



DREAMTIME EDITION: September, 2012

Learning From Unexpected Guests

"It's not about massacre", my friend reassures me, as Hitler strides towards me down a narrow corridor, "It's about myth."

And then I wake up. A few hours later, I share my dream in a workshop with Margaret Bowater as part of "Healing Pathways: Dreams & Imagination", Australasia's very first conference on dreams. Needless to say, the room falls silent. I've pulled the Hitler card.

"Well," says Margaret carefully, after inviting me to draw my dream on a whiteboard, "how would you feel about... embodying Hitler?"

And isn't that just the thing with dream work? One moment I'm eating cereal with colleagues, the next I'm embodying the most shameful and terrifying man in my ancestral history.

And strangely, he was very polite. "You don't have to call me Sir", he said. "I'm just a man." He'd come to warn me, he told Margaret, who was interviewing him with her unique and skillful blend of Psychodrama and Gestalt techniques, about the dangers of archetypal power, about the potential for corruption, exploitation, and for that dreaded phenomena in dream circles everywhere: inflation.

The dream was as poignant a warning for me as it was for everyone in the group. Margaret and I had worked together for only half-an-hour, but we all felt somehow bonded to after that.

Margaret is New Zealand's representative to IASD, and I immediately invited her to Melbourne to train practitioners in my community to work dynamically with dreams. She agreed, and several months later I was hosting Dream Lab's first international guest speaker in my home.

"Dreams in Action with Margaret Bowater" was a sold-out weekend intensive for professionals and experienced dreamers. Educators, counsellors and dedicated dreamers came to learn from Margaret's decades of experience, and try her techniques themselves. Trauma revealed through dreams was a powerful topic, as were paranormal experiences and unconscious ancestral inheritance.

I'm a psychotherapist in private practice, and the week after Margaret's workshop a new client arrived wanting a private dream consultation. Little did she know that within an hour both her and I would be on our knees embodying a dream dog who had stuck its nuzzle into her ear. "My god," she said, after I'd interviewed the dog and we'd returned to two legs. "That dog, it's me. I had no idea I felt like that."

And I knew exactly how she felt. Because I also had no idea I felt like that about the archetypal symbols that fill my dream journals. My dream of Hitler was an instant teaching in humility and conscious boundaries.

Moreover, my dream was a reminder that if we let them, our dreams are keen on bringing us back into community. My dream bonded me not only with a group in Sydney, but created an ancient tie between Margaret and I, which has now spread its gifts through the Dream Lab community in Melbourne.

No matter who or what visits you in your dreams, if you can bare it, give it chance to speak. From one dream respectfully handled, hundreds of people can benefit.

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