung's fundamental view that psychological development processes, and therefore also motives in dreams, do not develop in a linear, progressive manner, but rather in a process of ups and downs that can be described as a spiral movement, i.e., the motive is taken up again and again, but increasingly at a higher level of development.

The manifestations of the child motif and its dynamics very clearly support the explanations of Jung and other analytical authors on the archetype of the divine child. This leads me to venture the statement that the analysis presented here provides empirically reliable and, in this respect, scientifically meaningful evidence for the existence of what Jung and analytical psychology refer to as an archetype. It is obvious that here the psyche of the dreamers, completely independently of their knowledge and intention, produces an image that has a general character and a typical course across many individuals. This developmental dynamic is ap-

parently also independent of whether the treating therapists address the motif at all. Neither the dreamers themselves nor, as a rule, the treating therapists were aware of the motif or addressed it (with very few exceptions). This would support Jung's assumption that archetypal elements possess a certain autonomy and momentum independent of consciousness ("autochthonous development").

The findings on the connection between the emergence of the child motif and the psychopathology of the dreaming person are also interesting. Analysis of the contextual information provided by the treating therapists revealed attachment or identity issues in all 38 cases. It is very often reported that the patients experienced a lack of care and attachment in their childhood. Accordingly, a connection could be made here to the concept of the "wounded inner child" and it could be assumed that the child motif symbolizes the patients' own wounded and needy childlike part, which is initially split off and needs to be integrated and cared for in the course of therapy. Based on the findings presented here, this is certainly correct. However, the meaning of the child motif clearly goes beyond this. It is obvious that the appearance of the motif is linked to a progressive dynamic in which, with appropriate attention from the dream ego to the child, a positive integration of the motif within the dream narrative becomes apparent. This strongly supports Jung's (1975) interpretation, that the child motif has a universal character and is in itself a symbol of therapeutic transformation and individuation.

The general hypothesis put forward here is that the motif of the child in dreams is connected with transformations in the psyche (and correspondingly in dreams), i.e., it itself represents a transforming element, and that the attitude of the dream ego toward this element is decisive for the continuation of psychological development. It seems as if the psyche creates an image completely autonomously and develops it narratively, which at the same time exhibits interindividually similar manifestations and developmental dynamics. At the same time, this motif apparently symbolizes a psychological content to which ego consciousness (or the dream ego in the dream) must adopt a specific attitude in order for psychological development to continue. At the same time, when this attitude is successfully adopted, a characteristic transformation toward progress and completion of therapy becomes apparent both in therapy and in the dream patterns.

According to the findings of SDA, it is a basic pattern of dreams that the dream ego encounters challenges that it must overcome (Roesler 2025). It was found that in psychotherapies which develop positively the agency of the dream ego continuously rises over the course of the dream series, which means that the dream ego increasingly succeeds to confront threats, solve tasks and become independent from others. Following this, the theme of "caring for the child" can also be seen as such a challenge in which, in successful therapies, the agency of the dream ego rises in the form that it is increasingly capable of taking care for the child.

At the same time, the child can also represent what is hurt or neglected in the person and needs the attention and care of the conscious mind so that the person can become whole and healthy. It should be noted that practically all of the cases examined here were considered successful by the treating therapists, and significant improvements were even documented in some cases using standardized measurements. The theoretical model presented here is also con-

firmed by a negative case in which the patient prematurely discontinued therapy; here, the child motif does appear and the dream ego struggles to care for it, but in the course of the dream series, the child is taken away from the dream ego, exposed to cannibals, and is lost in the last dream of the series.

One question arising from this study that warrants further investigation is whether it can be proven in detail that the change in attitude of the dream ego toward the child, in the sense of acceptance and assumption of responsibility, precedes a transformation/turning point in therapy, or whether both tend to occur in parallel.

It should be noted that even in our own case material, the child motif only appears in this clear form in approximately 40% of cases. However, it should be borne in mind that most case reports used here only document a selection of the dreams discussed; furthermore, it must be assumed that the patients had many more dreams (and remembered many more) than those discussed in therapy. When, as in the case of Mr. H., a virtually complete series of dreams is available (at least all the dreams that were remembered), the motif and its development are evident in an almost exemplary form.

The present study is pilot in nature, partly due to the limitations of the data material. In the future, it would be even more important to examine as complete a series of documented dreams as possible from the perspective of the hypothesis presented here on the child motif.

Author's note

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3271-5521>.

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