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Spring 2022

# DREAMTIME

M A G A Z I N E



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# Reflections on the Alchemy of Dreaming

Carmen Sorrenti



I'd like to share some of my findings along the slippery and awesome slope of consciousness. It is an infinite topic and these will only be pointers to accompany the electrical current of the paintings shown, the map of dream states I've been making over the years. Mostly, I've been a map maker, using images and words as landmarks for the perplexed child of my early days on this planet. One of my dreams addressed this better than memory: *In a workshop, I start to write about the troubling existential experience of coming into the world. I'm recalling way back, as a one year old. I am writing "bound to the body."*

Further dreaming showed the child had a volcanic passion to serve the Mystery through writing about it. Gradually, I took the child's secret longings—the ones that were expressive and taboo—and started making maps for her, maps of images and words, maps of travels in the dreaming. This brought up pictures of faces without mouths until the *miracle of the mute girl* took place: during a waking incubation, a surprising picture of Piazza St. Maria della Scala in Rome popped into my mind; to my delight, I discovered it is where a famous renaissance midwife had her prayers answered when her child, mute since birth, began to speak. The *miracle* created such exhilaration that a church was erected on that very spot.

The most important discoveries will provide answers to questions that we do not yet know how to ask and will concern objects we have not yet imagined. (John N. Bahcall, astrophysicist)

Connective maps of images and words, an inquiry to hold my answers... as a child I had urgent intimations of questions. Not being able to formulate her questions about the universe and its ontology echoed in the heart, the six year old trembled as she peered into an abyss.

The *Pholarchos Tarot* is one of the maps I eventually created for her. Not surprisingly, it is inspired by the ancient art of dream incubation... another form of asking questions. The four *trail guides* are details of large, brightly colored paintings that in the deck show up as black and white close ups—a visual recall effect—consciousness is responsive and the potential of what colors or shapes appear varies with our engagement. This is why shadow work is fundamental—we carry with us everything we do not transform... or rather, it carries us without our even knowing it. As the *Trail of Coral* might remind us, navigating these waters takes practice and the soul wants our full creative involvement.

The night I completed the *Pholarchos* I dreamed a bird gifted me a tiny jewel, a shiny seed-egg. In waking, I had it made into a ring, a kind of nest for it to hatch—another form of incubation. Dreaming is our torch in the night, akin to the Egyptian sun god as he goes through the underworld journey in the hours of darkness. The torch allows us to see the path we are on and the myths that animate us. Incubations are a lovely way of furthering dialogue; here are three varied and succinct examples of dream responses that I have added to my child's map:



*Trail of Coral*

1. A percussive dream song announces how inner sound and rhythm will provide the guidance.
2. A lucid travel as a hawk reveals a magnetic ball in my head, a compass for true North.
3. On moving house, a visitation dream warns against it (the reasons given turn out to be accurate).

Such experiences can help make us receptive to what comes and more sensitive to how the unconscious steers toward the soul's entelechy or *realization of potential*. A fine practice is to make a special journal of all incubations and responses with words, drawings, collages—it becomes a heightened narrative that incarnates the dreaming. Consciousness loves such play and it stimulates intricate synchronicities that remind us of the grand web of infinite life.

If we take the ancient idea of the daemon as a guide that has intent for us, we may recognize that in our dreaming the daemon continues to have teleology—it is purposeful and demands that we hear its call. Writing our dreams over long periods of time is cardinal if we are to see the patterns that reconnect. We track an arc of development as we deepen our personal relationship to symbols:

... so that a long dream-series no longer appears as a senseless string of incoherent and isolated happenings, but resembles the successive steps in a planned and orderly process of development. I have called this unconscious process spontaneously expressing itself in the symbolism of a long dream-series the individuation process. (Jung, 1960)<sup>i</sup>

Dreams use an alchemical language that pops and fizzes with the constant hum of interconnected transmutations. This push to individuation carries on well beyond our time span here in incarnation yet this physical realm has unique orientations for consciousness to investigate. What we distill here, we carry onwards.

From the very beginning of alchemy, the making of the philosopher's stone was linked with the idea of death... the making of the stone is compared in the earliest alchemical texts which we possess with the different stages of the mummification process. The Egyptian sacred art of mummification was a symbolic performance whose goal it was to produce the resurrection body or eternal body for the dead. (von Franz, n.d.)<sup>ii</sup>



*Transmuting the Eternal Body*

This ties in with my dream of an owl perching at the threshold of an alchemical clay furnace where she has made her nest. There are chicks within and an irresistible sense of deity. Her mouth is a perfect round disc of yellow light—a *Sun God* as the Egyptians would have it... the light circle that symbolizes our eternal nature. The owl, whose wisdom traditionally relates to death, emanates teachings through a light-filled mouth... this *enthusiasmòs* shatters every illusion of death. Is it not wonderful that the word enthusiasm means being filled with God? It says a great deal about the power of enthusiasm in our lives. I will share one last dream that parallels the mummification process and its aims:

*A woman hands me a keychain with three fish. I assume they are inanimate though they shimmer with special movement and texture. She informs me they are very much alive—preserved by her oils and the burning of salt.*

The dream took place some months before I delved into the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*; in it Jung cites texts that relate to the alchemical use of *oils and the burning of salt* in pursuit of the stone or glorified body. He explains that salt is a volatile spirit that is delivered by the burning and he equates this process with ash—that which remains. One of the quotes encapsulates a profound meditation on the eternal body:

Despise not the ashes, for they are the diadem of thy heart, and the ash of things that endure. (Rosarium Philosophorum)



*Infinity Owl*

Jung adds that ‘in other words, the ash is the spirit that dwells in the glorified body’(1955) <sup>iii</sup>. There are further amplifications with fish and the etymology of names in the dream but it is too much material in this short space. My point is that for every transformation, a fragment of the alchemical stone is formed. Individuation here matters, our material reality is a unique vehicle. The ash may be bitter, the burning may be intense but the experience is revelatory and it encodes new forms of love into our essential nature.

We are entering a new paradigm. The dreaming informs us of this great movement. The work we do is personal and collective at all times. It is a work of consciousness for consciousness. Many voices speak of this; a particularly insightful one is van Lommel (online) on post-materialist science <sup>iv</sup>. Once again, we need new questions for answers to hatch. The *Pholarchos Tower card* illustrates the splitting apart of our old vision; the image glows with the unequivocal rewiring that we are experiencing, together. I’ll close with its accompanying text:

A song that drags you to it, a shore whose tide is calling, a blue-white sky kiss that shatters the illusion of a coherent body. The revelation sets off a revolution, elemental rain and fire irrevocably shifting what you know—you are pelting at the seams, shedding every skin at once while the lightning rocks right through you to reach the world. It’s encoded on your soul, this blasting into light. You cannot force this nor would you want to. More often it happens in the shattering of a cherished dream, a crisis, a paradox beyond the boundaries of containment—some emergency that is in fact *emergence*. (Sorrenti, 2021) <sup>v</sup>



*The Tower*

## References

- <sup>i</sup> Jung, C.G. (1960) *The Collected Works*, vol.8, *On the Nature of Dreams*, par.550. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- <sup>ii</sup> von Franz, M.L. (n.d.) “On Dreams and Death,” [minute 5, audio interview online, uploaded by Intellectual Deep Web in 2019], available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkErJY-ZYLY>
- <sup>iii</sup>Jung, C.G. (1955) *The Collected Works*, vol.14, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, par.247. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- <sup>iv</sup> van Lommel’s dedicated webpage: <https://pimvanlommel.nl/en/pim-van-lommel/postmaterialist-science/>
- <sup>v</sup> Sorrenti, C. (2021), *Stories from the Pholarchos*, a companion guide to the Pholarchos Tarot. Download available: [http://www.carmensorrenti.com/Pholarchos\\_Tarot-5.html](http://www.carmensorrenti.com/Pholarchos_Tarot-5.html)

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