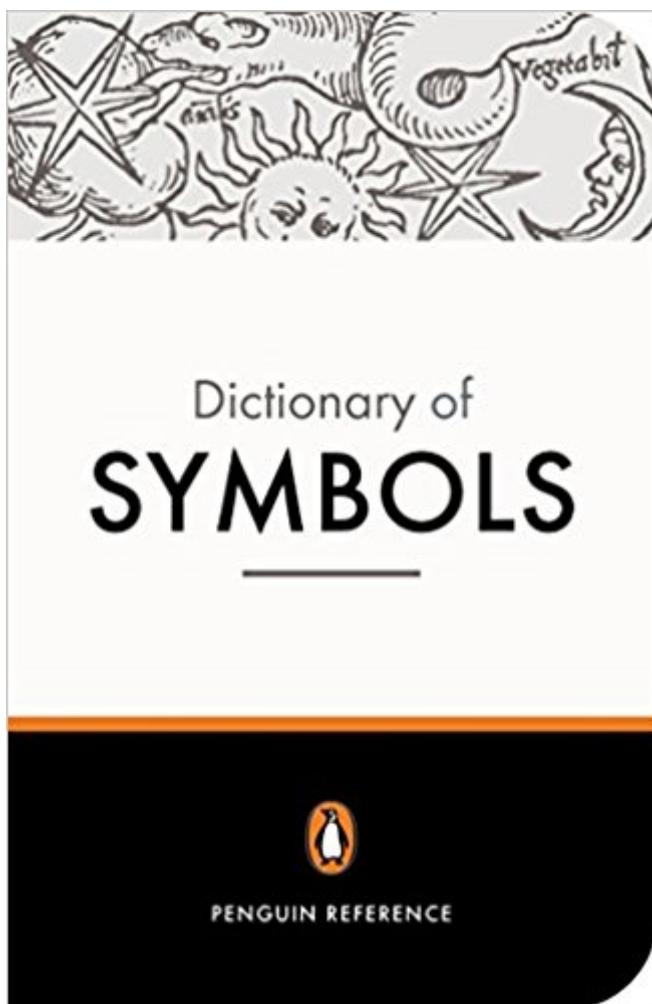


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# The Penguin Dictionary Of Symbols (Dictionary, Penguin)



## **Synopsis**

This remarkable and wide-ranging book is an inventory of symbols and the symbolic imagination. The editors and their fifteen contributors are drawn from a variety of scholarly backgrounds including anthropology, ethnology, psychotherapy and art history. This diversity of approach is responsible for the book's unique character, a reflection of the multiplicity of symbols and signs and the phenomenal range of possible interpretations they offer. This book draws together folklore, literary and artistic sources, and focuses on the symbolic dimension of every colour, number, sound, gesture, expression or character trait that has benefitted from symbolic interpretation. The conscious and unconscious minds are explored, desire and dreams are treated alongside the known and the chronicled. Extraordinary in its range and eclecticism, this dictionary was originally published in French as the *Dictionnaire des Symboles*, and it is regarded as the standard work on the subject.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Text: English Original Language: French --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Jean Chevalier was a university lecturer in philosophy and theology before working for UNESCO. He subsequently devoted himself to writing and research, publishing many works on religion and

spirituality. He died in 1993. Alain Gheerbrant is a well-known poet and travel-writer, living in Paris. John Buchanan-Brown is a long-established and gifted translator of French books.

I'm mostly happy with this book, but I'm not 100% satisfied. I do enjoy how the book dives right into the entries without any tedious introductory remarks, but it may have been good to include at least some small explanation as to the definition of symbol or a remark on the methodology used to determine which entries to include. The book seems to cover the sorts of symbols that most people would probably be interested in: animals, plants, gems, astrological, and mythological. However, it's less about the graphic representations than it is about the conceptual and metaphorical aspects. There is scant coverage of mathematical symbols and modern symbols. Then, there are also entries which seem out of place: seemingly modern entries like "automobiles", an entry on "dreams" (which is not really a symbol so much as a context for symbols), and many entries on specific mythological characters (which are admittedly interesting to read about but perhaps not deserving the designation "symbol"). In my point of view, generic types of beings such as centaurs and elves warrant inclusion, while specific characters (e.g. "Daedalus") mostly do not. This is perhaps subjective, but that is my perspective as someone who would rather use a dedicated mythology reference book for those entries. So, for all of those reasons, I would deduct half a star. Then, I would deduct another half star for the quality of the entries themselves. For example, the entry on "eye" described many mythological traditions where the sun and moon are eyes, but failed to mention the ancient Egyptian god Horus. Nevertheless, I have already learned many new things from this book (including things evidently not known to Google and Wikipedia, which is impressive) and so I do intend to finish it and keep it as a reference.

This is an amazing book -- it covers symbolism, but it also functions as a book of world folklore and mythology. It's nearly 1,200 pages and the entries are quite extensive. For example, there are about nine pages on "stone," five pages on "egg," a full page on "dew." But even more obscure items like "termite" gets four paragraphs, "comb" gets two, "porcupine" gets eight lines and "persimmon" gets six. This book takes a world perspective, showing what each symbol has meant to different cultures, religions and peoples -- these often differ. I've rarely seen a book of this type that is able to tackle both a wide range, yet give them depth as well. For example the entry on "falcon," one page, gives perspectives from Ancient Egypt, the Peruvian Incas, the Yunca Indians of Peru, the Irish, and various beliefs from the Middle Ages. There are some ancient gods and mythological and religious figures presented like Adam and Cain, and astrological signs, but

thankfully these don't take up most of the book -- there are enough books on those topics already. The vast majority of this book covers things like "chariot," "dog," "feather," "oil," "serpent," "throne" and "wheel" -- just to name a few. I own many books on folklore, superstition, folk belief and mythology, and I know a great book on these topics when I see one -- and this is a great book and a browser's dream. Some complain that images would have been helpful, and there aren't many pictures here, but when you're discussing something like "fox," "crown" or "satire" -- do you really need an image? I would prefer this book to have been a little larger, it is a rather small, fat book but regardless of the format the content is just beyond anything else I've seen. I would recommend "Dictionary of Symbols" as a companion volume to a book like "Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend." While the "Standard Dictionary..." is a much longer book, it opts for more depth and perhaps a bit less range than this one. Of course their purposes are slightly different. There's several dictionaries/encyclopedias of symbols out there, if you just want one, get this one.

I purchased my first copy 10 years ago and have been working with my dream symbols for nearly 20 years. I've been enticed to purchase newer ones since then with photos and graphics ( I now have nearly a dozen symbol dictionaries) -- thus I am clearly drawn to these things. However, I find there is always a trade off. Publishing costs and space taken up for these visuals means less text and less substance. So while I have an initial pleasure in perusing the ones with pictures I often find these don't really have anything to do with my dream images -- they are indeed usually intriguing works of art but not particularly helpful for serious symbol analysis. Thus the most consistently helpful symbol book, to which I always return when I seriously want to know a range of possibilities for my dream images or concepts is the Penguin Dictionary of Symbols by Chevalier, Cheerbrant and Buchanan-Brown. The authors have done a monumental work bringing so much substance to it, managed to remain relevant for decades even though it was first published in France in 1969 with the second edition in 1982, and by now reading it is like coming home. A another benefit of being all text (seriously the text is not that hard to read, the print is of excellent quality with crisp deliniations between entries, references, etc.) is that the act of researching my dream images does not itself start interfering with the memory of my own visual image, as pictures might. To each his own preference ... but for persons more experienced in working with dreams, I think the substance here will be recognized as highly valuable.

Huge book full of thorough explanations on not only symbols, but key terms and concepts related to

various cultures mythology, mysticism, practices, etc. This was highly recommended to me by a friend, and I'm very happy to have it. You shouldn't take every definition or explanation as the only possible meanings for each one, but it will give you detailed information to think about and do further research on if needed.

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